

MJC DEVELOPMENT, SAN FRANCISCO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS KUOH, MARGOT HARTFORD,
AND VINCE VALDEZ

Matthew Cook, Andrew Johnston, and Jennifer Nagle conjure
one-of-a-kind Napa Valley estates that embody California living at its best.

WINE COUNTRY COOL

Interior designer Jennifer Nagle relates, "One of the greatest challenges in designing a home that is as contemporary as this one—with massive scale and 25-foot ceilings—is making it warm and inviting." To that end, Nagle clad the fireplace wall in barn wood with lighted niches for bookshelves. "The texture immediately draws you in," she relates. "Really, texture is key

with all the furniture and fabric choices here. I selected natural linens, mohairs—nothing synthetic." The sofa and chairs here were sourced from HD Buttercup. The oversized floor lamps add dimension, "and, again, they help with the scale of the space," notes Nagle. The home's beautiful kitchen and dining room are located just off the living room.

"We wanted to emphasize the farm-to-table concept that is so intrinsic to Napa," says the designer. "A beautiful garden is located right out the kitchen door. I flanked the dining table with a pair of linen-covered wingback chairs at the ends and comfortable undulate height, especially with tall ceilings."



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hen Restoration Hardware impresario and style guru Gary Friedman buys your newly finished home within minutes of entering it, you know you're on to something big. And so begins the story of cousins Matthew Cook and Andrew Johnston, and a development venture they launched in 2010.

Cook and Johnston, veterans of the real estate and high-end construction industries, decided to join forces six years ago when they spotted the proverbial "worst house in the best neighborhood." Recalls Johnston, "It was a tiny ramshackle of a house in Ross—barely 1,000 square feet." Adds Cook, "When we saw it, we knew we could transform it." The cousins leaned on relatives for loans and set to work. "It was a win/win for everyone," continues Johnston. "Our investors, our buyers, and the neighbors."

Through the process, Cook and Johnston combined their knowledge of best practices and their keen perception of what buyers today are looking for in an upscale family home. The result was a home that was supremely functional, but simultaneously sophisticated and luxurious. "We looked at each other," notes Cook, "and said, 'Let's do this!' MJC development was born that day."



PHOTO: THOMAS KUOH



Nagle relates that the beautiful late afternoon light in the Napa Valley informed her color palette in the sitting room (opposite). "There's a wonderful time of day when the sky reaches a deep brilliant blue and the light reaches marvelous orange. To give the space character, she selected a pair of floor lamps from Cisco Home, reminiscent of the wrought-iron bells lining California's historic El Camino Real and a dip-tych by Nicholas Coley titled "Homecoming and Reunion" from the MOMA gallery. The master bedroom (left) embraces the indoor/outdoor living concept. Nagle says, "I envisioned the homeowner waking up surrounded by vineyards and enjoying the view and spending wonderful moments drinking in the atmosphere from one of the Mid-Century armchairs. The doors slide into the wall making the space even more dramatic." The kitchen (below) from another MJC project demonstrates Nagle's love affair with blue. "There's so much grey in the design world right now," she notes, "I just didn't want to do a grey kitchen for this home, so I opted for rich navy cabinets with antique bronze pulls and kept the island white to provide contrast. The amazing light fixture was part of a vintage airplane turbine. It's huge."



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: THOMAS KUOH



PHOTO: MARGOT HARTFORD

MJC Development's Andrew Johnston, Jennifer Nagle, and Matthew Cook (left), wearing clothing from Brooks Brothers, San Francisco, are photographed at one of their latest Napa Valley projects. A twist on the classic farmhouse (right and below) this stunning residence by MJC faces East toward the Silverado Trail. A massive picture window in the great room perfectly frames vineyard views.

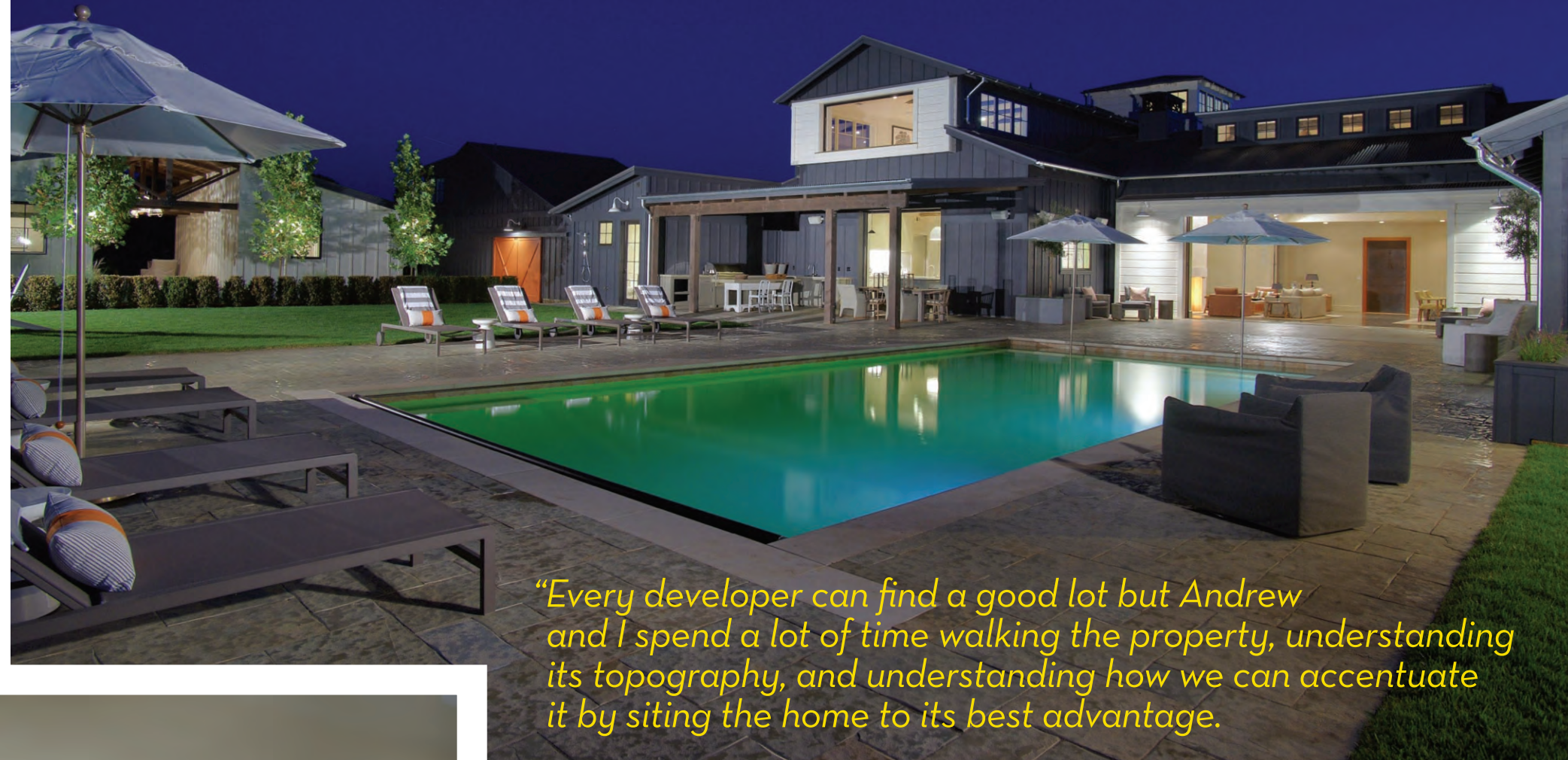


PHOTO: VINCE VALDEZ

“Every developer can find a good lot but Andrew and I spend a lot of time walking the property, understanding its topography, and understanding how we can accentuate it by siting the home to its best advantage.”

Their next project would take root in Yountville. “Each project starts with the land,” notes Johnston. And Cook quickly adds, “Every developer can find a good lot, but Andrew and I spend a lot of time walking the property, understanding its topography, and understanding how we can accentuate it by siting the home to its best advantage. We take the time to understand its flow, its strengths—we even meet the neighbors.” Ultimately, he adds, “The land greatly influences what we create.” Over the years, they have worked with different architects and designers, enabling these creatives to lend something unique to each project—“giving it a voice,” as Johnston would say. “We sit down with the architect and let the land lead us, all the while expressing the lifestyle we want to create in the space.”

Three years ago, they started working with award-winning San Francisco-based interior designer Jennifer Nagle. “We all just clicked,” remarks Johnston. “We really respect each other and understand that each brings his/her own expertise to this enterprise.” Nagle takes her cues from the beautiful Napa Valley countryside as well as relying heavily on a natural palette of golds, greens, and crimsons. She deftly mixes materials and fills her projects with a bold



PHOTO: VINCE VALDEZ

assortment of contemporary and vintage pieces. “I am up at 4AM regularly, combing estate sales,” she smiles, “always in search of that distinctive treasure.” Indeed, treasure is how the MJC team views each project. “We assemble top-notch craftsman to work on each job, usually sourcing materials like wood and stone from the surrounding area,” says Cook. “We don’t want cookie-cutter homes. We want our projects to have a strong sense of place and belonging. We work within the local vernacular but strive to achieve timelessness.”

Their discerning clientele has taken notice. The MJC team essentially builds dream homes—luxury properties that are turn-key, ready for a client who heavily values both quality and time. “We’ve discovered that our clients want not just homes, but that lifestyle we’ve mentioned,” says Cook. “They see these finished

projects and want to immediately kick back on the patio, glass of wine in hand, friends and family enjoying the house around them. It’s a resort mindset, but even more luxurious and private—your own private resort really.” Adds Johnston, “In many ways, the Napa Valley has become our west coast version of the Hamptons. This is where Silicon Valley and San Francisco folks come to get away weekend after weekend, and it’s fueling a desire for luxury property like never before.”

To that end, the MJC has two properties in construction at the moment. One rests on five acres, the other on a 3.9-acre parcel. “They will be completely different,” emphasizes Johnston. “We don’t modify and repeat. Our mantra is: if you’re not keeping it fresh, you are not on top of what’s going on in design. We look at these homes like art. They need to be unique and personal.” ♦