

EUREKA, CALIFORNIA

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An Artful Second Act

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ON THE COVER: Working with his Eureka kitchen's existing footprint, architect John Ash added more storage, another sink/prep area, and lighted, glass-front cabinets to showcase collected art and decorative glassware. A new island allows for cookprep as well as entertaining. Butcher block countertops add a durable, organic touch to the room, while speckled veneered cabinetry in light gray (which takes on a pale green cast in the warm evening light) is easy to clean. True to the home's historic interior touches is a new flooring of durable linoleum, which is soft to stand on and ultra-durable. Its warm rust color complements the leather seating at the island's peninsula. Photo by Brian J. Sweets



An Artful Second Act

John Ash and Dolores Vellutini have created a home that reflects their love of each other, creative design, and the natural beauty of Eureka

By Denise Gee
Photography by Brian J. Smeets

Dolores Vellutini never imagined that after spending nearly 20 years in the historic home where she raised three children, both she—and the house—would embark on a new chapter in life. That period would follow after the death of her husband, Ray Vellutini. Before then, she and Ray had invested a lot of energy into the home—a beautifully weathered, cedar-shingled Craftsman-style dwelling built in 1912, one surrounded by lush, well-manicured environs.

"I don't know what it was about it that appealed to us most," she says, looking back to 1973, when the couple and their young family purchased the nearly 7,000-square-foot place. "It was just the greatest house. It wasn't one thing that stood out—it was the whole thing—the size of the rooms, the views from the windows. It just felt like home."

To better define the lush grounds surrounding their historic Eureka home, architect John Ash and wife Dolores Vellutini added a new concrete fence with a massive concrete gate (above). The copper, with its weathered, sea-blue patina, is a nod to "both the solidness and beauty of our relationship," John says. Imbedded within the concrete are cracks filled with river rocks. "The people working on this project couldn't believe I wanted it to be imperfect," he says, but the plan was "to have it truly reflect an organic quality."

That was especially true once she put her own mark on the place. "The first thing I did was take down the heavy curtains in order to look out," she recalls. "But beyond that, when we purchased the house, its condition was very good. It was a house you could easily move into. Sure, there were a lot of things that we wanted to do, and ultimately did. But the house had always been owned by people that loved it—none of the woodwork had been painted, for instance—and it showed."

Fast-forward to 1993, two years after the passing of her husband. That's when Dolores began researching progressive-minded architects to help structurally retrofit some of the downtown buildings owned by her development company, Vellutini Properties. The address in question was 422 1st Street, the second oldest commercial building in Eureka. As it turned out, Dolores would indeed find the right person to help her with the project: John Ash, a prominent L.A. architect who'd been recommended by a friend. Dolores and John connected instantly "over art and buildings and architecture," she says. And ultimately, and unexpectedly, fell in love.

John and Dolores began spending more time together, and by the late 1990s, John had opened a second architecture office in Eureka, working on both commercial and residential projects. The Detroit native has worked as an architect for more than 25 years, and since moving to L.A. in the late '70s, has worked on the city's Memorial Coliseum, the Fillmore Theater, the Getty Museum, and Frank Lloyd Wright's Ennis House. His primary focus has been on historic preservation and increasingly, live-work architecture. (His current project is the Madame

A striking and stalwart sculpture by regional artist Melvin Schuler (*previous page*), made of copper over redwood, makes for a beautiful view at the back of the home, which was built in 1912 for the Jerry Malley family. It links nicely with the home's window trim. New glass doors, in the same sunny hue as the home's window trim, help better invite the view into the home—and provide accessibility to the outdoors.

The existing Japanese garden was cultivated by Dolores and her first husband. "It's so peaceful, and was especially therapeutic for Ray toward the end of his life," she says. Throughout the property, where a small creek (*right*) flows to and from a waterfall pond, are well-established rhododendrons, Japanese maples, camellias, firs, and cherry trees—much of which was put in by an earlier owner, Garnet Kramer. John expanded the concrete around the existing 16- x 32-foot pool and added a glass windscreen at the back of the realm. "Because this part of the house faces south, it makes for a sunny place to be," Dolores says. "Actually it can get really hot there in the late afternoon, so we have a crank-out awning for protection." The couple's gray standard poodle, Zulu, often can be spotted romping about, while Dolores and John read, tend to plants, or entertain company.



Green Genes

John Ash is a proponent of green building and his remodeled home features a variety of elements to make the home more energy efficient and sustainable.

- Hydronic radiant heat flooring downstairs heats the rooms from the floor up, allowing for an overall level of comfort throughout the space.
- A new, more efficient boiler and tankless water heater offer on-demand service so that water isn't heated unnecessarily.
- Homasote fiber board (made from recycled paper) is used for interior attic roof insulation and soundproofing.
- In-wall insulation made of recycled denim ("actually old Levi's," John says) is in the master bathroom, where the sun's rays are most harsh.
- Low-E glass is used in the new windows and doors of the sunny breakfast nook.
- Fortified old windows (via tightened sashes, re-built jambs, replaced caulking/weather stripping) reduce air infiltration.
- Preserved linoleum (see "Soft on Linoleum," page 15) "recycles a historic material in place to preserve the character of the house," John says.



Tussaud building that will be next to Grauman's Chinese Theater in Hollywood.) By 2001, the couple was married—in the home's Japanese garden. "My mom was matron of honor, his father, then in his late 80s, was his best man," Dolores says. "It was a very small, very beautiful ceremony."

Besides being taken by Eureka's distinctive historic architecture (and Dolores, of course), John also loved the natural beauty of the region—going so far to even create a nonprofit kayak-focused group, Explore the North Coast, which helped provide a water trail for the region.

After working together on the downtown project that brought them together, and ultimately others (including a waterfront project still in the works), the couple began to work on their own home, which has become a gallery of sorts for all the artwork they have collected over the years. Beyond the décor, though, John knew the bones and flow of the house needed updating.

His first hint at the possibilities was when he stuck his head through a small attic-access door in an upstairs closet. That's when he saw a 1,100-square-foot unfinished space with 14-foot ceilings—a space he realized would make the ideal place for them to share their home offices and art studio. (Both are accomplished artists—she working in mixed-media and he with a variety of mediums.)

"We use this large, open room more as a gallery space," Dolores says. Modern Barcelona chairs (designed by acclaimed German architect Mies van der Rohe in 1929 and now sold by Knoll) subtly define a conversation area (left) surrounded by abundant natural light and art. The raised animal sculpture at the far end of the room is by Los Angeles artist Ron Pippin. On the window seat, the ceramic paper bag sculpture (an homage to Ray Vellutini's success as a grocer) was a gift to Dolores by former Humboldt State art teacher Reese Bullen. The home's golden oak flooring "supposedly came to Eureka 'round the horn on a ship,'" Dolores says. "It had been under carpet for many years, so fortunately it's in perfect condition."

John redesigned the area of the kitchen that once held a butler's pantry, transforming it into a bumped-out, light-filled nook (above) providing magnificent views of the pool, garden, and new reflecting pond. Large-scale picture windows frame the vista, and glass doors offer easy access to the outdoors. A clean-lined glass table also helps beautifully reflect what's outside. Prominent in the view is a potting shed John designed—one that, with corrugated plastic in between the boards, "makes it look like a lantern when it's lit from within at night," Dolores says.



"Everything we added is contemporary but reflects the historic character of the house. It's a beautiful marriage of the old and the new."

— architect John Ash



Soft on Linoleum

Genuine, natural linoleum (a.k.a. Marmoleum)—not to be confused with vinyl (a plastic-based material)—was invented nearly 150 years ago, but remains completely modern in its green appeal. According to one of the product's leading manufacturers, Armstrong Flooring, the flooring stems from linseed oil, which derives from the flax plant (in Latin, "linum" means linseed and "oleum" means oil)—giving it its inherent pliability, or softness. Other ingredients used to make the product include wood or cork powder, resins, ground limestone, and mineral pigments, which provide its rich colors. The flooring can last up to 40 years if installed and maintained correctly.



From the remodeled third-floor treetop perch, Dolores focuses a good bit of time on her role as director of North Valley Bancorp (where her daughter Andrea Pedley works) and also as director and owner of Vellutini Properties (operated with help from her son Joseph). Previously she has been president of the Eureka Baking Company (now the Vellutini Bread Co., owned by her son Vincent). Having been born and raised in Ferndale, her family's roots run deep in the region, and that inspires her activism in historic preservation. To that end, she oversaw an intense, 13-year project to create the survey of historic buildings in the region: *Eureka: An Architectural Review* was published in 1987.

"The house has undergone a number of renovations, each one requiring careful attention to detail in order to maintain the historical context while judiciously introducing some contemporary design elements," John says of his most personally fulfilling project. Primarily that has involved adding green design elements to the home to make it more energy efficient; bringing more storage and entertaining space to the kitchen, and better connecting its view with the outdoors; opening up the bathroom adjacent to the master bedroom; and creating more living space outdoors.

There's also a new front fence in place, one that represents the bond between Dolores and John. "The copper gate represents both the solidness and beauty of our relationship, and the concrete walls, with purposefully exposed cracks and imbedded river rocks, represents the pressures we weather as we move through life," John says.

Such a concept is at the core of the Eastern philosophy wabi-sabi—an aesthetic focused on the beauty of transience—of which John is a believer. "Basically it reflects that everything is either becoming or declining," he says. "That's the same process with a house. That's what keeps life interesting."

Near the front door is an art vignette anchored by an antique black walnut sideboard topped with gray marble (*far left*). Showcased there is a sand-casting by local artist Melvin Schuler; the three drawings above it are by local artist Peggy Irvine; the vibrant medallion above is by artist Jim Crawford; and the three glass vessels were found at San Francisco's de Young Museum. Vinyl grass cloth-style wallpaper helps provide a neutral backdrop and is easy to clean.

Much of the home's original linoleum flooring is preserved in the home, and because in many places it was covered by carpeting, it only needed minor repair work to bring it back to light. The couple's favorite example of it is in their bedroom (*left*). "This particular pattern reminds me of an Indian print or rug," Dolores says, noting that its pattern almost reflects that of a textile. A small Danish-style chair sits near one of the windows. "I found that in L.A.," she says. "Someone had thrown it away simply because there was a small hole in the caning. I fixed it and love it."



One of the home's downstairs bathrooms—featuring its original speckled linoleum (*left*)—received a creative update by Dolores, who painted the base of the tub a rust color to better link to one of the flooring speckles. She also added the same paint color to the radiator and pipes under a sink that's just beyond. Above the tub is an artichoke drawing by local artist Bob Lopez.

The home's new master bathroom exists in the space formerly housing a small, cramped bathroom and adjacent bedroom—thought to have been used by the original owner's valet. After John's revamp of the space (*right*), the larger room is now anchored by a two-sided marble-top vanity "so two people getting dressed don't get in each other's way," Dolores says. The red sculpture atop it is by local artist Glenn Berry. Also new are a large walk-in shower and, across the way, a sauna. "It's incredible. Every day I walk in and smile. It's a joy," Dolores says. "I love having room to have all my clothing in the space without having everything in different places. It's made all the difference."

Local Expertise

Architect: John Ash, AIA, 707/442-6125 or jagarchitects.com

Tile: Carbonneau Ceramic Tile, 707/443-8842 or ceramictileman.com

Concrete work: DCI Builders, 707/786-5450 or dcibuilders.com

Plumbing: Maples Plumbing, 707/445-2500 or maplesplumb.com

Cabinetry: Finigan & Thonson Woodworks, 707/822-8522

Appliances: Franke sink (800/626-5771 or franke.com); Wolf stove (800/332-9513 or wolfappliance.com); Samsung refrigerator (samsung.com), available at Costco (707/441-8750 or costco.com)

Linoleum restoration: Carpet Express, 707/445-1805 or carpetexpresseureka.com

Decorative metalwork: O & M Industries, 707/822-8800 or omindustries.com

New glass: Fortuna Glass & Paint Co., 707/725-4486

Steel work: Fortuna Iron, 707/725-2608 or fortunairon.com

