

# Country Home

MARCH 2007

FEATHER  
YOUR NEST  
BED &  
BATH  
SPECIAL  
ISSUE





WRITTEN BY  
KATHY BARNES  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
JAMES CARRIÈRE  
PRODUCED BY  
JODY KENNEDY

OPPOSITE Sitting in front of an old Irish armoire filled with her signature ceramics, designer and stylist Cary Nowell paints a vase as her curious dachshunds, Bisou and Woody, watch. THIS PAGE Cary and her husband, Tom, restored their 2,700-square-foot California home to look like an old summer cottage on the outside. Inside, they opened up the rooms and vaulted the ceilings to gain visual volume.



## JUST HER TYPE

AN ARTIST WITH A LOVE OF SIMPLE, GRAPHIC TYPE DOES A NUMBER ON HER CALIFORNIA COTTAGE WITH PAINTED CERAMICS, FABRIC, AND PAPER.

**SHORTLY AFTER MOVING** to their Ross, California, home in 1989, then-newlyweds Cary and Tom Nowell settled into the basement to await the birth of their son, Peter, and the rebirth of their 1940 cottage. Although the house was modest in size, Tom, an architect, envisioned open rooms and a greater relationship between the house and its lot, which is surrounded by towering California redwood trees. The couple gutted the place, vaulting the ceilings, replacing windows and doors, and renovating the kitchen and bathrooms. "The remodeling was 14 months of chaos," says Cary. "But believe it or not, life was blissful. We were young and living by the glow of candlelight during my entire pregnancy."

Two years later, the couple added a master bedroom suite and a second child. Then, Cary put to rest a career as the owner and creative vision behind her children's clothing company to raise her children. Always the consummate designer, Cary focused on the interior of their home, filling it with French furnishings purchased over a lifetime of trips to France. She displayed the artwork of her three siblings and mother, all fine artists, on her walls. Then one day, inspired by 3-year-old daughter Abigail's infatuation with her own age, on a whim Cary stepped into "one of those paint-it-yourself ceramic shops," where she painted a number 3 onto a tile. The graphic, simple number captured Cary's creative attention. She continued to explore typography and calligraphy, painting letters and numbers onto ceramic plates, platters, and vases, and later silk pillows and antique French documents. "For me, it's about the quality of a number or letter. It doesn't have to be personally significant to be interesting," Cary says. "It's the fluidity of the handwriting that inspires me."

Today, she sees the writing on the wall—literally—with her own framed art showcasing her signature, stylized type. "My art and interiors are inseparable," says Cary. "It's a layer of what I love and who I am."

"I don't think of our home as decorated," says Cary. "We surround ourselves with things that are special to us, like old French furniture, family artwork, and lush flowers." Many of the items in the room—the chairs, cocktail table, and side table—are pieces she rehabbed with paint or fabric. A variety of chairs, rather than large upholstered pieces, provide flexible seating. Cary's own artwork hangs in the dining area.





1) The materials the couple chose for the tiny kitchen are simple yet timeless: white cabinets, butcher-block counters, and honed marble. Awning-style windows in the kitchen and throughout the house open to 90 degrees and were chosen so the Nowells could look up at the 150-foot redwood trees.  
 2) The dining table is a long, narrow Irish antique that seats 12. Cary intentionally mismatched the chairs: "I love interchangeable pieces," she says. "That way everything works for every space."  
 3) Because they live in a temperate climate, Tom and Cary use their flagstone patio, located just off the dining room, six months of the year.  
**OPPOSITE** Cary displays a few of her favorite ceramics from Spain, Turkey, and France on a French table in the living room. She rehabbed the table by painting the lower portion white and leaving the top natural.





1 2  
3

1) Yellow and white fabrics are piled high on this chipped wooden chair, purchased from a friend for \$50. From the French doors beyond, Tom can check on his garden of tomatoes, squash, chard, berries, and perennial bloomers.  
 2) Cary painted "merci" on this silk boudoir pillow, the focal point for the bed.  
 3) Cary and Tom Nowell say their sunny, quiet retreat is at its best when the windows are open and good friends stop by for a relaxed dinner on the patio.  
**OPPOSITE** The master bedroom suite addition was influenced by cottage-style architecture, including the pitched roof and exposed beams. Cary blends some of her favorite elements of design: neutral fabrics; natural materials, such as sisal and woven hyacinth; and touches of galvanized metal with small French park tables. The white wing chair, where Cary's father read his daily paper, is a sentimental favorite. A new slipcover made from white duck fabric and simple pleats helps it blend in with its new decor. ©