

## STATE OF GRACE

With deep roots in California, Suzanne Tucker embraces the West Coast's casual elegance. The designer spoke with **Meredith Mendelsohn** about balancing comfort and luxury.



Suzanne Tucker (above) and a San Francisco residence she designed (opposite), with a work by Richard Diebenkorn.

Born and raised in Santa Barbara and now based in San Francisco, Suzanne Tucker has a strong appreciation for California, one that goes beyond its dramatic coastline and vineyard-covered hills. For Tucker, the state is a trove of historic architecture, from the Beaux Arts gems on San Francisco's hills to the 1920s Spanish Revival estates tucked inside leafy gardens. Add to this her expertise in European and Asian antiques and her desire to ensure comfort amid luxury, and you have Tucker's design sensibility. This appreciation of craftsmanship and materials is also evident in her line of textiles and furnishings, as well as in her collaborations with other firms such as Royal Limoges. Having cut her teeth working for Michael Taylor – known for his airy, white “California Look” of the late 20th century – Tucker took over his design practice with her business partner and husband, Timothy Marks, in 1986, renaming it Tucker & Marks. Meredith Mendelsohn talked with her ahead of the San Francisco Fall Art & Antiques Show (27–30 October), which Tucker is chairing for the second year in a row.

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONAL STYLE?

I'm not easily pigeonholed. Define me by adjectives: classic, appropriate, elegant, timeless, comfortable and inviting, which can apply to any home that I design, whether it is casual or formal, in the city or in the country. For me personally? Casual elegance.

### THIS WILL BE YOUR SECOND YEAR CHAIRING THE SAN FRANCISCO FALL ART & ANTIQUES SHOW. WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THIS EDITION?

I am thrilled to be chairing the show again. There is a lot that is new this year: adding *art* to the name of the show, for one. This was by popular demand from many dealers, and it opens up the show to a broader range of galleries. We've also invited dealers to think beyond antiques and bring pieces from antiquity to the present day. There is no 50-year cut-off date anymore.

### WHAT COMES FIRST IN YOUR DESIGNS, THE OBJECTS OR THE INTERIORS?

It varies with every project, depending on whether it's a new build, new collectors or redecorating with a new vision. In the end, what really makes a room sing is a personal approach to furnishing and art that reflects who lives there. I will say that you should always have at least one piece with some age in a room. It does not have to be over-the-top expensive. Antiques resonate with history's silent voice. The appeal resides in a patina achievable only with time. Their very imperfections speak of soul and character and life.

### HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME INTERESTED IN ANTIQUES?

My passion for antiques and the decorative arts goes back to my childhood. I grew up in Santa Barbara, in a rather privileged playground, able to roam freely through properties with romantic



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names such as El Mirador, Lotusland, Val Verde, Constancia and Belaggio, to name a few. As magical as the gardens were to me, I was equally enchanted by the houses and interiors. My eyes were opened when Sotheby's held a three-day estate sale at a large property next to us. I explored every inch of the house and sat in the bleachers for three days, watching the furniture being auctioned, noting every sale price in the catalogue. That experience inspired me to become a lifelong collector.

**ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC HISTORIC PERIODS THAT YOU ARE DRAWN TO?**

It is hard to go wrong with anything from the 18th century. If I could have only one piece in an empty room, it would be something from the Regency period, that narrow window of incredibly elegant, perfectly proportioned furniture. I have a soft spot for anything with good lines, deep patina and intriguing provenance. I am not a purist, though, and I definitely believe in marrying modern elements with antiques.

**WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START A HOME FURNISHINGS LINE?**

In 2010, I started Suzanne Tucker Home furnishings with a collection of textiles inspired by my global travels. It had been a longtime dream to build a textile line, and it was also an obvious segue to my growing design practice. We just introduced our 2016 Kismet Collection of embroideries, jacquards and stripes. Kismet is exactly what has led to other product categories, including a collection of dinnerware for Royal Limoges, classic stone mantel designs for Chesney's and a line of luxury bath accessories with Labrazel.

**WHAT IS YOUR DREAM PROJECT: A BLANK SLATE ON A BEAUTIFUL PROPERTY? A HISTORIC BUILDING IN NEED OF REVAMPING?**

Beautiful historic property – yes. Revamping, remodelling – always. Blank slate – no! I love the connection with my clients, and one dream project is never the same as the last one. Clients who have a love of good houses and good architecture, who enjoy the process and who trust that I have their best interests at heart: those are the best. Perhaps my dream would be the White House, but that could end up a nightmare.

Meredith Mendelsohn writes about design for *Architectural Digest*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other publications.

(From top) Inside a Northern California villa, an 18th-century console doubles as a bar; in the dining room, Gustavo Ramos Rivera's painting *Visca* provides a playful, contemporary backdrop for Regency chairs and a marble table.

