

Honoring the Past on RUSSIAN HILL

James Marzo Updates a Julia Morgan Treasure
Once Belonging to Design Legend Tony Hail

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James Marzo is a great admirer of Tony Hail's work. Hail, the late elder statesman of San Francisco interior design once owned an Italianate villa on Russian Hill. When Hail renovated the Julia Morgan house, in the early 1980's, Marzo was beginning his design career at the esteemed firms of Randolph & Hein and Therien & Co. Twenty years after the inception of his own company, James Marzo Design, the designer received a commission to work on Hail's former residence.

The house began as a gingerbread Victorian that Hearst's architect transformed into an architectural jewel. In 1915, Morgan removed the structure's upper floors, replacing them with three sets of French doors and an ironwork balcony centered over the arched front entrance. Hail introduced a light filled enfilade of well-proportioned rooms to the villa. It provided the perfect backdrop to showcase his museum quality antiques. Marzo's clients,

LEFT An elegant foyer is viewed through the glass front door. Marzo paired a Louis XVI giltwood console by Maître Ebéniste, Georges Jacob, with a mirror of his own design. A pair of gilt bronze sconces by André Leleu flanks the mirror.

OPPOSITE In the living room Marzo placed a playful eighteenth century French neoclassical trompe l'oeil bookcase. Against this he vignetted a Jacques Adnet round rosewood end table and a Swedish Neoclassical style painted and parcel gilt Klismos side chair.





THROUGHOUT THE VILLA, MARZO COMMINGLED THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT.

a young family, wanted their new home brought into the twenty-first century while embracing the building's historic past. The designer accomplished this with a vibrant mix of antiques, art and bespoke furnishings. Hail's Louis XV Breche d'Alep marble chimneypiece anchors the drawing room. Surmounting the mantle, Marzo placed a robust, Sicilian Late Baroque painted and parcel gilt mirror. For relaxed seating, the designer selected an English club sofa covered in practical midnight green suede. He paired this with a contemporary shagreen and bronze coffee table fabricated by artisans living in a farmhouse outside of Paris. The space is illuminated by an eighteenth century French rock crystal chandelier.

Pale yellow rusticated plaster walls in the salon transition to a refined hand painted Chinoiserie wallpaper in the dining room. The romantic scenes of Chinese court figures are echoed by the ambiance of a candle lit eighteenth century Italian green painted and gilt tole chandelier. Beneath the fixture, an English Regency rosewood center table is surrounded by doe foot Directoire side chairs once belonging to Karl Lagerfeld. An eighteenth century Italian faux marble and parcel gilt mirror reflects a primitive nineteenth century Oceanic figurative sculpture.

OPPOSITE For durability and beauty, Marzo selected Edelman's Royal Suede for the sofa upholstery and living room drapes. The swamp colored curtains are hand sewn in a diamond pattern and hung on bronze rods.

RIGHT Hand painted wallpaper from Gracie, envelopes the dining room. Grounding the room is a woven sisal area carpet from Stark.








OPPOSITE A pair of 1940's armchairs are upholstered in a woven check from Brunshwig et Fils. Marzo decorated the mantel with a pair of Japanese silver inlaid iron riding stirrups from the Edo period.

ABOVE A painting by Russian avant-garde Suprematist artist, Anna Kagan dominates a corner of the living room. Marzo painted the baseboards a faux marble to match the Louis XV Breche d'Alep mantel.

Beyond the dining room, lapis blue glazed walls can be seen in the study. Marzo deftly juxtaposed a French Regence giltwood mirror with what he describes as “an antique tribal Rothko”, a framed Indonesian crimson and citrine silk ceremonial scarf. For the cocktail table, the designer combined an ancient Roman marble mosaic top with a modern base. Seating is supplied by a pair of Jean Royère’s angular armchairs from the 1940’s along with a pair of curvaceous Rococo blue painted and parcel gilt stools. A neoclassical bronze and alabaster chandelier casts golden light on the dramatic room. In the master bedroom, Marzo wanted his clients to retreat from worldly concerns into a peaceful sanctuary. He custom designed a bronze and leather four-poster bed to give the illusion of an intimate room within a room. Marzo drew his subdued color palette from a large Grecian volute Krater. Instead of a pedestal for the ancient vase, the designer installed it on a period Russian center table composed of Macassar ebony with a opaline glass top. Continuing the theme of antiquity, a vintage Klismos styled side chair by Robsjohn-Gibbings sits in front of a Louis XVI bureau plat with bronze dore mounts.

Throughout the villa, Marzo commingled the past with the present. Although Tony Hail passed away in 2006, his classical approach to design continues in the alterations Marzo made to his former home. Hail, known for being an antiquarian as much as a decorator, gave his clients brilliant yet livable interiors. Today, Marzo follows in the master’s footsteps. 



OPPOSITE An Austrian Biedermeier daybed provides a place to put on shoes in the morning or take an afternoon nap. In the evening, the owners can relax in a Directoire reclining chair covered in black leather.

ABOVE Above the bureau plat a mixed media abstract by San Francisco painter Jeff Long enlivens the antiques in the room. Complimenting it is a tall 1950’s Italian ceramic lamp with a woven silk shade.

