

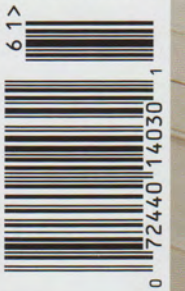
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Growing Character

An earthy yet elegant California kitchen features finishes that weather well over time.

In youth-kissed California, where fortunes are spent on reversing time, Krista and Rich Coffin rubbed against the grain. They refused to follow fads in building a new home for their family in Montecito. Instead, the Coffins opted for a design that would grow old gracefully. Krista, in fact, went so far as to issue a mission statement: "We want a home with finishes that will improve over time." And nowhere is that mission more successful than in the kitchen. Intrigued by the room's rich textures, we delved deeper into the Coffins' plan for building toward the depth of character only time can yield.

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STEP 1: GO WITH THE RIGHT GRAIN

For their cabinets, the Coffins chose alder wood—a species with the look of burl wood but with lots of earthy mottling. Subtle color shifts in the wood's hue almost anticipate the patina of time, while the grain, Rich says, "can take any amount of stain and distressing." He should know. Together, Rich and Krista own an upmarket custom home-building company, RHC Builders in nearby Santa Barbara. Their advice on what kind of wood finish to avoid? "A fake distressed look," Rich says. Instead, the couple roughed up their cabinets' finish just enough to create the base for an evolving texture. With two young sons—Conner, 12, and Parker, 10—adding this jump start to their cabinetry's patina proved not only attractive but savvy. "With boys, surfaces have to be durable," Krista says.

STEP 2: WEAVE IN FIBERS

Krista returned from Cabo San Lucas with three rough-textured baskets that designers Kyle Irwin and Erin Keosian had wired as over-the-island pendants. The three repeating baskets are matched by three woven rattan bar stools that offer contrasting layers of textural interest.

STEP 3: MAKE HISTORY WITH STONE

Nothing says age like stone, especially in distressed finishes. For perimeter countertops, the Coffins loved the hues and grain of marble, but craved something less polished. Acid-washed marble offered a smooth, earthy surface that plays against more rustic terra-cotta-based backsplash tiles and floor pavers. The couple ordered the bricks and pavers from Mexico, then had them stained and sealed in Santa Barbara for a rich, aged look.

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Above left: Open shelves reveal thick plaster walls to break up the expanse of beautifully distressed wood cabinets.

Above: A custom hood is plastered to match the walls, creating contrast crisp enough to bring out every burl in the alder wood cabinets. Various-size terra-cotta bricks, laid in different patterns, add stretches of sunbaked earth to the backsplash and floors. Left: Inside the food pantry, at the end of the L-shape kitchen, a decoratively painted armoire juxtaposes its weathered colors against the room's many natural finishes.

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STEP 4: EMBRACE WEATHERED METALS

From cabinet hardware and faucets to the ornate iron scrollwork of a pendant hanging in the butler's pantry, Rich and Krista opted for metals that grow a patina over time—known to the trade as “living finishes.” Although metals are usually protected against oxidizing with a sealer, these finishes (available in bronze, copper, pewter, or brass) are oil-rubbed or brushed, then left uncoated. The result, after time, is one-of-a-kind because no two finishes will age precisely the same. They change in color, tone, and glow.

STEP 5: HIGHLIGHT IN WHITE

Even the most gradual changes over time are easy to perceive in this kitchen, thanks to one element that remains the same. The Coffins wisely painted their smooth plaster walls a natural white, creating a clean, consistent backdrop against which to view subtle variations in the room's evolving finishes. **B**

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Opposite: Marble countertops on the kitchen's perimeter are acid-washed for a matte finish. Faucets are brass, and will grow a lovely patina with use.

Below: Rich Coffin had terra-cotta pipes—the kind often used as chimney caps—embedded in the plaster walls in the butler's pantry for use as open wine storage.

