The new home of a Durban-educated designer and her Irish-American husband, is one of the oldest houses in San Francisco’s Bernal Heights neighbourhood. An 1860’s cottage, it sat in disrepair for years and, at one point, was close to being condemned.
ays architect Camille Cladouhos: ‘We were faced with a challenge of expanding the original 149m² San Francisco house to accommodate a young family, plus two off-street parking bays. The house is built on an unusually shallow stand, located in a neighborhood with unique zoning restrictions including a very vocal neighborhood organization. Our challenge was to repair, expand, and modernize this small dark house, while maintaining the rustic charm of the original building. To accomplish this, we kept the facade and envelope of the existing structure and added a contemporary, but unobtrusive addition: a narrow, three-meter-wide wing that contains a garage, bedroom suite and studio office spaces on two levels. These open studio offices are complemented by a two-story library equipped with a sliding ladder, here large corner window walls create a connection with the back garden.

The contemporary glass-enclosed tower is juxtaposed against the original cottage structure. The fluid lines of the two Le Klint pendants above the rustic dining table soften their stark aesthetic: Philippe Starck ‘ghost’ chairs aid spatially while earthy redwood side panels on the workstation provide a warm contrast to the slate floor tiles.
Within the existing volume, we cut away the roof and upper floor in the centre to create a central light core that washes a new stone wall and illuminates the kitchen and living room. Partially cantilevered oak stair treads appear to be anchored against this feature wall, while the same wall provides a durable backsplash to the kitchen counter on the opposite side.

The central staircase divides the kitchen area from the sitting room where a mix of cushions add vibrancy to the contemporary low-profile sofa. Original abstract painting by Engel-Pak.
To take advantage of the gentle fall of land, the floor of the dining room and the studio office were lowered to achieve a higher ceiling, more volume and easy connection to the garden. New aluminum windows at the rear of the house give the otherwise traditional existing volume a modern update; and an oversided wood sliding door was introduced in the dining room both as a design accent and to open up the room to the deck and the landscape beyond.

Careful mixing of rough stone and wood, with clear glass panels and metal, breathes new life into the once-neglected structure. The
rustic charm of the original house is re-introduced via the use of a restored vintage stove, while salvaged redwood cladding was re-used as interior paneling. Exposed joists over the dining room and the studio office remain as rugged contrasts to the contemporary materiality of the new finishes and fixtures. Here, the eclectic tastes of the clients – both artists and designers – has added yet another layer of interest to the modern architectural interventions applied to this old wooden cottage.

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Main bedroom overlooks the garden and what was once a proposed walk-in wardrobe for the adjacent guest bedroom is now a slate-lined steam shower in the spacious, light-filled master suite.