

place



: vision

Building a Life

A Wine Country couple aims for joyful simplicity.

by CAROLE KELLEHER

photography by REBECCA CHOTKOWSKI

BEFORE THERE WERE WALLS, a foundation, or even sketches of the form it would take, Michael Muscardini and Kate Eilertsen could envision the contemporary home where they planned to spend the rest of their lives. Shortly after the couple purchased 3-plus acres on Sonoma Mountain in 2015, Muscardini built a wooden platform on the building site, and it was there that the couple would sit for hours, taking in the unobstructed view of the Valley of the Moon and imagining the future.

It was fitting, then, that in 2018, a year after their home was complete, they were married in the living room — their lives officially bound together in the house they created. Their architect performed the wedding ceremony, with 150 guests joining in the celebration.

■ Kate Eilertsen and Michael Muscardini live a relaxed lifestyle in the contemporary home they share with their golden retriever, Biondi.





■ The kitchen is open to the dining and living area and is perfect for entertaining friends and Muscardini Cellars clients, who always appreciate the stunning view of the Valley of the Moon. The couple especially enjoy the family-style table when their adult children and grandchildren visit.

Prior to launching his award-winning Muscardini Cellars in Kenwood, Michael Muscardini was a longtime high-end-home general contractor. He returned to his career roots for this project, dedicating heartfelt energy to this special place to share with Eilertsen. "I was driven," he says.

The couple had been living in a rental home with a view looking away from the valley and after a decade together longed for permanency.

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■ The first sight as you enter the home through the front door is a glass-encased wine cellar. It was a surprise addition to the plans, added by architect Jeff Zimmerman, who is also a close friend. It serves as a showcase for Muscardini Cellars wines, and keeps them within easy reach.

The couple wanted a contemporary home, which they believe is quintessentially California. There are plans and permits for two additional bedrooms above the garage, but for now they are enjoying a simple lifestyle and have no need for the extra space.





■ Sunrise and moonrise are in full view from the entire east-facing home, including from the glass-sided master bedroom, which opens to a private deck.





■ The home is built in such a remote location there is no need or desire for window coverings, and even the master bath and shower have a full view of the surrounding oak woodlands. With graceful aging in mind, there is not a single stair in the home, not even a curb in the marble shower.

“We wanted it to be simple and minimal,” Eilertsen says of the 2,400-square-foot home that she especially wanted to perfectly showcase their art. A signed Picasso “Demoiselles d’Avignon” print hangs near the entryway, and Eilertsen’s favorite — “Hawk Fields” by Larry Thomas — anchors the great room, hanging on a wall painted golden yellow to set it off. Eilertsen is now an art consultant, putting together installations for museums and wineries throughout Sonoma and Marin counties, having served seven years as the executive director of the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, with earlier stints at San Francisco’s Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and Harvard Art Museums.

The couple brought in their friend Jeff Zimmerman of the architectural firm Zimmerman + Associates to put their dream house on the boards. The home is built on a rocky knoll that presented challenges, and they were grateful for the expertise Zimmerman brought to the project. The glass-encased home boasts a great room, a master bedroom suite, a guest room, and his-and-hers 10-by-10-foot offices so they can work from home. “I wanted ‘A Room of One’s Own,’” Eilertsen says,





MUSCARDINI

architect

Jeff Zimmerman,
Zimmerman + Associates,
zmanarch.com

owner/ builder

Michael Muscardini

■ The goldenrod umbrella and furniture cushions match the paint color of the main wall of the great room, adding to the seamlessness of the indoor-outdoor architectural design. The deck surround is also glass, so the expansive view of the Valley of the Moon and the Mayacamas Mountains is uninterrupted.



referring to Virginia Woolf's feminist classic. Zimmerman brought a surprise to the plans, adding a glass wine cellar just inside the front door, with one glass wall facing Muscardini's office, so he can see his library wines from his desk.

Now in their 60s, Muscardini and Eilertsen wanted an easy house to maneuver and maintain, with one level and not a single stair. "There's not even a curb on the shower," Muscardini says, "And the only thing we have to do here is hire someone to wash the windows."

The couple love to entertain, and have a center-set dining table dividing the open kitchen area from the living room, so they can converse with guests while they are cooking. The long waterfall island is Carrara marble, which Muscardini insisted on despite its tendency to stain and etch. "Michelangelo made 'David' out of Carrara. There was no question we were going to use it," Muscardini says. He sees it as one more way to honor his Italian ancestry, in addition to a winemaking style inspired by Franco Biondi Santi (the namesake of the couple's 2-year-old golden retriever).

The east-facing home allows them to see sunrise and moonrise from every room, and the location is so remote not a single other home is visible.

Muscardini Cellars' tagline is "Bottled with love, for the joy of living." Eilertsen and Muscardini's home has a similar theme: It was built with love and the living is joyful. **S**