



Home!

## LIVE LIKE A TECH BOSS IN SILICON VALLEY

British CEO Ben Hutchinson and his wife, Florie, used to have a one-bedroom flat in Notting Hill. Now they've upsized – to a 4,000sq ft modern bungalow in the hills above Palo Alto. Jealous?

REPORT Lisa Grainger PHOTOGRAPHS David Livingston

The living area with hanging chair designed by Jessica Davis. Opposite: the exterior



The open-plan living room, with a glass-roofed central area and cedar-clad walls on which hangs the couple's art collection



The dining area, with chairs by Bruno Rey for Dietiker, bespoke Luteca table and Caragh Thuring painting. Below, from left: the entrance to the house; the children's bathroom

Florie Hutchinson was flicking through a local paper in a Palo Alto coffee shop one Saturday morning when she spotted an ad for a house. Having already viewed 40 homes around the nearby San Francisco area, the 42-year-old was pretty knowledgeable about its housing stock. This bungalow, though, seemed different.

Not only was it in the rural Palo Alto Hills; it also overlooked a golf course. It looked like a mid-century modern design. And, having been built in 1971 and not renovated since, it was ripe for some creative reconstruction.

She took a quick drive to look at the locked, empty building and texted her English husband, Ben, 43, to see if he could get an appointment to view it. By the time she got home from a meeting with friends, Ben had not only been inside, but told the property broker they wanted it. "For both of us, the attraction was immediate," she says delightedly.

There were deer on the road as she drove there, "and beautiful sequoias in the

driveway", and the property, on two thirds of an acre, ticked boxes for them both. Ben, the co-founder of two tech companies, Earnest and Rocketplace, wanted a retreat where he could relax after his commute from Silicon Valley. Florie, a Swiss-American, Princeton-educated arts publicist (who successfully campaigned for a ballet pump to be added to the red stiletto as an emoji for women's shoes, and



Florie and Ben Hutchinson with their children, from left, Beatrice, 5, Anais, 8, Eloise, 10, and Ottilie, 3

for a full swimsuit to be added, rather than just a polka-dot bikini), wanted "a house with character and history, with charm and soul". And with three young daughters and a fourth on the way, they needed a lot more space than the one-bedroom flat in Notting Hill in which their first child was born in 2014.

The designer of the house, Joseph Eichler, had built almost 11,000 similar bungalows, characterised by wooden walls and a central courtyard, between 1949 and 1974. When the Hutchinsons moved into theirs in 2018, not much had changed in the almost half-century since its last owner had commissioned Eichler to build it. The walls and ceilings were clad in reddish-brown wood and the floors in cork. Windows were small and rooms dark.

But Florie could see the potential, and knew just the people she wanted to oversee its remodelling: Gustave Carlson, a Berkeley-based architect; and the designer Jessica Davis, who'd been in the same a cappella choir at Princeton as Florie, and had children herself. "She instinctively understood what



IMAGES: GUSTAVE CARLSON DESIGN WITH INTERIORS BY JESSICA DAVIS AT ATELIER DAVIS





a young family needed, without compromising on aesthetics,” says Florie.

Today, the reconfigured house – an airy 4,000sq ft, with five bedrooms, four bathrooms and a TV room – brings together an outdoor Californian lifestyle with European style. Skylights over the central courtyard mean the enormous living area is flooded with light. Each room has sliding doors onto the garden and sliding screens to allow air to circulate. Walls are clad in golden cedar or painted in chalky whites, making it feel light yet warm.

Perhaps most important of all, there is plenty of wall space for their collection of art. Florie works as a media strategist for art organisations – including the new Institute of Contemporary Art San Francisco, which opens in October – and has amassed a considerable collection, from a Yayoi Kusama print, which she bought for Ben as an anniversary gift, to pieces by British painters including Gabriella Boyd, Sophie Barber and Mary Ramsden.

The colours and materials of the furnishings, she says, were chosen to go with the art – and the views of nature around them. The beds, for instance, are made of natural rattan and wood. The pieces aren’t all expensive either, she insists, with items from home furnishings chain RH and Ikea sitting alongside iconic pieces by designers such as F Schumacher & Co and custom-made furniture: the sofas by George Smith in London; the Schneider dining chandelier from Stillfried Wien.

A lot was made to order: a pattern Florie loved on a Cody Hoyt ceramic, for instance, was photographed and sent to India to be handwoven into the rug for the living room. The composite in the cream terrazzo floor was coloured to their specification – “After about 30 different tests” – with bits of terracotta,

**Clockwise from top left: the bathroom; one of the children’s colourful bedrooms; the kitchen, with a central island that doubles as a craft-cum-homework table**



blue and yellow. And Jessica Davis designed the hanging chair at the heart of the living room. “Children particularly love that when they come to visit,” Florie says. “They think it’s so cool we have a swing inside our house.”

For Ben, says Florie, the coolest thing about the house is the kitchen. Her husband loves to cook, hence the four ovens: “One for pastries, one big enough for a proper English roast and the others for potatoes and veg.” He also has a walk-in wine room and a fridge in their outdoor barbecue area, “which is pretty handy, as we’re right by the 18th hole so friends often stop by for a drink”.

One of the most personal touches in the house is a mural by the Salt Lake City painter Mariel Capanna, in the 21ft passageway from the living quarters to the girls’ rooms. Because California went into lockdown just as the artist arrived to do the work, she had to stay for five weeks. Each morning she plastered a new section of wall and each afternoon illustrated it with images inspired by the family’s life, from Ben’s trainers and three-year-old Ottilie’s yellow wellies to a pirate ship from a song loved by five-year-old Beatrice. “It’s a house,” says Florie, “that makes us all happy.” ■