



# against the GRAIN

TO MAKE A DREAM HOME MATERIALIZE, ONE CALIFORNIA COUPLE TAKES A RISK, BREAKS THE RULES, AND EVEN MANAGES TO STAY WITHIN THEIR BUDGET'S CONFINES.

**ABOVE** Dana and Daniel Vrechek relax on the property they developed on 8 acres of raw California pasture. **RIGHT** A dark charcoal exterior offers a stark contrast to the bright, airy openness of the home's interior. "I've always been drawn to Scandinavian design," Dana says. "My grandma and her five sisters grew up in Norway, and I still remember the pictures of their homes that she shared with me. I wanted to bring that joyful feeling to my home too." **OPPOSITE** Dana was keen on working intimate areas into the house, including this breakfast nook. "We have three little window nooks in the house," Dana says. "They're not that deep or luxurious, but they just invite you in. The kids curl up with a book or talk with me while having tea. A lot of good memories happen in those spots, and they provide enough seclusion for private conversations."

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**ABOVE** "The Scandinavian style started to bleed into the rest of our house," says Dana of the bright and open living room. Along with the mantel that Daniel built in the style, the IKEA armchairs covered in white slipcovers and the area rug's pale pop of color work together to create an airy palette. The last to be built in the county due to updated fire codes, the classic woodstove "is like something you'd see in a Charles Dickens novel," Dana says, and it satisfies her desire for a modern romantic aesthetic.

**S** **SEVEN YEARS AGO, DANA VRECHEK STOOD ON TOP OF AN 8-ACRE** parcel of land in Gilroy, California, and said, "This is it." The property's agent told her, "Not so fast; it's probably impossible to build here," as the county had strict codes to protect the wild land and any endangered species on it. But that didn't stop Dana, owner of country lifestyle shop The Stonehouse Road in historic downtown Gilroy. Two months later, with no endangered species found on the property, the Vrecheks had finalized the purchase and submitted all the necessary permits to begin breaking ground on their 4,850-square-foot fantasy family home.

Though she'd lived in cities and suburbs her whole life, Dana longed to be a country girl. She wanted her children to grow up knowing their neighbors and community. Her husband, Daniel, grew up in the Midwest and craved wide open spaces. "I didn't think those existed in California," she says.

Growing up, she also spent hours poring over photo albums of her grandmother's childhood homes in Norway. "My grandma was my best friend," she says. "I want my home to feel how she made me feel." For Dana, that means the traditional dark



**ABOVE** A small standing trunk becomes a display table for rotating antiques and found items from the daily nature walks Dana takes with her children. **ABOVE RIGHT** This 1968 Ford pickup was restored by the couple's teenage son, Matthew. He started flipping tractors when he was only 11; now he makes a business of his restoration work. Dana's beloved David Austin heirloom roses brighten areas around the home, including this picket fence. **RIGHT** A vintage chandelier provides ambient lighting over a simple, iron-legged table in Dana's office. "Changing lights is one of the quickest ways to update a room for me," she says. **BELOW** A Scandinavian drop-leaf desk is where Dana manages much of the inventory for her shop. "I love the finish," Dana says of the vintage reproduction by Park Hill Collection.





**ABOVE LEFT** Combining the natural with both new and vintage goods is a design staple in the home. A fresh bunch of white roses sits atop handmade shelving made from raw, reclaimed wood to brighten up this cozy kitchen corner. **ABOVE RIGHT** Dana opted for the convenience of drawers over cupboards, including the apothecary-style drawers on the island. "When we were drafting the kitchen, everyone said the island would be way too big and impractical," Dana recalls, "but I wouldn't have it any other way." **OPPOSITE** A handmade Shaws fireclay sink—made the same way for a hundred years—was a must-have item for Dana. "I wanted a house that could stand the test of time," she says. "Stainless-steel or copper sinks are beautiful, but a Shaws sink could be in any century, and it just works."

exterior she'd seen in the albums, paired with lots of natural light streaming through 82 transom windows onto light floors, pale walls, and white upholstery.

With this design project, finding the right materials came first. "I wanted a home that could last a hundred years," she says. "Something I could pass on to my kids." She considered the durability and flexibility needed in a home with a growing family, and budget also played a central role in design decisions. "I really wanted 12-inch baseboards," she says, "but there was no way we could afford them." So instead of expensive finished millwork, they installed and painted rustic-grade knotty pine boards with the same measurements. "If you get some really good sturdy boards, you can build almost anything out of them," she says. "Just one of the many tips from our incredible builder, Edward Lazzarini."

After five years, the Scandinavian-style farmhouse has an eclectic, romantic style that resists definition. "Our home is a constant work in progress because I'm always changing. My family is changing," Dana says. In this DIY duo, she sketches the plans and Daniel brings them to life. Whether it's the kitchen backsplash made of Carrara marble—chosen precisely because it becomes etched with memories over time—hidden storage for crafts and school supplies, or the custom hood vent made simply from more pine boards, the home is a marriage of personality and effort.

Throughout the house, practical chairs and sofas from IKEA personalized with Bemz slipcovers commingle with vintage hutches and antique reproductions by Park Hill Collection. But her favorite pieces, including rescued dining chairs and vessels for her beloved garden blooms, are those she finds while shopping with her children. "I love everything new and old," Dana says, "and anything I can put roses in." □

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“IT’S A JOY TO LOOK OUT THE WINDOWS AND SHARE MORNINGS WITH THE COWS.”

—DANA VRECHEK

**ABOVE** “I probably have enough flatware stashed away for a large wedding party,” Dana says. She continues to grow her collection, and this heirloom set from her mentor, Linda Ashford, gets prominent display. **BELOW** The Vrecheks with their children: Matthew, 17; Lauren, 15; Case, 8. “Giving my children the opportunity to learn about the process was a huge part of why I wanted to build,” she says. “We drove down every day to see what was happening, whether they were excavating the land or building the house, and my kids soaked it all up.” **OPPOSITE** Chairs collected over a 20-year marriage sit around an extended, wood dining table owned for just as long. “We’ve stripped and waxed and stripped the table again,” Dana says. The room hosts family dinners and homework sessions.



**ABOVE** An ivory range, gray marble tiles, and pale blue painted cabinetry create a fresh palette in the kitchen. “I designed the entire kitchen around the Bertazzoni range,” Dana says. “I picked a very pale cabinet color, and I think my husband and our builder thought I was crazy. The kitchen needed layers. We needed the marble and the old copper. All of the different pieces came together, and it made sense.” **NEAR RIGHT** Building on a budget can be give and take. When Dana requested recessed cabinetry for the kitchen, the price came back out of reach. The flat-panel style became a happy result.





**OPPOSITE** "I bought the vintage claw-foot tub on Etsy before we even had a loan to build the house," Dana says. "It felt like such a risk." With the enamel still in good condition, she applied a coat of Farrow & Ball paint to renew the tub's shine. Built-in, locker-style cabinets offer ample storage for linens and personal care items for the family. **THIS PHOTO** "A north-facing room can throw you all sorts of curveballs with paint colors," Dana says of the master bedroom. "The blues looked green, and the grays looked blue. It took three tries, but I'm finally happy with it." After Daniel finished the handcrafted wall paneling, Dana added a touch of femininity with velvet curtains.

"I BROKE EVERY RULE OF DESIGN IN THIS HOUSE,  
BUT I'M NOT SURE I'D DO ANYTHING DIFFERENTLY."

—DANA VRECHK



**OPPOSITE** Budget in mind, the Vrecheks did most of the landscaping themselves, with some help from Karen Aitken, a local landscape designer. "She provided us with a list of native and drought-tolerant plants, and anytime we plant something new, I start there," Dana says. **ABOVE** "The garden shed and garden boxes were handmade by my Wisconsin-bred husband," she says. Based on sketches from Dana, Daniel built the structures using vintage doors and windows. **BELOW** "With every project, we learn a little more," Dana says of the charming and functional chicken coop she designed and Daniel built with the help of their children.



**ABOVE** Dana spruces up a vintage washtub with cuttings from her yard. She loves spending afternoons putting with the plants and tending to her David Austin roses. Dana says the minimally furnished porch is one of her favorite places to do that, and spend time with her children. "The kids are so much more talkative outside," she says. "That's where I really get to hear their hearts." **LEFT** "There's no such thing as sleeping in," Dana says of their move to the picturesque countryside, complete with expanses of grasslands and a small menagerie. With three babydoll sheep (Winston, Clementine, and Spurgeon), four cats, 19 chickens, and Willie the dog, there's always work to do.