

Cradled

By Lili Weigert
Photography by
Adam Potts

BY

Nature

A STINSON
BEACH HOME
melds the
outdoors with
the indoors and
is a model for
environmental
sustainability
and preservation.







When designer/
contractor
Susan Skornicka
of Skornicka

Designs & Construction (www.susanskornicka.com) embarked on creating a sanctuary for her clients in Stinson Beach, she pulled the house back 20 feet from the coast and kept its footprint small. "We could have built bigger and closer to the ocean," she says. "But we wanted to feel connected to the environment." In contrast to other new beachfront houses, the single-level home is understated and set back. "We wanted it to feel at one with the dunes," Skornicka says. "Not towering above the beach."

"Cradled by nature" is how Skornicka describes the Stinson property that her clients, a spiritually minded and environmentally conscious couple in their 60s, bought in 2014. One of the original lots in the Seadrift





Building in the Seadrift community presents unique environmental challenges.



community, it consisted of a dilapidated bungalow and an unusually large yard.

"The house was a teardown," Skornicka says. "The garden was the selling point."

The project took six years to complete, held up by county permits as well as strict coastal commission regulations, including a wave study, that took three years in all. "Coastal projects present unique challenges," Skornicka says. "It's quite different from a typical Marin County build." Seadrift's housing association also conducted regular inspections to make sure all the plantings were on its approved list. "They're so concerned about erosion," Skornicka says. "They looked

at every single plant to make sure it was OK."

Skornicka and her team, which includes her daughters Lilly (age 26) and Maia (age 24) and longtime partners Gubbins Building Company and Jane Walter, owner of home-design store SummerHouse, completed the project in 2022. Anna Kondolf Lighting Design, Boyce Electric Company and Mitchel Berman Cabinet-makers Inc. also contributed to the project. It's unusual for the same team to design both the interior and landscape, but it's a service Skornicka has offered for more than 20 years. "Integrating the outdoor space into the design is sort of my trade-

Skornicka is known for her ability to meld the outside environment with the inside, as well as what she calls "natural luxury."



mark," she says. "It's not just an afterthought."

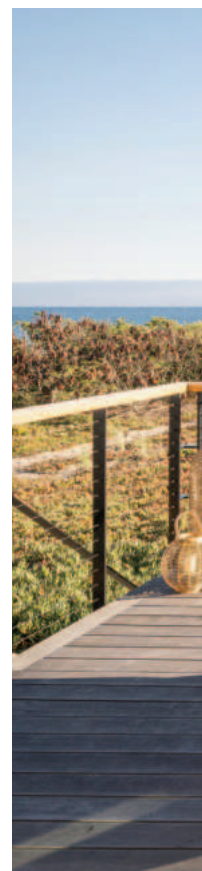
The Stinson Beach sanctuary now consists of two structures: a one-bedroom main house and a two-bedroom guest house. The design is elegant and modern, with an open floor plan and simple lines. "We call this style of home 'natural luxury,'" Skornicka says. "It feels incredibly luxurious, but the materials

are all natural and chosen to be comfortable." Windows, skylights and doors flood the house with light and bring in the natural beauty of the environment from every direction.

Originally from Michigan, Skornicka fell in love with indoor-outdoor living when she moved to California more than 30 years ago. "There's such an increase in the 'feel-good' element in any house

when you can feel the connection to the outdoors," she says. "And we're so blessed to have our landscapes alive all of the year."


"Each step was intentional," Skornicka says about the landscape design. "I wanted it to feel like a retreat center, where you could exhale and feel at peace." The design includes multiple seating areas and gathering spaces, a hot tub,





a fire pit graced by a grand Buddha and several unique water features. “We wanted the garden to feel like an experience,” Skornicka says. “Not just a walk-through to the house, but an immersive magical experience that starts as soon as you walk through the gate.”

Planted with native, low-water plants and pollinators that invite hummingbirds and bees, the garden is full of activity and color. “You smell the lavender and citrus trees that line the entryway, then you hear the sound of flowing water and see the grasses flow in the wind,” Skornicka says. “It’s a multisensory experience.”

It took a long time to get there, but Skornicka says her clients are overjoyed with their new home. “We were all in it together and they were dedicated to the environment and the process,” she says. 



“

I WANTED IT TO FEEL LIKE A
RETREAT CENTER, WHERE
YOU COULD EXHALE AND
FEEL AT PEACE.”

