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AT HOME IN THE MODERN WORLD

## Prefab Perfected



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Dec/Jan 2012

**The Light Fantastic**  
Essential Table Lamps

**Fresh Off the Boat**  
Shipping Containers  
Move Indoors





2407619

MAX. GROSS

30 480 kg  
67 200 lbs

TARE

2 250 kg  
4 960 lbs

MAX. PAYLOAD

28 230 kg  
62 240 lbs

CUBE

331 m<sup>3</sup>  
1170 cuft



Hapag-Lloyd

SESU  
206507 5  
2261

HC  
81

2.6m  
8.6



# CONTAINED

TWO SAN FRANCISCO ART AND TRAVEL ADDICTS  
OVERHAULED A LOFT—AND CUSTOMIZED A PAIR  
OF SHIPPING CONTAINERS—TO ACCOMMODATE  
THEIR COLLECTION AND REFLECT THEIR PASSIONS.

**By** Emily Kaiser Thelin  
**Photos by** Drew Kelly

**Project:** Wardell/Sagan Residence  
**Location:** San Francisco, California



In the pursuit of their hobbies, Jeff Wardell and Claudia Sagan are not laid-back. When the San Francisco couple says they love to travel, they don't mean trips to Napa. Over the past three summers Wardell put 15,500 miles on a motorcycle he and Sagan keep in Milan on rides from the Arctic Circle to southwestern Portugal. When Wardell began collecting street art in the mid-1990s, he admits, "it quickly became an obsession." When he began dating Sagan several years ago, "we got serious about buying big." Starting with local graffiti artist Barry McGee, they bought ever-more ambitious installations by stars like Shepard Fairey, JR, and Os Gemeos—until they needed a bigger home to accommodate their approximately 120-piece collection.

In February of 2007 they purchased a 3,200-square-foot former Chinese laundry and tooth-powder factory with column-free interiors and a zigzagging sawtooth roof in lower Pacific Heights. As a former VP of real estate for Williams-Sonoma, "Claudia knew right away it had excellent bones," says Wardell, a former financial advisor. The travelers also loved how the 127-foot-long loft seemed to stretch out to the horizon. "I walked up those front stairs, and I felt like I was at the edge of a highway, like I could keep going forever," Sagan says. "I loved that feeling."

Where some might box the cavernous space into cozier rooms, Wardell and Sagan wanted "to celebrate that length," Sagan says. The apartment lies on a north-south axis with large windows at either ▶

The shipping containers (opposite, top) were stacked, joined with steel tubes, and lashed to reinforced floor joints to make them earthquake-safe. The bottom container houses a guest room; the top is Wardell's office (right), with a rectangular cutout the couple calls the "dinner's ready slot" for its bird's-eye perspective on the kitchen.





# Ship It

If you'd like to incorporate shipping containers into your house—or build a structure entirely out of them—these architects and designers are good resources:

**Robert Humble and Joel Egan, HyBrid Architecture, Seattle, Washington**

Their prefab Cargotec-tecture homes incorporate shipping containers, with prices starting at \$29,500. They also consult on D.I.Y. projects. [hybridarc.com](http://hybridarc.com)

**Peter DeMaria and Michael Sylvester, Logical Homes, Manhattan Beach, California**

Prefab Logical Homes, some incorporating shipping containers, start at 160 square feet for \$25,000. [logicalhomes.com](http://logicalhomes.com)

**Ada Tolla and Giuseppe Ligano, LOT-EK, New York, New York**

Pioneers of the field, they use containers to build offices and residences around the world. [lot-ek.com](http://lot-ek.com)

**Jennifer Siegal, Office of Mobile Design (OMD), Los Angeles, California**

Siegal integrates containers into homes priced from \$230 to \$280 per square foot. In 2013, she will launch a line of Take Home container homes, with prices starting at \$100,000. [designmobile.com](http://designmobile.com)

**Geoffrey Warner, Alchemy Architects, St. Paul, Minnesota**

Builds containers into his custom projects and offers prefab wooden weeHouses starting at \$79,000. [weehouse.com](http://weehouse.com)

**Adam Kalkin, Quik House, Bernardsville, New Jersey, and Paris, France**

Known for high-concept designs, including a three-bedroom \$119,000 Quik House made from six containers. [architectureandhygiene.com](http://architectureandhygiene.com)



@ Learn more about the containers in our behind-the-scenes video at [dwell.com/magazine](http://dwell.com/magazine)





end. To showcase the art and maximize daylight, they decided to situate the master bedroom at the back, away from the street, but keep everything else open, with a central kitchen and living room and a den facing the street. They hired a local company to sandblast the interior to expose the board-formed concrete walls and replaced the carpeted floors with Georgia hickory pecan planks—the longest, knottiest boards they could find—to further lengthen the loft and make it look more like a warehouse. The next question was, “how do we make a home office and a guest bedroom happen without cluttering the space?” Sagan says.

For the guest room, “we wanted something our friends would tell everyone they knew about, but not so comfortable they would never leave,” Wardell explains. He wanted it to be a self-contained space with a Murphy bed, an element he remembered fondly from a train ride he took across Europe in his 20s. After considering plunking the interior compartment of a Pullman train car in the middle of the apartment, they landed on shipping containers.

“I contacted Hapag-Lloyd looking for an orange one in newer condition,” Wardell says. “But they’re German. They have rules. They wouldn’t sell us one, but they put out a call that these nuts in San

Furniture designer Pat Carson created a plethora of custom fixtures for the guest room, including a riveted aluminum Murphy bed (above and bottom left) operated with a hand-cranked wheel and pulley, and a teak-and-steel sink (opposite) surrounded by exposed copper piping. One wall of the container was replaced with liquid crystal PolyTronix glass (top right and left), which changes from clear to opaque at the flick of a switch.







In his home office (above), Wardell runs his online art gallery Chester's Blacksmith Shop and researches his next project: opening a boutique hotel in New Zealand. His nephew peeks down from the "napping nook" secreted above

the office. The desk is from Room & Board, as is the sofa in the living room (opposite) where Wardell and Sagan hang out with their niece and nephew beneath "Super Chango," a large-scale piece by the Date Farmers.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**Containers in use worldwide:** 17 million

**Dimensions:** Generally 8 feet wide by 8.5 feet high by 20 or 40 feet long

**Cost to purchase a 20-foot container:** about \$2,500

**National dealer:** ConGlobal Industries, [cgini.com](http://cgini.com)

Francisco wanted containers for their house. In late 2007, we got word that the Port of Oakland had some used ones." Sagan examined several before choosing. "A ton are just a mess," she says. "You'll see a huge dent in the side and go, Wow, a wave did that? It's important to smell them, too, because they pick up odors from their cargo."

In 2008, while a container reseller prepped the containers (replacing the original pesticide-treated floors, repainting the walls, cutting out holes for windows and plumbing), a structural engineer and builder reinforced the loft's floor with wooden joists to accommodate the nine-ton load. The containers arrived by flatbed truck one morning in late July; by midday, a crane had lowered them in through an opening in the roof, cantilevering the blue one, Wardell's future home office, atop the orange one, the guest room.

For the container interiors, "the mood we wanted was raw," Wardell says. There was only one caveat: The guest room "had to pass the Dottie test," Sagan says. Her mother would be their first visitor that Christmas. "She was mortified by the idea of sleeping in a container," Sagan says. "She said it sounded like a coffin."

To customize the apartment and containers, Wardell brought in Pat Carson, a furniture designer and builder who shares the couple's love for travel and industrial design. When asked why his pieces have so many rivets, Carson grins, "I'm that guy on the airplane by the window, staring at the wings." Over six months Carson designed and constructed 75 custom fixtures for the apartment, many with a kinetic, gadget-like charm. "A lot of the creative ideas I've had in the past 20 years are manifested in this house," Wardell says.

The carbon fiber dining table, for example, opens on a hinge to form a V, an L or a straight line, with ball casters embedded in the legs so it can glide easily. Woven-leather bar stools swivel between the table and the kitchen island. Surrounded by exposed copper piping, the guest bathroom's teak-and-steel sink evokes the utilitarian atmosphere of a train car or ship cabin; in the master bathroom, tilt-out shelves in the shower hide shampoos. Just about the only convertible fixture Carson didn't build in its entirety is the liquid crystal "privacy wall" in the guest bath, which changes from clear to opaque at the flick of a switch.

Shortly before Dottie arrived, Carson installed the custom Murphy bed, which is clad in aluminum with dozens of rivets and rolls up on a pulley made from a mill wheel. The unconventional guest room passed with flying colors. "She was pleasantly surprised at how spacious and comfortable it was," Sagan says. It's been a hit with subsequent guests as well. "We've found the container self-selects," Wardell says. "Our friends who are the most fun choose to stay here." ■■■



