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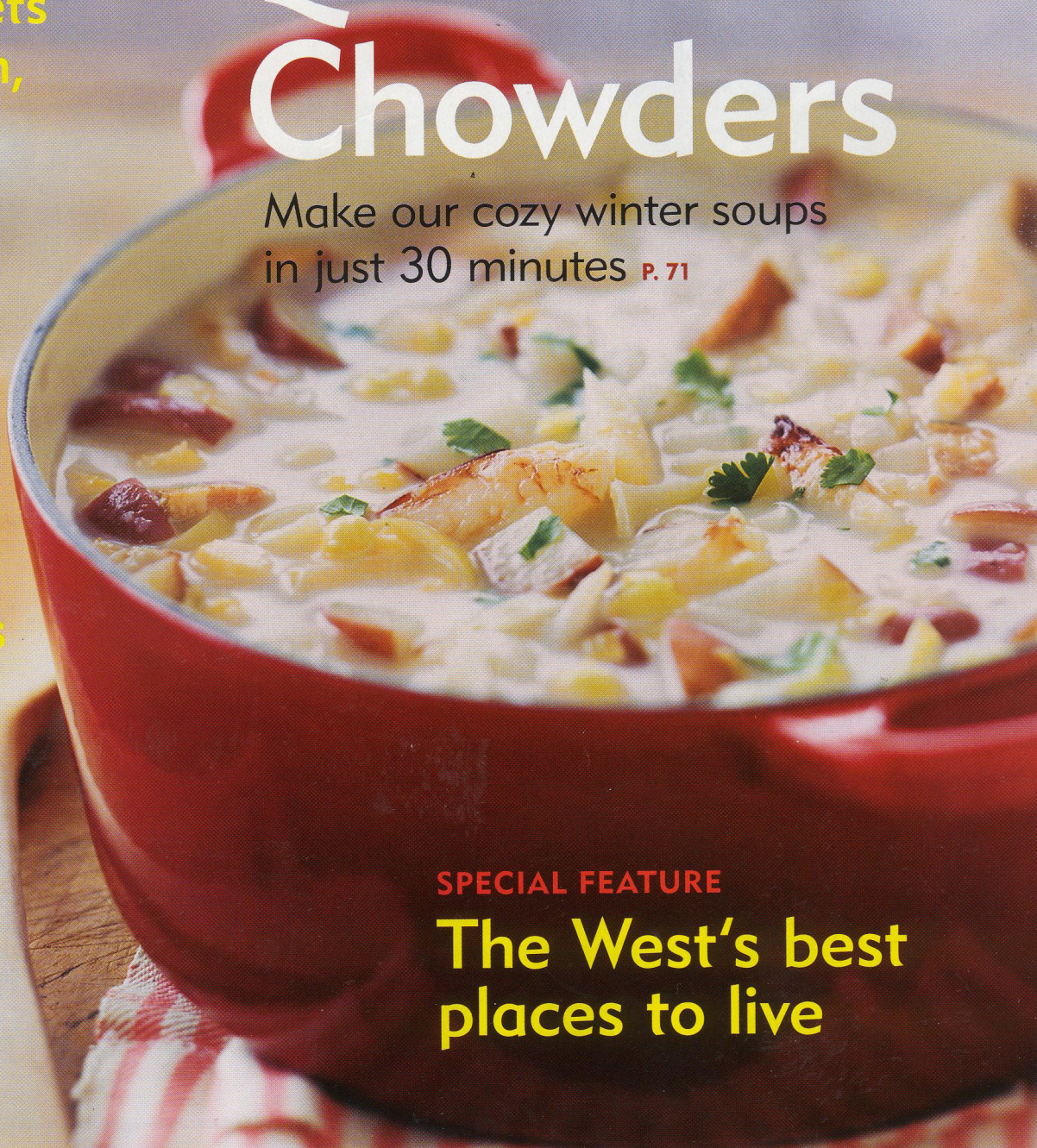
Style secrets for a warm, modern home

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REMODEL

Warm and modern


Design advice from an interiors expert

BY JAIME GROSS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS J. STORY

"Minimalist spaces require constant work to keep neat. It's not fun to live in such a high-maintenance home," says renovation expert Chris Choy. This realization led him to move from a spare loftlike space to a more conventional two-story house in San Francisco, where he served as his own interior designer. "I thought I'd like everything open, but it turns out I actually like privacy," Choy says.

His new house had a straightforward layout, generous-size rooms, and a big backyard, but still needed remodeling. Choy wanted a flexible, open plan with laid-back warmth, a few doors, and the ability to tolerate a little "controlled clutter." So he and his architect, Cary Bernstein, removed walls separating the kitchen and dining room to open up the first floor, while retaining the more traditional



DESIGN TIP: Paint things white and edit down your display. It's a kind of magic trick that makes anything look better.



layout upstairs for privacy. On the first floor, they installed floor-to-ceiling sliding doors at the back of the house.

Choy also looked for simple, affordable ways to add a little style. He found several furniture pieces from salvage yards and office and restaurant suppliers, including an industrial-grade kitchen island and steel cabinets with beautiful patina. He used just a few high-design splurges to give an impression of luxury: the living room's blackened-steel fireplace, with its oversize walnut-framed mirror; the dining room's custom-made light fixture wrapped in nutmeg-colored linen; and the dark walnut platform bed.

"Besides the furniture," Choy says, "most everything else is bare bones." The bookshelves on either side of the living room fireplace are white-painted plywood mounted

with inexpensive brackets; the perforated vinyl window treatments came from an office supplier. The floors throughout are the original oak, sanded and stained a dark chocolate brown to hide their imperfections. And all the interior doors are original, updated with a fresh coat of white paint and sleek steel handles.

The contrast between old and new—period detailing paired with ultramodern fixtures and furniture—is more interesting than "an all-out traditional interior or one that's all-out modern," Choy says. "Plus it saves you money and keeps the character of the house intact." It also helps a house feel more comfortable. "When your home is relaxed, everyone in it can relax as well," he says.

DESIGN: Cary Bernstein Architect, San Francisco (www.cbstudio.com or 415/522-1907)

DESIGN TIP: With open shelving, stay monochromatic. Piles of all-white dishes never look messy.

DESIGN TIP:

If you're going to splurge, consider something custom-designed, such as this light fixture. It can often be less expensive than buying a comparable off-the-shelf item.



More style secrets

■ **Change the hardware** (door handles, window pulls). It's one of the fastest and easiest ways to update your space. Remember that it's the juxtaposition of traditional and supermodern elements that's most visually fresh.

■ **Use your paint palette consistently.** To create a unified look throughout your home, let these colors inform the rest of your design decisions; carry paint chips with you when you're shopping.

■ **Scale up.** Go for tactile punch with added texture—felt-covered stools, nubby sisal rugs, for example—to warm up a modern space.

■ **Explore beyond furniture stores.** Salvage yards and restaurant and office suppliers (check the yellow pages) often have better prices and more durable fixtures. Mixing in rougher, industrial elements creates interest.

■ **Stay flexible.** Sometimes it pays to break your own design rules. *

DESIGN TIP:

Streamline your color palette. Choose three great paint colors that work together—a light, medium, and dark.

