

Home & Garden

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INTERIOR DECORATING



Matilda Kerner, 5, daughter of designer Lorena Siminovich, works on her own craft projects in her playroom.

Russell Yip / The Chronicle

Playful, crafty, modern

Petit Collage founder, family uncover the potential in an S.F. midcentury fixer-upper

By Chantal Lamers

Lorena Siminovich designs eco-chic toys, decor and games with a midcentury bent for her children's line, Petit Collage (www.petitcollage.com). So when she and her husband were on the brink of outgrowing their condo with the impending birth of their daughter, Matilda, they didn't hesitate after popping in on a '50s fixer in San Francisco that was filled with possibilities.

Understandably, Siminovich was not exactly prepared to pack up and move into a home that had been so grossly neglected. But she and her husband, Esteban Kerner, a fashion executive, saw past the peeling exterior, frosted-glass windows, pink and yellow pastel walls, a seriously obsolete kitchen and some architectural oddities.

"We fell in love with the windows and the floors," said Siminovich. "Something about it really connected with us."

Siminovich continues on P6

"Something about it really connected with us."

Lorena Siminovich, on seeing past the oddities of the 1950s home she and her husband bought in 2008

Inside

A project from "Petit Collage: 25 Easy Craft and Decor Projects for a Playful Home."

FROM THE COVER

Finding potential in a '50s fixer-upper

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Worried about being outbid, the couple wrote a letter to the owner, sharing their intentions for making minimal modifications to the Noe Valley dwelling.

That was 2008. After a lot of white paint (a few neutrals) and the help of an architect who whipped up an ingenious plan for untangling a knot of odd staircases and floors at the center of the house, the home's midcentury bones became the idyllic backdrop for the design-minded couple. It also turned out to be a complementary setting for photographing the projects in Siminovich's new book, "Petit Collage: 25 Easy Craft and Decor Projects for a Playful Home" (\$24.99, Potter Craft).

The crafts featured in her book are right at home in the space and embody her ideals such as "meaningful handmade objects, well-designed goods, vintage and upcycled materials, and colorful and bold living for modern families."

Passion for vintage

Siminovich was an art director for Mudpuppy, which manufactures puzzles and toys for kids, when she and her husband relocated to San Francisco from Brooklyn's Williamsburg. One afternoon in 2006, she was hurrying off to meet a good friend who was expecting her first child.

Siminovich rifled through her collection of vintage ephemera and whipped together a modern collage of owls as a gift. And so Petit Collage was born.

Siminovich's passion for vintage extends beyond the hunt for old wallpaper, discarded books and cool maps. Her family's home is a mix of high and low, flea-market finds anchored with contemporary pieces for an effortless counterbalance.

"The house has such a feel for its era that we feel if we only did flea market or Scandinavian furniture or Danish furniture, it would feel like you've stepped out in another time."

The living room, with its original wood beams that cross the ceiling and crisscross an enormous window looking into the yard, lend the home a cabin-y feel, says Siminovich. But to foster a communal vibe, the couple opened up the kitchen by tearing down a wall near the entryway.

New white cabinetry, open shelving and, more recently, an island paired with bright yellow stools were introduced.

For the most part, the walls are neutral, so when it comes to color and texture, the artwork, furnishings and accessories do the heavy lifting. The one exception is the kitchen, where the couple chose to introduce two slightly varying shades of green paint.

The green hues in the kitchen help balance the perspective with the lush greenery flowing along a slope beyond the over-size window at the opposite end of the house. The effect draws the eye seamlessly from one space to the next. And because there isn't an abundance of natural light in the kitchen, a lighter shade helps brighten the wall that the sun hits.

Starting small

Matilda's room, one level below along with the master bedroom, was originally a laundry room. To cover a maze of exposed pipes, the couple commissioned a carpenter to create custom cabinetry.

To tame the rough and raw concrete wall, Siminovich purchased, hung and painted yellow a huge 8-by-8-foot canvas.

A few years ago, their daughter's room inspired a change when they happened upon a bright pink, red and black fish-shaped windsock in Japan-town. Siminovich repainted the canvas, this time with a large, red heart, a favorite of 5-year-old Matilda. "I took that inspiration and carried that theme through the room, which is black and white details and that very strong, almost fluorescent pink and red. When she was born, we had a bit of an apple fixation, so there are a few apples in there that carry



Photos by Russell Yip / The Chronicle

Lorena Siminovich opted for mostly neutral walls, letting the artwork and accessories provide most of the color, in her Noe Valley home. The wood-beam ceilings give it a cabin-y feel.



Siminovich writes down the week's meal plans on a DIY dry-erase board in her Noe Valley kitchen. The project, included in her new book, is explained at right.



A DIY lamp in Matilda's bedroom is a project from Siminovich's book.

the red color." Starting with a small detail like the cheeky windsock was a departure for Siminovich, who typically designs a room from big to small. Admittedly, she says, "I tend to get a little fixated on the small details and build it that way organically. "But of course it's what I say, not what I do."

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Siminovich and daughter Matilda relax in the garden as dad Esteban Kerner watches from inside the house.



Petit Collage: 25 Easy Craft and Decor Projects for a Playful Home (\$24.99, Potter Craft).

With Lorena Siminovich's children's goods available in more than 1,400 stores around the world, her company, Petit Collage (www.petitcollage.com), has morphed beyond handmade. The inventory has grown up well past the nursery years to include stylish growth charts, puzzles, fabric wall decals, board books, alphabet cards, nesting blocks, dolls and more. But when it came to the book, Siminovich returned to her company's handmade roots. The crafting manual includes tutorials for some of the most coveted items from her line, including a signature wooden plaque and paper mobile.

Accessibility was equally essential to Siminovich, so she divided the book into sections for family (dry-erase dinner planner, ceiling pendant), decor (book ledges, wheeled toy bin) and playful things (portable dollhouse, memory game) among chapters on a materials, tools and trick as well as templates.

Projects are fairly straightforward and, for the most part, can be made using tools and materials most people already keep around the house. Another user-friendly component: "There's no sewing required."

"Everything is in paper and/or wood," she says.

— Chantal Lamers



Petit Collage

Dry-Erase Dinner Planner

This modern menu planner comes from "Petit Collage: 25 Easy Craft and Decor Projects for a Playful Home" (\$24.99; Potter Craft).

MATERIALS

- One 14-by-11-by-1 1/2-inch picture frame with glass
- Various colored and patterned papers
- Double-sided tape
- Clear gel tacky glue
- Two small Mighty Magnets
- Dry-erase marker

TOOLS

- Craft knife or scissors
- Cutting mat
- Large ruler

Instructions: Using a craft knife or scissors, cut out seven 2-by-11-inch strips of paper. Choose papers that are not too heavily patterned or dark. You want your writing to be legible once the board is assembled.

Cut out the first letter of the days of the week from a solid colored paper. (The book includes a letters template, not included here.)

Lay out your paper strips vertically in an appealing order.

Use the cardboard or mat board backing that came with the frame and adhere the strips of paper to it using double-sided tape.

Once these are all in place, use double-sided tape to adhere the paper letters for the days of the week along the left side of the board. Make sure to leave enough room on the left edge of the board so the letters will not be covered by the frame once the board is placed in the frame.

Place the board into the frame and reassemble the frame back.

Using tacky glue, adhere one of the magnets to the top of the frame, and the other to the dry-erase marker to always keep it handy.