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VOL. 5, 2021

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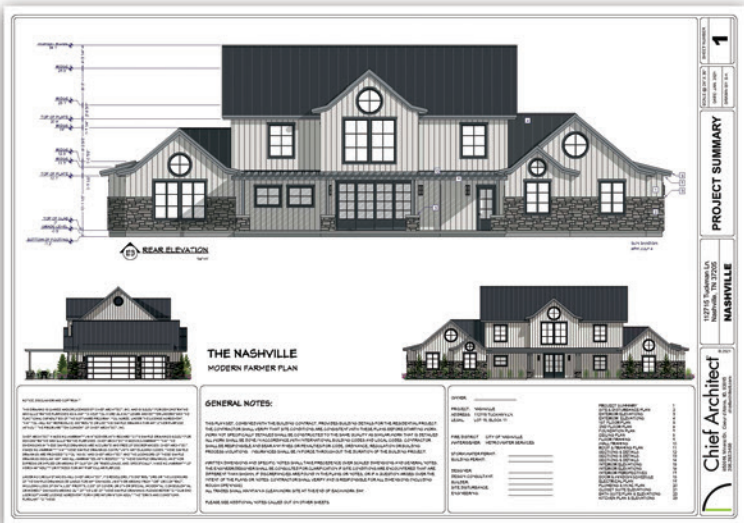
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# RD

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## Tough Decisions



Although we cover remodeled houses as a matter of course throughout the year, this is our annual deep dive into the subject. Our theme this issue is “Existing Conditions,” and each of our featured projects has had to contend with and surmount at least one major constraint to achieve a successful outcome.

But this is our new reality. Dealing with existing conditions will be the future state of most residential building before too long. Yes, there are still some green fields left for tract development and some choice parcels here and there for new custom homes, but much of our new construction will have to cope with at least one constraining condition and likely more—an obsolete structure, the wrong kind of building in the wrong place, steeply sloped lots, unstable soils, buried oil tanks, or some other environmental obstacle.

Other constraints are emerging quickly. One of the biggest ahead are revised flood maps that take a more climate-change conscious view of coastal flooding and small stream impacts, and the skyrocketing flood insurance costs that lie in wait. And then there are increasingly onerous building codes that force architects and builders to prioritize compliance over the best means of achieving building performance and construction standards. Zoning restrictions, too, often impose restraints on density that would enable greater affordability for owners and renters alike. Or they arbitrarily prohibit a healthy, dynamic mingling of commercial and residential building types.

This is where the vision, expertise, and nimble problem-solving abilities of architects and builders are sorely needed—not just on the jobsite but in public office as well. It is, indeed, past the time for pros to get political—to push for change at the municipal level and beyond. You are uniquely qualified to see the whole picture and to perceive the nuances and ramifications of particular decisions that others often miss or dismiss. We need more pros sitting on planning commissions, running for mayor, and more. We can't expect significant improvement while working only from the outside.

That said, we still need more architects and enlightened builders driving change from the outside, too—but on a more macro level. They must lead development efforts, not just implement them as advisers and hired hands—because it's the developers who make the key decisions about location, quality of construction, and building type and purpose. When the decisions that affect everyone are left to those who have only monetary or other one-sided interests at heart, it harms us all.

We have very tough decisions ahead of us and a myriad of existing conditions to surmount. These decisions are appropriately tough, however, because their results will endure long after we are gone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "S. Claire Conroy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

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-Brandon Ingram, Architect, C. Brandon Ingram Design



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# Think Icon

BY BLAKE HELD, AIA

**It is about this** time of year that CRAN typically holds its symposium for all to gather, learn, tour, and exchange ideas in a compelling city. For the second year in a row and for obvious reasons, we will not be holding an in-person event. Rest assured, however, that we are hard at work planning our 2022 symposium in Chicago for Sept. 8th through the 11th. We hope to see you there!

To tide you over until then, we are continuing our 2021 series of virtual sessions. Centered on the theme of “The Iconic House,” this series delves into what it means for a house to be truly “iconic.” Several live presentations have already occurred but remain available to view on demand. Future sessions will also be made available live online or on demand later.

In the spring, Stuart Cohen, FAIA, launched the series by explaining that iconic houses are embodiments of architectural principles to be explored—not simply copied. Three architectural firms then presented their own work, along

with inspiring precedents that informed their designs. Those firms—Rehkamp Larson Architects; T.W. Ryan Architecture; and Moor, Baker & Associates, P.A.—presented a variety of projects from across the country. The session was exceptionally educational eye candy.

In “Lessons Learned on Detailing for Durability,” another in the series, historic preservation expert Matthew Bronski, of Simon Gumpert & Heger, examined the challenges and rewards of detailing to bolster the physical and visual integrity of iconic structures from the past.

“The Iconic Room in Contemporary Design” looked to architectural interiors to find iconic precedents. Here, Ankie Barnes, FAIA, of BarnesVanze Architects; Celeste Robbins, AIA, Robbins Architecture; and Dell Mitchell, AIA, Dell Mitchell Architects, revealed the power of referencing iconic sources in one’s interior work, whether traditional or contemporary.

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Carol M. Highsmith, LC-DIG-highsm-04847



Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House was the topic of September’s “Iconic House” presentation by Ashley Robbins Wilson, AIA, the Graham Gund Architect at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Iconic House series is available on demand at [aia.org](http://aia.org).

In September, CRAN focused on The Farnsworth House, Mies van der Rohe's uniquely iconic structure. Presenters explored in depth the personalities involved in its creation, as well as the design, history, and struggle to preserve the house.

October's session, "The Iconic House in Contemporary Design II," picked up on the central theme and introduced three more influential practicing firms and their work: Historical Concepts Architecture & Planning; Joeb Moore & Partners; and Ike Kligerman Barkley.

At publication, each of these events has already occurred, but each remains available to view online through the AIAU.

On Dec. 15 at 1 p.m. ET, our final session for the year is a collaboration with the Housing and Community Development Knowledge Community of AIA. Titled "Working Across Housing Typologies," this session looks at the common challenges faced by architects across building types—from




Historical Concepts' Jim Strickland spoke on iconic houses in October.

single-family residences for a private client to multifamily projects for a developer. Increasingly, architects are striving to create a variety of housing opportunities—including multifamily, workforce development, and missing-middle residential—to complement their portfolios of affordable and market-rate housing. This session will suggest strategies for tackling the breadth of housing needs.

Finally, CRAN offers two additional free educational sessions. The first, recorded in August and still available online, focuses on

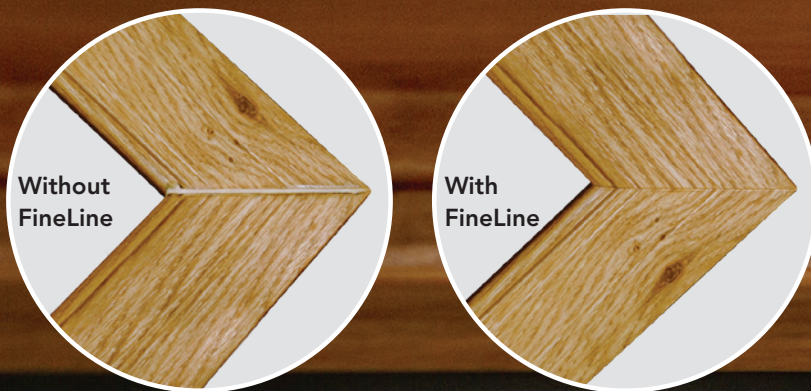
Insulating Concrete Forms; and the second, coming Nov. 17 at 1 p.m. ET, focuses on innovations in glass—from providing greater bird safety to photovoltaic uses. Our own Kevin Harris, of AGS Stainless, will demonstrate the use of glass in railing systems.

To register or view the most up-to-date schedule of sessions, visit the 2021 AIAU CRAN Course Calendar at [aia.org](http://aia.org).

We look forward to seeing you in Chicago in 2022! 

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# Making Moves

THINKMAKEBUILD  
EASTON, MARYLAND



Darren Kornas

When he launched ThinkMakeBuild in Washington, D.C., in 2010, Darren Kornas made two decisions that now seem prescient. One was that architects, rather than home-

owners, were the clients to chase—a smart, long-range move in a high-wealth region that was on the cusp of a building boom. The second was to use technology to decentralize operations, which allowed them eventually to follow business opportunities far from their base. Indeed, in the last decade the company has expanded from D.C. and Easton, Maryland, to Richmond, Virginia, Atlanta, and Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Eerily resonant, this nimble approach has resulted in minimal disruptions during a prolonged pandemic whose end is still uncertain.

ThinkMakeBuild was born in the bleak period following the 2008 housing crash. Darren had been working for a developer of single-family homes and townhouses when work dried up almost overnight. Living in D.C.'s Capitol Hill neighborhood without a job, no one hiring, and a first child on the way, he jumped at some stray requests from homeowners looking for remodels. "I formed an LLC, got licensed, and called the company Capital Carpentry," Darren says. "It was me and two carpenters with tool bags on, cranking out a couple of remodels without the intention of starting a business."

Darren's is a classic story of following the threads, perhaps blindly at first.



Photos: Brycen Fischer Photography

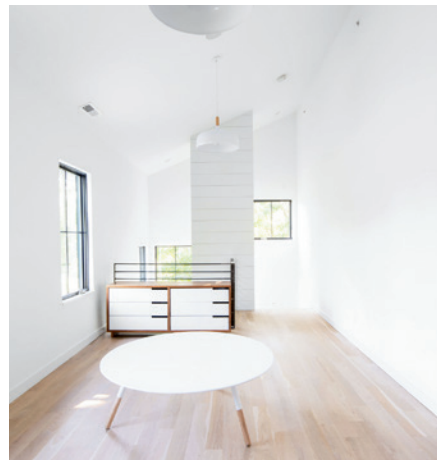


*This page:* Across a creek from historic Annapolis, the Spa Creek House by GriD architects makes the most of its narrow, deep, waterfront lot. A tandem garage preserves green space at the front, and a façade of steel and wood demarks public and private spaces.

Until several years after college, he had never considered making a living in construction. Graduating with a political science degree, he looked at law school but soon realized it wasn't his passion. During those angsty years he fell back on what he knew, and that was building. His father was in commercial

construction, and Darren's teenage summers had been spent on jobsites outside Philadelphia, in his home state of New Jersey. Buying time to figure out his future, at age 23 he took a superintendent position at Toll Brothers. "Working for a production company like that teaches you how to manage the

Photos: Studio HDP



*This page:* Designed by Thomson & Cooke Architects for Darren and his wife, this house in Easton, Maryland, evokes area farmhouses but with a modern twist.

construction process as efficiently as possible and overcome obstacles when things go awry,” he says. “It didn’t teach me how to build the highest level of detail, but I learned to manage schedules, budgets, and the client-facing part of the industry.”

A desire for more hands-on experience led to his next job as lead carpenter and project manager for the fledging design/build firm Commonwealth Home Design in Vienna, Virginia. “It was a nice experience because design/build firms are uber client-facing,” he says. “They had a nice system down for managing client communications and expectations. I

got into building science, and I loved the hands-on aspect and got to hone the craft in the way I thought things should be built.” Next came the stint with the development company and, a few years in, the housing collapse.

### Plugged In

By the time he formed the LLC in 2008, Darren knew he wanted to do high-caliber work with architects, but it wasn’t until late 2010, when he landed his first big-budget project, in D.C.’s Dupont Circle neighborhood, that he decided to make a serious go of it. “I needed to stop acting like a carpenter and start acting like a business owner,” he says.

“We needed to rebrand—we were no longer two carpenters building a deck.” Working with a local branding firm, Design Army, Darren defined his company’s identity, goals, and target audience. “We made the solid decision that we would go after architecturally significant projects driven by architects, interior designers, and landscape architects who appreciate a high level of quality, customer service, and design,” he says. “We won’t do a project where there’s not an architect involved from start to finish.”

It was the Design Army consultants who suggested the name ThinkMake Construction, but Darren liked Think-

MakeBuild—a preference validated in focus groups. “People tell me that make and build are the same thing, but you want to make relationships, drawings, preparations, and then build and execute the final portion,” he says.

Launching at the height of the recession spurred his decision to embrace technology. He couldn’t afford to turn projects away, even if they were spread apart geographically. “We realized technology was our friend: How could we manage the information without having to spend five hours a day driving to jobsites?” he says. “Everything was converted to electronic format so everyone in the company can access everything they need from a phone or laptop—there are no binders.”

A few years later, Darren and his wife moved to Easton, Maryland, and he opened an Eastern Shore branch. The computerized systems he had in place simplified the move and have evolved with the use of Procore for project management and job financials, and Smartsheet for scheduling. Also in the

toolbox is the Concur app that tracks expenses on employee credit cards and imports them to the accounting software. Every project is equipped with a MacBook and Zoom. “As long as we have a superintendent on site, we can put on a project anywhere,” he says. “Our superintendents are spread out all over. An hour and a half drive is the limit for what most are willing to put up with.”

While it’s common today for builders in major markets to use sophisticated software, during the startup it helped him stand apart from competitors. It still does in many mid-sized cities, including Richmond, just two hours away. One of his project managers was already coming from there, which led Darren to scout local work. ThinkMakeBuild’s first Richmond project, a single-family home, was completed earlier this year, another is in design, and a half-dozen more are in the pipeline. In the case of the Steamboat Springs office, a top-notch employee wanted to return to Colorado and offered to launch a satellite there.

And operations are just ramping up in Atlanta, the latest branch location.

“Some superintendents are kind of adventuresome,” Darren says. “When we were asked to look at a community in Sun Valley, Idaho, we asked one of our employees if he wanted to go for eight months during ski season, and he said sure. If there is enough market share in that area, we’d look for a new hire to staff the projects.”

Darren oversees 30 employees ranging from carpenters to superintendents, project managers, a business development and estimating manager, a production manager, and an office man-



*This page:* Thomson & Cooke also spearheaded this ThinkMakeBuild remodel of a Chevy Chase, D.C., house. The Classic Stucco Residence received all new millwork, lighting, and wide plank flooring.



Photos: Studio HDP



Photos: Studio HDP



This house in St. Michaels, Maryland, designed by Robert M. Gurney, FAIA, is built on the elevated foundation of a failed 1980s Dutch Colonial inside a waterfront buffer no longer zoned for new houses.

ager, all of whom have worked remotely since Day One. A CFO consultant handles company financials. “Employees appreciate that kind of freedom,” Darren says. “We don’t micromanage their time sheet. There’s no hard and fast expectation of working from 7:00 to 3:00, as long as clients and architects are happy, work is getting done when it’s supposed to, and the jobs are making money.”

While 75 percent of their work is remodels, new homes account for

50 percent of revenues because the budgets are bigger—to date as high as \$11 million. “We still do projects down to \$200,000 as long as the client has an eye toward high design, quality, and customer service,” Darren says. “Some firms turn their nose up at projects that small, but I think clients that are willing to spend substantial money on a tiny project will eventually spend even more on a larger project.”

### Means and Methods

The steady progression of high-end work has honed the company’s building techniques and problem-solving abilities. One recently completed project included an indoor volleyball court, which raised questions of how to scale the room and prepare the court surfaces. “Half the battle of being able to pull off [something new] successfully is knowing where to go to find the information and not being afraid to seek out people who know more than you do,” Darren says. “We pulled in a sports company that does commercial flooring for school gyms and a lighting designer who does sports arenas to make sure we’re putting in the proper lighting.”

In another project, AutoHaus [RD Volume 5, 2019] in D.C., the architect’s design called for a wall of glass between the garage and the living space behind it. “The entire glass façade had to be fire rated, and with modern houses you are leaning on a lot of commercial means and methods,” Darren says. “We found a commercial glazier and worked with them on how to implement it so the architect could work on drawings.”

Darren is quick to attribute the company’s successes to his employees. In hiring, he looks for people who fit into the company culture. “We can teach best practices for materials we like to use and how things are assembled, but we can’t teach people how to have a sense of urgency or be empathetic and a good listener.” Instilling a welcoming, non-adversarial work environment eliminates the microaggressions that tempt some superintendents. “No topic is taboo in terms of [the homeowner] wanting to change things or take something out that’s been installed,” Darren says. “Our staff has learned to stop asking whether they should change something a client has asked for; they know what



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the answer will be. Yes, it's a pain, but they're paying us to do it, and our job is to make that stuff happen at the end of the day. It's important that everyone's tugging on the same rope."

Almost from the beginning, Darren has worked with a business consultant, who recently started a recruiting arm. In a tight labor market, it takes longer to hire the right people, but they are out there, he says. In addition to talent procurement, he reviews estimates and does high-level marketing, identifying the architects he wants to work with.

Darren likes bringing projects to architects, and one challenge for this youngish company is how to get more repeat clients. "We have tons of repeat architect clients, but we'd like to figure



Photo: Anson Olson

The company's Richmond office built the Byrd Park Residence by ARCHITECTUREFIRM. The neo-Mediterranean moderates the budget with EIFS stucco and synthetic slate roofing.

out how to get more repeat homeowner clients," Darren says. "The builders we compete against have been in business longer and have a bigger client base. We just had our first repeat client who is renovating a house in Florida. As the company ages and owners

move from one house to the next, we'll start to see repeat clients." He adds, "One of the best gifts is bringing in a job that the architect doesn't have to sell. When a homeowner does contact us directly, seldom do they have the budget to afford an architecturally significant home."

That reality prompted a soon-to-launch design/build arm in the metro D.C. and Eastern Shore markets called Shelter. "Two architects told me that they turn away clients all the time who want a design/build model." These folks usually aren't hiring an architecture firm, he says, but as the appeal grows for a distinctive modern aesthetic, people are increasingly appreciative of good design. Shelter has taken on a part-time architect and is gearing up for the more meeting-intensive approach that will inevitably be required.

Another diversification strategy is the maintenance and concierge services ThinkMakeBuild offers to past clients on the Eastern Shore, where many have second homes. It launched in 2019 and is expanding to D.C. Eleven years in, these are logical next steps for a company on the move. "We're at a happy place in terms of staff; we have some of the best people the company has ever worked with," Darren says. "My goal is to realize more opportunities so they can be successful and grow."—Cheryl Weber





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# New Heights

WESLEY HEIGHTS RESIDENCE  
WASHINGTON, D.C.  
RICHARD WILLIAMS ARCHITECTS

Washington, D.C., has no shortage of distinguished older houses in lovely, leafy neighborhoods close to downtown. Most are worth saving, as they're generally well designed and solidly built, with high-quality materials that possess their own embedded value. None, however, is without flaws and quirky irregularities. And when their owners are also distinguished, with active professional, social, and cultural lives, the agenda for renovating these older houses can grow even more complex. Such was the case with the Wesley Heights Residence.

Architect Richard Williams, FAIA, had been ameliorating this 1880s house for nearly two decades when his clients finally decided they needed to unleash the big remodel. No more patching and tweaking, they determined; it was



time to really sort out the floor plan for maximum utility and delight, and to address some ongoing structural problems, as well.

They wanted the house to facilitate large-scale entertaining and robust careers conducted largely from home. They also had an impressive collection of art and antiques they wanted to showcase. As a result, nearly every part of the house—inside and out—was rethought and redone, but with a keen eye to preserving the character and

charm of the original building.

“We pushed doing the house as a very serious extension of what my wife, Kim, who’s an architectural historian, calls a transitional Colonial Revival. The house had great bones and very tall ceilings,” says Richard. “The carriage house in the rear is even older. The property had some real history to it—it had some Victorian and Queen Anne influences—but had been badly colonized and then kind of Homewooded. That’s when we first found it in the aughts.”



Top: The new conservatory addition connects almost on grade with outdoor entertaining spaces. Above: The enlarged living room links to the entry hall and formal dining room (painted in rich jewel-tone hues), facilitating the flow for large parties.

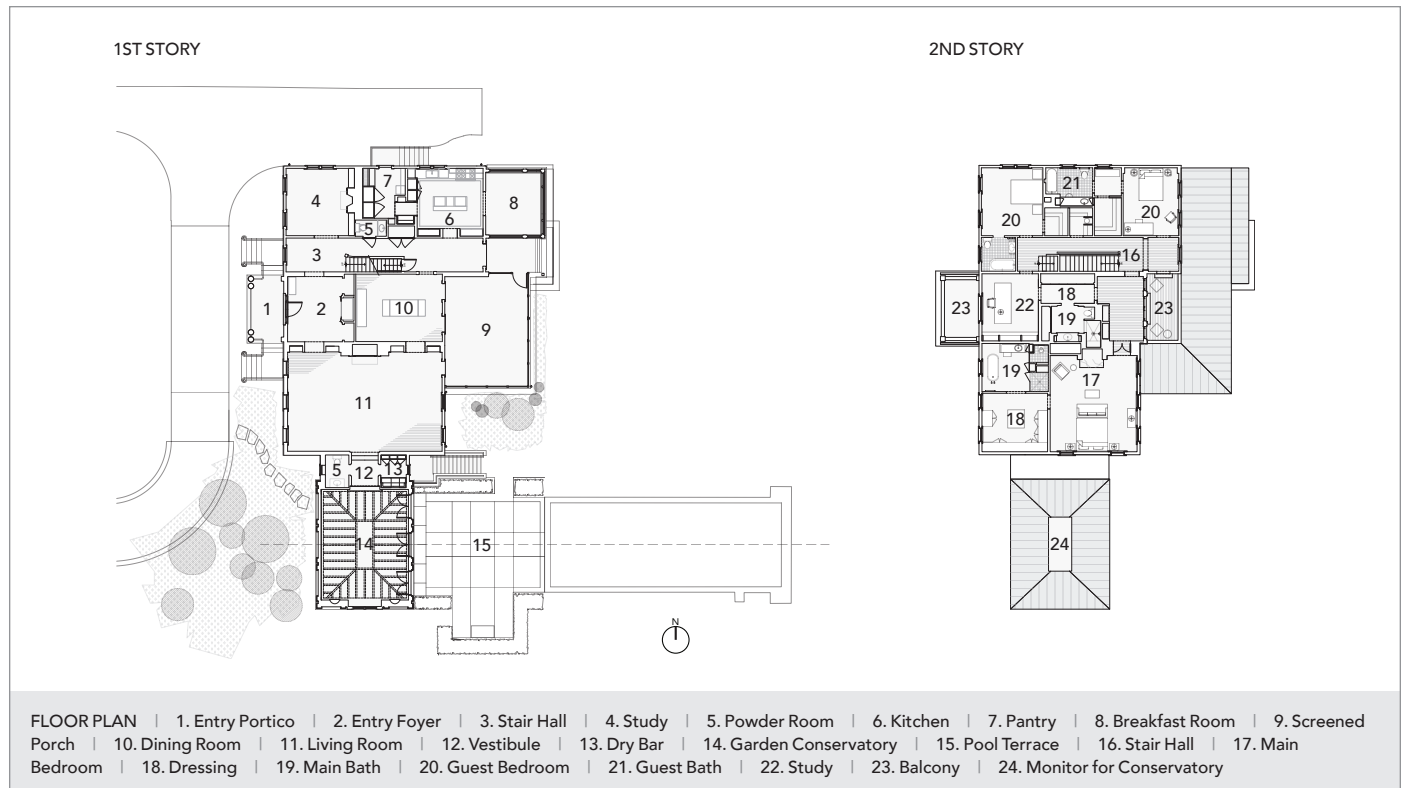
As with many houses of that era, there were foundation and water infiltration problems to solve as well. Those were the low points. But its situation on a high point in the city offers catwalk views of the skyline (including the Washington National Cathedral and Washington Monument). Meanwhile, the ground level is a private oasis and escape from the hustle and bustle. The property held the best of both worlds.

### Noteworthy Addition

The architects accomplished most of the key changes the clients desired by lengthening the existing house. The important exception to that strategy is a significant new addition—a new conservatory joined to the living room of the main house with a hyphen. From the front elevation, the new building defers to the original with lowered height, pared down detailing, and the connecting hyphen. Those choices allow visitors to take in the



The firm took on the kitchen during a previous remodel. It incorporates two Viennese globe lights over the island. The adjacent breakfast room accommodates flanking Viennese vitrines.





The house is notable for its period millwork, enhanced with fresh wallpaper and dark-stained flooring.

older building in its full, individual glory. They also, modestly, permit the new building its own distinct identity.

The conservatory's front façade creates the suggestion of windows with ironwork that mimics mullioned units, but the wall is paneled against the busy street. (Eventually, vines will espalier up the framework.)

The rear elevation, however, opens wide to the private backyard pool and gardens. Those steps down from the hyphen enable the conservatory to connect almost on grade with the outdoor entertaining spaces. A trio of French doors leads to a patio that segues in perfect alignment to the existing pool.

"We couldn't help but be influenced by the orangery at Dumbarton Oaks," says Richard. "We wanted it to be more

of a garden folly, but with real honesty of structure. It's a little rustic and a little raw, with the exposed tension members. And the roof monitor gives it a little bit of stature to hold its own against the original house."

Although dubbed the conservatory, the room is intentionally undefined. It's part loggia, part music room, part art gallery—in other words, it's fully open to reinvention on the fly. "It's largely unfurnished, but often set up with round caterers' tables for parties," Richard explains. "It's not just another place for a couch." The art niches, however, were specifically designed for several stellar pieces the clients wished to display. "They fit like a glove, but they certainly caused some sleepless nights," he says.

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## Renewed Glory

Unless you had seen the original house, you might underestimate how much improved it now is. “It was really a gut remodel,” says the architect. Foundation and moisture problems were solved with a new basement that comprises a gym, sauna, steam shower, and new staircase up to the pool. The foundation wall was redone and extended with grapevine joints to accommodate an expanded and reoriented entry foyer with a new fireplace, a larger living room, a tweaked dining room with improved circulation, and an enlarged screened porch off the breakfast room.

Upstairs are all new bedrooms, a study for the husband, and a new bathroom and dressing room for the wife that incorporates her collection of Art Deco furniture. A new small deck off the primary bedroom is a heat sink for the shoulder seasons, giving the couple a private perch overlooking the pool and

gardens. A renovated attic holds several guest rooms.

“We added at least another third to the house. We put in a new curb cut and crescent entry drive. And we used the basic rhythm of the fenestration, cladding, and stone foundation to extend the building,” Richard recalls. “We untied a lot of knots and solved a lot of problems.”

All new cladding, roofing, windows, and gutters refresh the home’s faded glory. New bold paint colors enliven the foyer and dining room. And reconceived circulation paths and plantings uplift the gardens.

“Renewing these houses is just as interesting to us as building something modern and new,” says Richard. “They have so many historic materials and embedded energy, and they’re amazingly designed and built. We need to respect them, and honor the city by caring for them.”—*S. Claire Conroy*



Richard designed the wife’s Deco-inspired vanity and the floral wallpaper. Her dressing room with custom built-ins is reflected in the mirror.

## Wesley Heights Residence

Washington, D.C.

**ARCHITECT:** Richard Williams, FAIA, principal in charge; Timothy Abrams, AIA, project architect; Kerry Garikes and Justin Donovan, AIA, Richard Williams Architects, Washington, D.C.

**BUILDER:** Mickey Mauck, project manager, Mauck-Zantinger, Washington

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:** Julie La Traverse Design, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

**LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** Katia Goffin, Goffin Gardens, McLean, Virginia

**SPECIALTY FINISHES:** Lenore Winters, Bethesda, Maryland

**PROJECT SIZE:** 5,700 square feet (main levels); 2,900 square feet (basement)

**SITE SIZE:** .43 acre

**CONSTRUCTION COST:** Withheld

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Tom Arban Photography

### KEY PRODUCTS

**BATHROOM VENTILATION:** Panasonic

**CLADDING:** Western Red Cedar, Robinson Thin Brick at chimneys

**COLUMNS:** Chadsworth PolyStone (entry portico)

**COOKTOP:** DCS

**COOKING VENTILATION:** Broan with custom insert

**DISHWASHER:** Miele

**DOOR HARDWARE:** Frank Allart & Co.; Von Morris, Emtek, Colonial Bronze

**DRYWALL:** USG

**FASTENERS:** Simpson Strong-Tie

**FAUCETS:** Rohl (kitchen); Grohe and Newport Brass (secondary)

**FIREPLACES:** Heatilator wood burning; Monesson Hearth direct vent gas (primary bedroom)

**HOUSEWRAP:** Tyvek

**HUMIDITY CONTROL:** Aprilaire

**HVAC:** Bryant

**LIGHTING:** Lightolier, Bruck, and Lithonia (interior); Hunza and Lithonia (exterior)

**LIGHTING CONTROL:** Lutron

**PAINT:** Benjamin Moore (interior); Farrow & Ball (interior and exterior)

**PASSAGE DOORS:** TruStile

**PEDESTAL LAVS:** Kohler, Duravit

**REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER:** Sub-Zero

**ROOFING:** Cedar shingles with Benjamin Obdyke Cedar Breather underlayment

**ROOF WINDOWS:** VELUX

**SINKS:** Kohler

**THERMAL/MOISTURE BARRIERS:** Tyvek; Tremco

**THERMOSTAT CONTROL:** Honeywell

**TOILETS:** TOTO

**TUBS:** Victoria & Albert (primary bathroom)

**WASHER/DRYER:** LG

**WINDOWS:** Marvin; LePage Millwork

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# Concrete Improvement

Renewed from the inside out, a vintage Joseph Esherick house lives better than ever.

BY CHERYL WEBER

McINTYRE HOUSE  
HILLSBOROUGH, CALIFORNIA  
RICHARD BEARD ARCHITECTS





**All these years later**, Joseph Esherick's 1961 McIntyre house is still "in touch with nature's moods, from rain and clouds to stars and moonlight," as *House & Garden* proclaimed shortly after it was built. Designed by an architect known for straddling the line between fine art and understatement, this house is unusual both in its scale and use of cast concrete. Just over 9,000 square feet, the muscular, landmarked building has the added distinction of an elaborate garden designed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, who, like Esherick, was near the peak of his career when Henry and Winifred McIntyre commissioned it.

The couple were Chicago transplants who hadn't quite warmed to the balmy California climate or, indeed, the idea

of modern, open-plan living that was beginning to take hold. They requested a private, compartmentalized floor plan with bedrooms and living spaces organized around a show-stopping atrium that faced the pool garden on the south. Two steps down from the living room, the atrium was used as a garden room and contained several fully grown trees. "In an article published after the house was built, Mrs. McIntyre was quoted as saying that the climate is not at all what people think it is, that it's not comfortable to be outside, which I thought was strange for someone coming from Chicago," says Richard Beard, FAIA, who oversaw the renovation. "That led to Esherick's design of this atrium space, a controlled environment, warm and cozy."



*This page and opposite: The skylight's original concrete framing and water channels evoke Japanese detailing. New slotted windows open sight lines between the atrium and the bedroom wing, and between a sitting nook and the Lawrence Halprin-designed pool terrace, now partly restored.*



Overlooking the Burlingame Country Club, the north side of the house contains the bedroom wing, where a stretch of metal balconies rest on concrete buttresses. As appealing as it is architecturally, this section was disconnected internally from the common areas, and the kitchen was cut off from the living and dining rooms. No doubt that's why the property languished on the market before the current owners purchased it. "It didn't really live like most people are used to living now, so it challenged most people; they didn't know

what to do with it," Richard says.

For the new family of five, his firm brought it into the 21st century by opening up the anachronistic plan without changing the footprint, in the process highlighting the best elements of Esherick's design. As a fan of his work, Richard was the ideal architect for the job. He knew this house and has worked in Japan, where he became familiar with Japanese Metabolist architecture. This postwar movement explored the idea of organic cells emanating out from an open space and debuted around the time the house was built. "There's a generally Japanese feel to the house in its private courtyard orientations and detailing," Richard says. "It has a pavilion-like arrangement of spaces, and the exterior forms represent the interior spaces accurately and intriguingly. The office, atrium, kitchen, and main bedroom all have expressed [hip] roofs that are linked together." Interior designer Paul Wiseman, too, had worked with Esherick on his final house, and selected furnishings that reference the midcentury vibe but refresh it with larger-scale pieces and citron accents that echo the colors of the garden.







*This page:* Room locations were preserved, but taking down several walls opened up the new kitchen to the dining room and family room, which flows out to the pool terrace. White oak cabinetry and a shimmering tile backsplash update and brighten the space.

### Clean Sweep

In what was essentially a gut renovation to update all the wiring, plumbing, HVAC systems, and finishes, the design team swept out several walls to create axial views through the house. Without changing many room locations, the new configuration opens the kitchen to the family room (formerly a dining room) and the south terrace. Visitors enter a generous foyer on the west side, at the heart of the house. In front of them is the pièce de résistance—the sunken atrium in its 20-foot-tall glory, and a new view straight through to the east side of the house.

“There’s a generally Japanese feel to the house. It has a pavilion-like arrangement of spaces, and the exterior forms represent the interior spaces accurately and intriguingly.”

—Richard Beard, FAIA

The atrium roof’s exposed concrete roof beams incorporate a sculptural drainage system around the 24-by-32-foot skylight opening. Its detailing recalls some of Louis Kahn’s work, and Richard has a theory that connects the dots. “Esherick was from Philly, and Kahn, who worked

so much with concrete, was designing a house in Philadelphia for Esherick’s sister around this time.” Richard says. “I have to think there was a lot of professional exchange of ideas.”

Throughout, windows and doors were replaced with energy-efficient models, and the new atrium skylight was



*This page:* The family room's flexible furnishings reflect the colors of the garden. Cushions nested under the coffee table expand seating capacity when the owners host fundraising events.





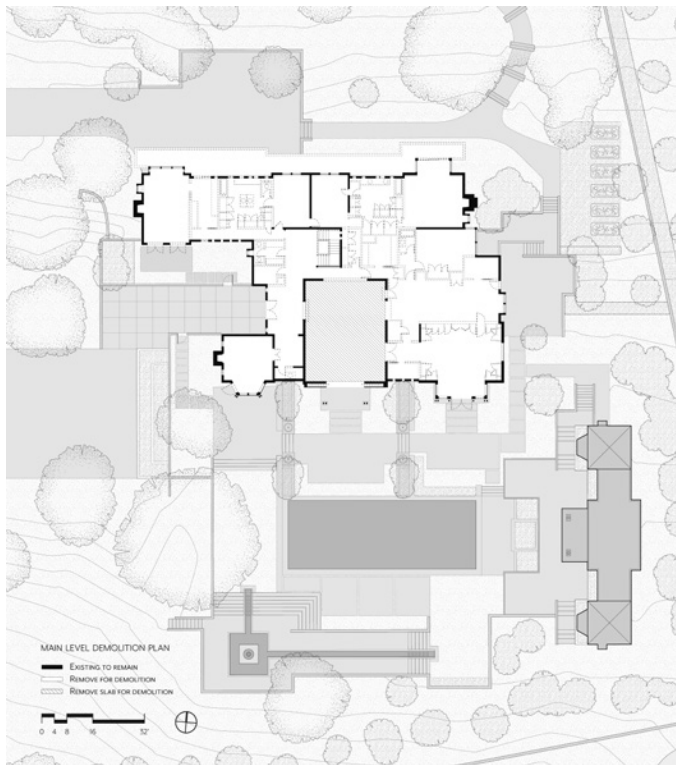
*This page:* Modern finishes and furnishings raise the level of comfort and polish while acknowledging the house’s midcentury roots. Outside the cocoon-like main bedroom suite, a walled garden offers a quiet place for moon-gazing or morning coffee.



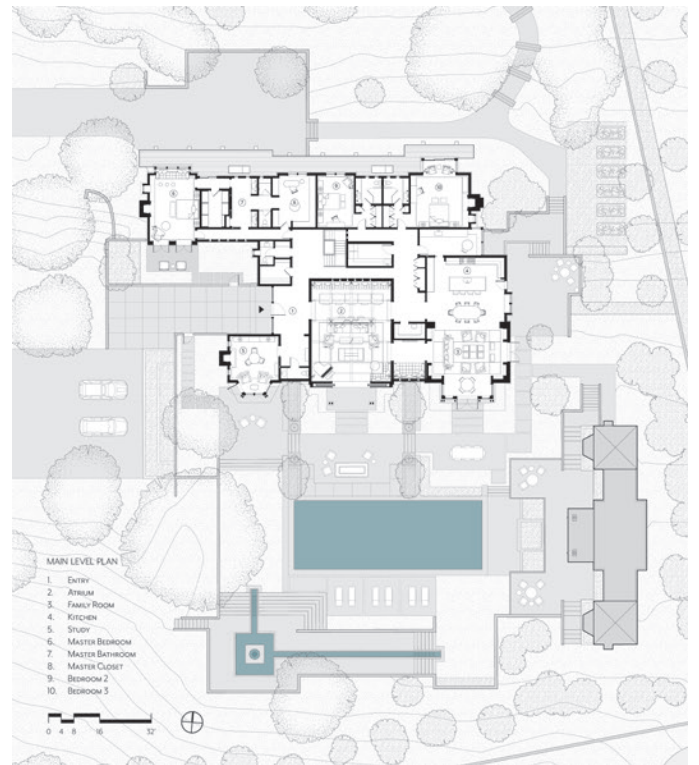
fitted with LEDs. To open subtle sight lines, the design team inserted tall, slotted windows on select interior and exterior walls. On the atrium’s north wall, for example, they provide a visual connection to the stair hall and bedroom wing behind it. The bedrooms breathe more deeply, too. Previously, “each bedroom had its own sitting area but there were communal bathrooms; it was a very odd plan,” Richard says. The three bedrooms were given en-suite baths, and a large dressing area was added to the main bedroom. This suite opens to northern views and a private walled garden on the south, which has a circuitous outdoor connection to the pool terrace. Outside the bedrooms, the concrete balconies were cleaned and patched, and the metal railings replaced with low-profile, code-compliant railings and planters that provide greenery.

In the partial walkout level under the bedrooms, the architects exposed the concrete framing to gain ceiling height, developing the space as a game room and additional bedroom. They also cleaned up the open concrete stair and stairwell, which conveys light down from the hallway, and preserved the handrail.

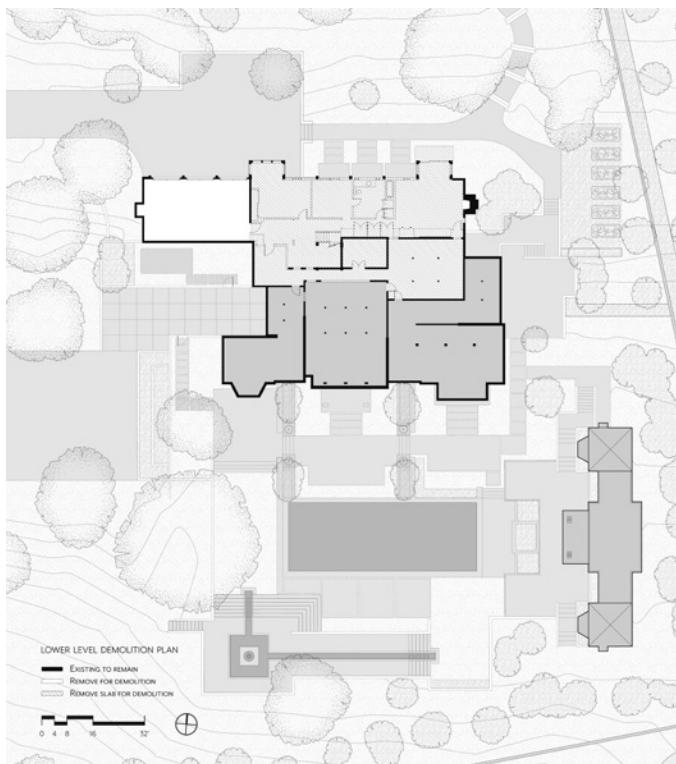
Main Level Demolition Plan



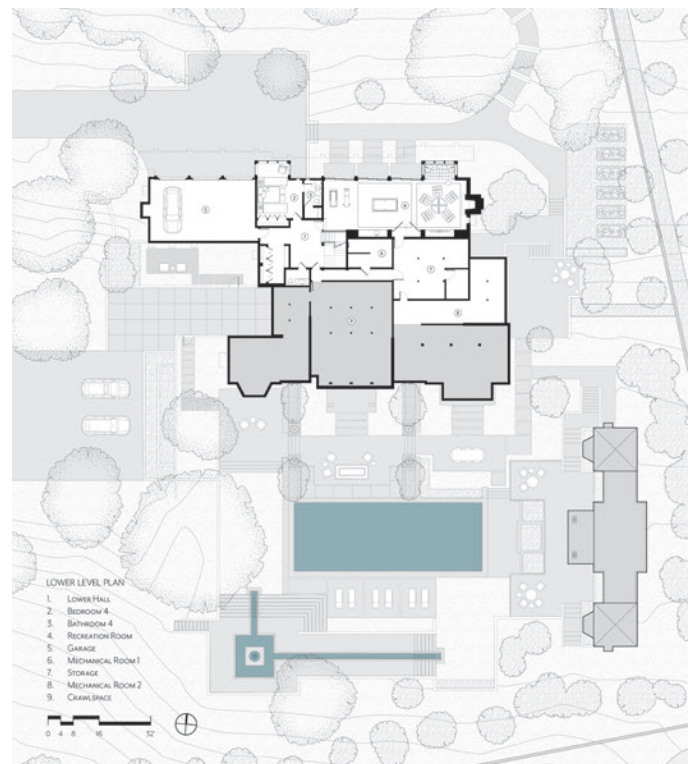
Main Level Plan



Lower Level Demolition Plan



Lower Level Plan





This page and opposite: Exposing the concrete lower-level framing added height to the new lounge and game room. Esherick’s sculptural buttresses support new railings and leafy vines outside the bedrooms. The study, atrium, and family room face the pool.



### As You Were

It’s not only the new light and views that make the home sparkle. The finishes—meticulously refurbished or replaced—reflect the original limited palette: stucco on the outside, wood, concrete, and drywall inside. “We had to match a lot of the resawn Douglas fir that was kept in place,” says builder Louis Ptak, who is also a student of Esherick. “That style of milling has changed in the last 60 years, but you can’t tell what we patched in.” The kitchen received new oak cabinetry, and the flooring is wide-plank American oak.

Although the house hadn’t been touched since its completion, Halprin’s multilevel landscape was substantially altered. Working with landscape architect Todd Cole, Louis executed a “hybrid restoration” of the original design. A reflecting pool had been modified as a swimming pool, which was allowed to stay. “The landscaping was a little more complicated because Halprin’s design had been covered with many layers of redesign in diminishing quality,” Louis says. “We kept peeling back the layers in collaboration with Todd Cole. We uncovered and refreshed a lot of the old site walls.”

Freed from its faded surfaces and constricting floor plan, the renovation presents a more comfortable yet refined version of Esherick’s commission. And while it might not have been Mrs. McIntyre’s cup of tea, the update makes it relevant for a new family in a very different time. “It’s a clear nod to the 21st century, but much as it originally was,” Richard says. RD





## McIntyre House

Hillsborough, California

**ARCHITECT:** Richard Beard, FAIA, principal in charge; Adam King, senior project manager, Richard Beard Architects, San Francisco

**BUILDER:** Louis Ptak Construction, Pacific Grove, California

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:** Wiseman Group, San Francisco

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Strata Landscape Architecture, San Francisco

**LIGHTING DESIGNER:** Hiram Banks Lighting Design, San Francisco

**PROJECT SIZE:** 9,165 square feet

**SITE SIZE:** 2.2 acres

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** José Manuel Alorda

### KEY PRODUCTS

**COOKTOP:** Wolf

**COUNTERTOPS:** Neolith, Oro, statuary marble

**DISHWASHER:** Miele

**ENTRY DOORS AND HARDWARE:** Torrance, Collier's International, Liberty Valley

**FAUCETS:** Dornbracht, Kohler, Pfister

**KITCHEN BACKSPLASH:** Heath Ceramics

**LIGHTING:** Lucifer

**LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS:** Lutron

**OVEN:** Wolf

**REFRIGERATOR:** Sub-Zero

**ROOF WINDOWS:** Collier's International

**ROOFING:** Johns Manville

**SINKS:** Julien, Kohler

**TOILETS:** TOTO

**WARMING DRAWER:** Wolf

**WASHER/DRYER:** Whirlpool

**WINDOWS:** Torrance Steel Windows

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# Existing Conditions

Architects don't always get to choose what came before them, but they do get to decide how to make it better. Three remarkable problem-solving projects point the way.

BY S. CLAIRE CONROY AND CHERYL WEBER

# Lakeview Penthouse

CHICAGO  
WHEELER KEARNS ARCHITECTS

**When life throws you** curves, sometimes the best choice is to respond in kind. When Wheeler Kearns' clients approached the firm with this duplex penthouse apartment, they yearned for the expected benefits of a lofty perch. Instead, the partially framed space was disappointing—denser and darker than it should be, given its position 40 stories above Chicago.

Occupying the top two floors of a building designed by Lucien Lagrange, the 8,000-square-foot apartment was saddled with the internal compromises of the exterior's mansard roof. Although the developer had attempted to mitigate the sloping walls and canted, round-top windows, the result lacked precision and refinement.

"It was a very challenging space," recalls Jon Heinert, AIA, of Wheeler Kearns. "The developer had struggled to sell it, and it sat empty for many years. It had a traditional form of mansard construction, but it was not constructed traditionally at all. It wasn't just the sloping walls—the way they were dormered out required a lot of bracing. There were kickers and metal studs protruding into the space, and each window has its own unique geometry."

To resolve the awkward proportions, the firm's first response was to frame the raw space into a uniform, orthogonal perimeter. "It was ours and our clients' impression that suppressing the sloping of the walls was the goal," says Jon. "The walls made the space seem very



*Opposite and this page:* Wheeler Kearns' clients bought the unit as partially framed raw space, and then asked the firm to solve the crippling impact of the building's mansard roof. The firm ripped out the developer's framing and tailored a new bespoke shell that maximizes space and views.



*This page:* A palette of Venetian plasterwork, gray lacquer, walnut paneling, and blackened steel unifies the sprawling duplex, allowing the views to take center stage. The deep dormers are painted gray, so the eye continues through the glazing without pause.

cavernous and heavy and were at odds with being so high up and overlooking the whole city.”

The architects had the apartment 3D scanned to create digital point clouds, building a kind of forensic floor plan to guide the design. “The measurements are precise within an eighth inch of tolerance. We could see the variations within each window—and how imprecisely they had been installed,” he continues. “It really helped us understand what we were dealing with.”

The scans import into REVIT, where they form the basis of design solutions. Once the process was completed, the firm moved space to square everything up. “We got pretty far along with the inner stud walls, when the clients walked through and saw how much interior space they were losing in making the walls vertical,” says Jon. “They asked us to revisit it and see if we could come up with a better solution.”

And they did. In their second take, they decided to reveal instead of conceal. They reframed the walls to allow





the slope but did so in a precisely fitted, 3-inch-thick Venetian plaster “shell.” The plasterwork gives the walls a subtle, lively sheen that changes throughout the day. Window dormers were then reframed to accentuate their height and depth and to control their intake of natural light. The effect is soaring, dramatic, and even a little enigmatic—like a de Chirico painting, infused with mysterious sources of light and shadow and surprising geometries.

Celebrating the angles instead of suppressing them was the new path forward for the four-bedroom apartment and it guided every subsequent decision. “Overall, it creates something unique that we would not normally have gravitated to. We are more orthogonal, and this was all curvilinear geometry,” Jon says. “There are concrete columns between the window bays, and we initially tried to hide them, too, with furring. But then we realized that because of the geometry, we had to reveal them.”



*This page:* The family sitting area occupies a corner adjacent to the kitchen and loggia. Formerly interior space, the loggia was created by removing a dormer window and elevating the floor. Precisely fitted glazing along the shell wall permits a protected view out to the space.



*This page:* Both the walnut-lined office on the main level and the top-floor studio share the lake view to the east. A dramatic staircase also showcases the vista, appearing to float from rods suspended from the ceiling. Steel stringers joining the wall side help support the weight and stabilize the structure.



Inset in the white plaster walls, the gray columns echo the gray lacquer walls of the service core—the kitchen, bathrooms, and utility areas. The window dormers are also detailed in gray to reduce incoming glare and facilitate the 270-degree views. “Had that white

Celebrating the angles instead of suppressing them created “something unique that we would not normally have gravitated to.”

—Jon Heinert, AIA

surface of the walls continued to the windows, it would have affected the eye and how it takes in light.”

The layering of wall and ceiling planes hides a number of architectural tricks. HVAC slot diffusers tuck into the recessed areas, as does linear cove lighting. “The cove lights are tunable





LED fixtures, and they're installed in a way that allowed us to get a hairline precision to the angle," says Jon. "That gives us a uniform grazing of light on the perimeter." Lighting control set on a timer automatically changes the color temperature of the LEDs based on the time of day. "Following a circadian rhythm, they start low in bright white, and later in the evening the level comes up and becomes warm white.

"The lighting highlights coves and reveals, which helps pull apart the project materially," he continues. "The apartment is very much like an onion—a series of material layers in plaster, gray lacquer, walnut, and black metal. And because of the gray service core, you always have a sense of where you are on both floors."



*This page:* The main bedroom suite captures city skyline views to the south. Walnut built-ins here and in the loft office unify the design across all levels of the apartment. A custom wall design enlivens a long corridor containing a private elevator.



*This page:* Where they could, the architects fitted utility and delight into the dormer cavities, freeing orthogonal areas to stretch and soar. The main bathroom mixes walnut cabinetry and paneling with veined marble elements. Flooring in oak and tile underscores the theme.

LEVEL 38



LEVEL 39



FLOOR PLAN | 1. Foyer | 2. Living Room | 3. Dining Room | 4. Kitchen | 5. Family Room | 6. Loggia | 7. Office | 8. Media Room | 9. Bedroom | 10. Main Bedroom | 11. Main Bathroom | 12. Main Closet



The J-shaped plan allowed careful placement of rooms and functions to optimize the apartment’s amazing views. “The guest and public living spaces face east, and the family space gets the main view looking back to the city to the south,” says the architect. Entertaining spaces are on the lower floor to capture the most ceiling height and breadth of space, while the bedrooms nest into the topmost floor.

A sculptural blackened steel stair connects the two levels. From its location adjacent to the main entertaining areas, it enjoys both the east view and a long view to the city skyline to the south. Its glass-topped platform, or plinth, is illuminated from within, casting a warm glow on the white oak treads above it. “There’s steel buried within the treads, something you can see expressed at the edge and that becomes the attachment point for the glass rails,” Jon explains. “The stringer snakes from the inboard side, which allows us to pick up the intermediate landings and suspend the whole thing between two rods. We wanted it to feel

like it’s floating. The wood treads are milled with a pair of fine grooves; and the plinth has a fine dot texture to the glass to make it safe walking in socks.”

Having maximized the indoor square footage and harnessed all the best vistas, the architects were left with an even greater challenge—creating an outdoor space in a landlocked unit. Despite its airy location, there was no terrace or roof deck—just that ponderous mansard shroud. The answer? Remove one of those giant dormer windows. Two steps up from the kitchen, the new loggia offers al fresco dining and a full “outdoor” grill, albeit properly ventilated to the real outdoors. There’s enough kick out to the roof to avoid inundation during storms, and a sheet drain takes care of any residual moisture.

Working with the slope of the mansard roof and its garret windows, instead of fighting them, generated a fresh architectural solution that straddles classical and modern design. It feels very much of its time and, somewhat mysteriously, of others, too.—*S. Claire Conroy*

The architects mined the main level for the greatest ceiling height, but found a few heady moments for the family media room on the top floor, as well.

## Lakeview Penthouse

Chicago

**ARCHITECT:** Jon Heinert, AIA, principal architect and project architect, Wheeler Kearns Architects, Chicago

**BUILDER:** Norcon, Inc., Chicago

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:** Sharlene Young, Symbiotic Living Architecture and Design, Chicago

**PROJECT SIZE:** 8,000 square feet

**CONSTRUCTION COST:** Withheld

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Steve Hall, Hall + Merrick

### KEY PRODUCTS

**ACOUSTICS:** FabriTrak

**CABINETRY/BUILT-INS:** Custom

**COOKTOP/OVENS:** Miele

**COOKING VENTILATION:** Best

**COUNTERTOPS:** Quartzo Bianco; Calacatta; Porcelanosa Krion

**DISHWASHER:** Miele

**FAUCETS:** Dornbracht

**FLOORING:** Hakwood Aura

**HOME CONTROL:** Savant

**HUMIDITY CONTROL:** DriSteeem

**HVAC:** Daikin

**ICEMAKER:** Sub-Zero

**LIGHTING:** Lucifer; Lumenpulse; Acolyte; No. 8 Lighting

**LIGHTING CONTROL/WINDOW SHADING SYSTEM:** Lutron

**PASSAGE DOORS/HARDWARE:** Accurate, SIMONSWERK, Dormakaba

**REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER/WINE REFRIGERATION:** Sub-Zero

**SPECIALTY APPLIANCES/GRILL:** Wolf

**VANITIES/LAVS:** Porcelanosa

**WASHER/DRYER:** LG

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## Residence With a View

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CORTE MADERA, CALIFORNIA  
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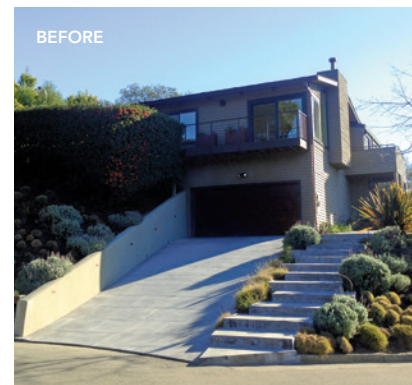
*Opposite and this page:* Renovating houses in Northern California is an incredibly complex undertaking, fraught with myriad constraints and astronomical costs. With the exception of the garage and existing upgraded landscaping, this 1960s house was completely re-conceived to make the most of its stellar views.

**The tension between** pretty good and absolute perfection is something architects must resolve before undertaking any significant remodel. For budget and stewardship reasons, no one wants to change more of an existing structure than is necessary, and the success of any home renovation depends on how well it achieves that before-and-after balance. While not easy, this is a decision tree that partners Heidi Richardson and Andrew Pribuss frequently confront in Northern California, where buildable land is scarce and expensive and remodels are a large part of their work. To get clarity, they begin by asking whether the house is in the right spot on the land, or at least whether the garage is well placed. “Invariably it’s us, the client, and the builder who says, this makes sense, or it doesn’t,” says Andrew.

That dilemma was never prolonged on this 1960s two-story house. The

driveway and garage were in the right location on the quarter-acre lot, which had 180-degree views from Mount Tamalpais on the west to the San Francisco skyline on the south. In fact, the owners understood this: A year or two earlier they had installed a professionally designed landscape with sculptural entry stairs and, in back, an outdoor kitchen surrounded by multi-trunk arbutus trees. These elements became the anchors of the renovation.

Banking up against a hill on the north side, the roughly rectangular home runs east-west along a downslope, its long side facing the view to the south. Originally it consisted of an entry-level garage, bath, laundry, and cramped TV room, with a long crawl space against the slope. Upstairs, a living and dining area led to a kitchen opening to the backyard, while the other side of the house contained three bedrooms and two baths.





*This page:* Sometimes the key to resolving a problem-plagued floor plan is to relocate the staircase. But because of the difficulty and expense of doing so, it's never a first option. In this project, moving the stair from the side of the house to a central location unlocked flow and views for all of the main floor rooms. "We made it a sculptural object that you could circulate around," says Heidi.



With a growing daughter who needed more space to hang out with friends, the clients asked for gracious common spaces, additional getaway rooms, and overnight accommodations for visiting family from the East Coast. Expanding the garage level made way for a mud-room, guest room, bath, and lounge with access to the lawn, an alteration that smoothed out some of the jogs in the footprint. The glassy main level was reframed and enlarged to house the kitchen, dining and living room, two offices, a den, and a gym. The recessed third story is brand new, containing two bedrooms, a bath, and a main bedroom suite whose deck overlooks the backyard. "This is

like the Covid house that everybody wants," Heidi says. "There's an office, a place for kids, and exercise space."

### Viewfinder

Circulation, views, and indoor-outdoor access were the focus of the interventions. On the main floor, one of the most fraught moves was figuring out where the kitchen would go. Adjacent to the living area, the existing galley kitchen faced the intimate backyard and outdoor dining terrace but was hemmed in, cut off from the big view. "There was all this angst: Does the kitchen want the view or to have outdoor space on the rear?" Andrew says. Ultimately, reposi-





tioning the stairway solved this puzzle. A bigger kitchen now enjoys the views on the south side—formerly the domain of two bedrooms. Directly behind it is a steel-and-cedar staircase that connects three floors and provides cross-views through the house. “The original stair ran north-south with a switchback and cut off one side of the house from the other,” Heidi says. “By putting it in the middle and running it in an east-west direction, we made it a sculptural object that you could circulate around.” At the main floor landing, a walnut panel screens the staircase from the living room, which maintained its original southwest orientation. Upstairs, the stair hall opens to a deck spanning the south façade.

“Fixing the stairs in a remodel is tricky business,” Andrew says. “We barely got the number of risers to work, and head clearance above.” However, it’s not just its new position but the detailing that elevates the whole house. The railings have no posts, only steel



*This page:* A new third story provides the breathing room the owners sought, but it stops short of the living/dining volume—bestowing greater ceiling height on these important rooms and lowering the overall profile of the house from the street.



*This page:* The third-level addition now contains all the family bedrooms, including the owners' suite. Their birds-eye perch takes in eastern and southern light, while an adjacent terrace offers full immersion views of the San Francisco skyline to the south and Mount Tamalpais to the west.

pickets, and keeping them straight and secure presented a challenge for builder Nick Calder, finish carpenter Jose “Yogi” Acevedo, and Nick’s son Mitch Calder, a welder. “It’s not the kind of thing you could draw ahead of time,” Nick says. “The bottom of the railing is a steel plate screwed to the floor, and the pickets are fully welded to it with tiny radius welds. It was a combination of all those pickets being welded, and the buttress effect you get when you turn the corner, that made it stiff.”

### Inside Out

In addition to the staircase railing, locally sourced white oak floors reference the wood exterior. They were stained dark to anchor the airy walls of floor-to-ceiling glass. “As an organizing principle, it was important that we fold the interior in,” Heidi says. “And the



## Residence with a View

Corte Madera, California

**ARCHITECT:** Heidi Richardson and Andrew Pribuss, Richardson Pribuss Architects, Mill Valley, California

**BUILDER:** Calder Construction, Nevada City, California

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:** Alden Miller Interiors, San Francisco

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Shades of Green, Sausalito, California, and IDS Landscape Design, Mill Valley

**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER:** Turbin Structural, Mill Valley

**PROJECT SIZE:** 4,500 square feet

**SITE SIZE:** .25 acre

**CONSTRUCTION COST:** Withheld

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Thibault Cartier

### KEY PRODUCTS

**CABINETS HARDWARE:** Omnia, Baldwin, Waterworks, Pinnacle, Dune

**CLADDING:** Western Red Cedar, AZEK

**DISHWASHER:** Miele

**ENTRY DOORS:** Fleetwood

**EXTERIOR WALL:** Corten steel

**FAUCETS:** KWC, Dornbracht, Waterworks, Franke, Hansgrohe

**Ovens:** Miele

**PAINT:** Benjamin Moore

**REFRIGERATOR:** Sub-Zero

**ROOFING:** Tar and gravel

**SINKS:** B91, Kohler

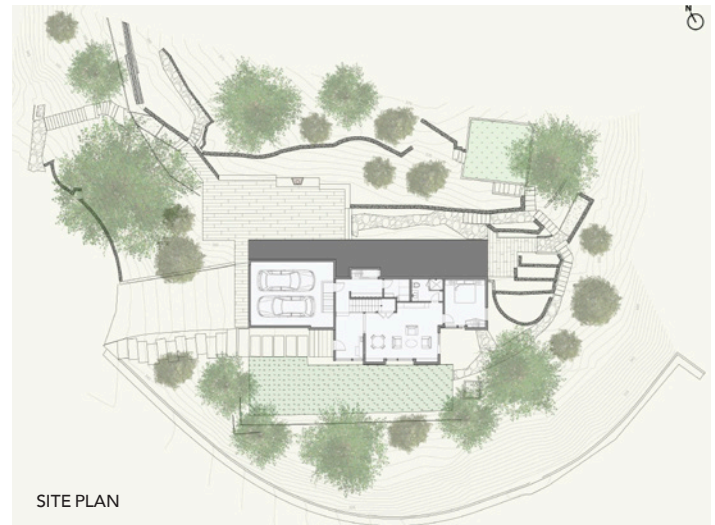
**TOILETS:** TOTO

**TUB:** Aquatica Spoon 2, Kohler

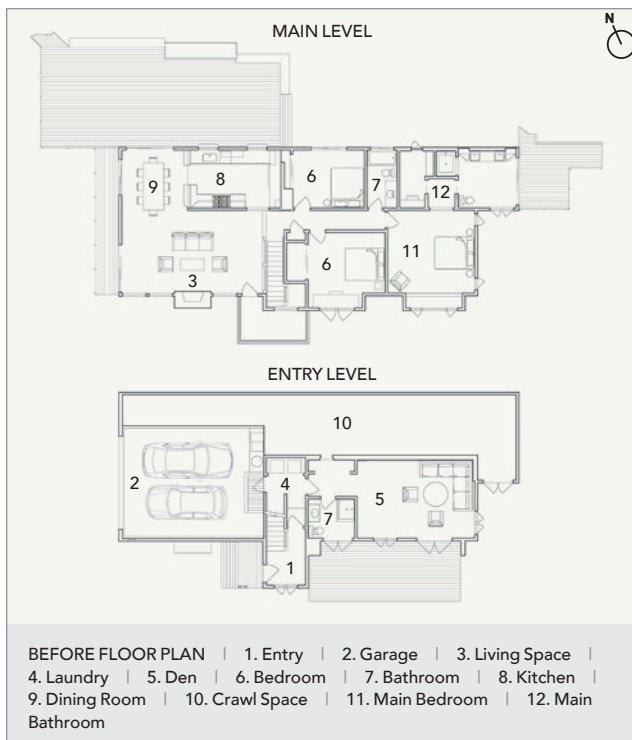
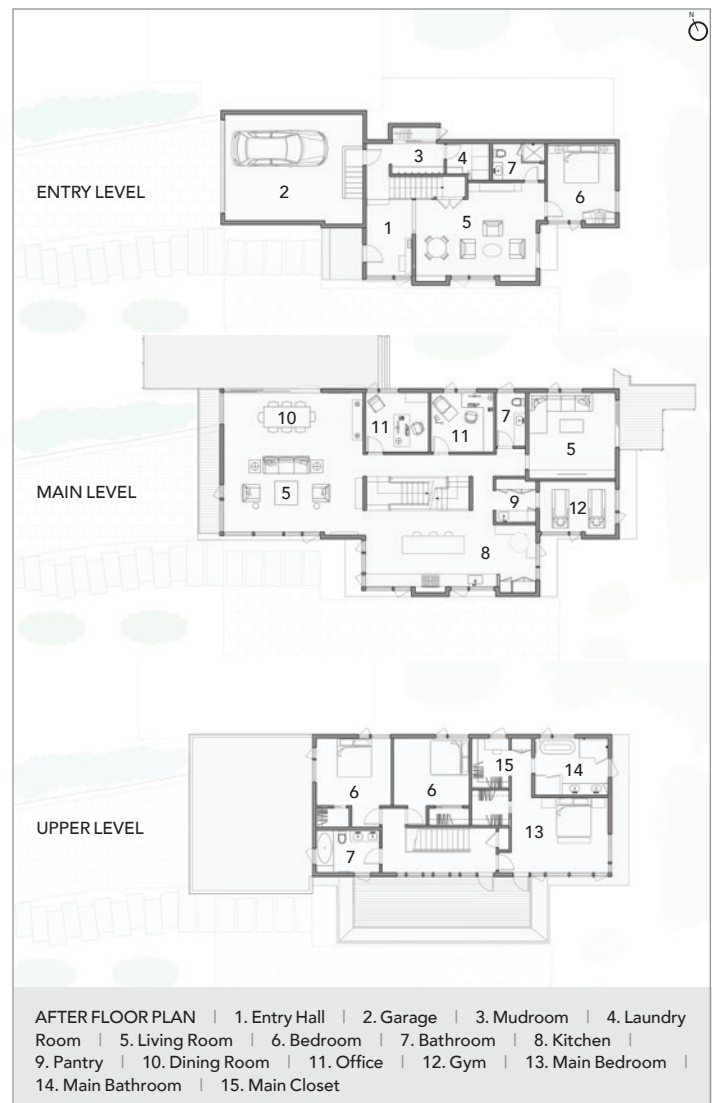
**WARMING DRAWER:** Wolf

**WINDOWS:** Fleetwood

**WOOD STAIN:** Cabot



SITE PLAN



**BEFORE FLOOR PLAN** | 1. Entry | 2. Garage | 3. Living Space | 4. Laundry | 5. Den | 6. Bedroom | 7. Bathroom | 8. Kitchen | 9. Dining Room | 10. Crawl Space | 11. Main Bedroom | 12. Main Bathroom

**AFTER FLOOR PLAN** | 1. Entry Hall | 2. Garage | 3. Mudroom | 4. Laundry Room | 5. Living Room | 6. Bedroom | 7. Bathroom | 8. Kitchen | 9. Pantry | 10. Dining Room | 11. Office | 12. Gym | 13. Main Bedroom | 14. Main Bathroom | 15. Main Closet



With hillside houses, outdoor spaces must be carved out of the topography or built into the structure of the house itself. The architects' skillful planning created outdoor opportunities on every level and aligned each with the best views available.

fact that you can see through the house was important." Outside, vertical and horizontal cedar siding ties the house to the land. The architects settled on the light gray-brown stain after "probably 30 samples," Andrew says. "We all lost years of our life on that." "The client had seen a house color they really liked, but the problem, when you call to get it, is that the house had been up three to four years and the color changes," Heidi says. "Western red cedar is tricky because it can go so orange."

Adding a third story to an existing house is also tricky in a neighborhood with coveted view corridors. That, and the house's siting, drove its location. Because the house is approached from below the garage on the west side, a full third story would have looked ungainly. Stopping it short of the living and dining

volume not only finessed the exterior scale, it also allowed the living/dining room ceiling to be higher than in the rest of the house—the better to enjoy the view. Deep overhangs work with built-in

**"This is like the Covid house that everybody wants. There's an office, a place for kids, and exercise space."**

—Heidi Richardson

cross-ventilation to mitigate heat gain on the south and west exposures.

Another concession to all the glass, the consummate touch was planting a thicket of trees to suppress light

pollution on the hill. "We were guilty of that on this one," Andrew says. "The landscape architects had to do a tree study showing how it would look in five and 10 years."

For all its aesthetic success, this is a classic case of architecture shaped by arduous constraints. "For a big site, you'd think there was plenty of space, but by the time you layer on the pieces, all of them had to be where they are because of issues such as views and existing trees," Heidi says. Nevertheless, the improvements bring a last-century house up to ambitious standards. "There are different extents of renovation," Andrew says. "We consider it a new house." New or renewed, the handsome house fits beautifully into its hillside site, despite the earlier imperfections. —Cheryl Weber

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Bringing the “outdoors in” and creating indoor environments that reference nature, in both obvious and subtle ways, can reduce stress, increase focus and productivity, and contribute to overall health.

Stairways and landings are a great way to bring a touch of nature indoors. Railings that utilize natural materials—or feature designs that mimic nature—can harmonize with other interior elements and exterior spaces such as decks and patios, to achieve a seamless transition between these environments.

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# Logan Pavilion and Lounge

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JACKSON, WYOMING

CARNEY LOGAN BURKE ARCHITECTS





**In the mid-1990s**, Carney Logan Burke Architects principal Eric Logan, AIA, was working in Denver after graduate school when he and his wife decided to return to their home state of Wyoming. After looking for a house and coming up empty-handed, they shifted to a property search and found a site north of Jackson. The windy, exposed sagebrush plain at the foot of the Tetons had beautiful light, views, and wildlife. Short on budget and time, Eric designed a basic three-bedroom house that borrows directly from the local buildings he finds beautiful: hay sheds and animal shelters with a rectangular footprint and gable roofs held on tall columns. “It was labor-built for \$75.74 per square foot in four months, and some of the detailing looked like it was at that level,” he says. “We invented almost nothing, trying to be creative with few dollars.” They moved into the house just before their first daughter was born in 1997.

More than two decades later, it is an example of how a starter house can gracefully change with the occupants when an economy of means is prioritized. Over time, the program grew significantly to accommodate two daughters, out-of-town guests, and Eric’s growing collection of cars, motorcycles, tools, and vinyl records. Yet his



*Opposite and this page:* Architect Eric Logan’s first attempt at his own family house in Jackson, Wyoming, was constrained by budget and neighborhood HOA rules. But after nearly 25 years of tweaks and improvements, he may finally have gotten it just the way he wanted it.



*This page:* New roofing in weathering steel is the latest and arguably best change Eric has made to the house over the years. Originally nixed by the HOA, it's now allowed and Eric has led the way for a number of neighbors. He also darkened the wood siding of the house, fully realizing his vision of "an armature for our family in the landscape."



*This page:* In the biggest interior upgrade, Eric swapped the kitchen's aging MDF cabinetry for white-lacquered maple plywood; new counters are hot-rolled steel. The ceiling's gleaming steel is a pristine interpretation of the roofing's rusted steel.

strong first response enabled later alterations that look effortlessly of a piece. What's also gratifying is that they reflect not just an evolving domestic agenda, but the homeowners association's more progressive approach to design reviews.

Built on a 12-foot grid, the orthogonal house consisted of three bedrooms and a garage at one end, and a great room at the other, spilling out to a large deck under the continuous gable roof. Spatial priority was given to this central open space for gathering, cooking, and hanging out in front of the wood-burning stove. "There we used king post trusses to create extra space and light, while the rest of the interior is a flat lid at 9 feet, using prefab trusses," Eric says. "It was a very economical proposition. The trusses went up in one afternoon, as I recall." Perpendicular to the linear

house, a deck walkway is part of the entry sequence, arriving at midpoint on the south side. The deck's geometry rolls through to the north side of the house, where it "squirts out, a companion deck of the same width that engages a small

**"The more elemental we can make solutions, the more timeless the forms, the more lasting they are."**

—Eric Logan, AIA

pond, a wide spot in the ditch," Eric says. Inside the front door, a gallery links the public and private spaces. Radiant heating was embedded in the concrete floor, and a crawl space under the slab allowed future flexibility for plumbing runs.

### Past to Present

Perhaps not entirely deliberate at the time, those moves set the stage for remodeling as their daughters and guest list grew. Eric's first and largest makeover was reclaiming the garage as a main bedroom suite with an outside deck and building a detached garage. Regrets? He's had a few, and here was his chance to undo a small blunder. Aiming for the look of an authentic Wyoming barn, Eric had designed the original two-bay garage with giant sliding barn doors on exposed steel tracks. "The first year was a big snow year, and my ritual, when arriving home from the office, was to get out of the truck and shovel a path through the drifts that formed during the day, so I could get it into the garage—the door wouldn't slide open because of the snow," Eric



*This page and opposite:* Working within the footprint of the house, Eric annexed the former attached garage for an expanded main bedroom suite and private, east-facing deck. Weathered and natural steel and lacquered cabinets appear here, too.



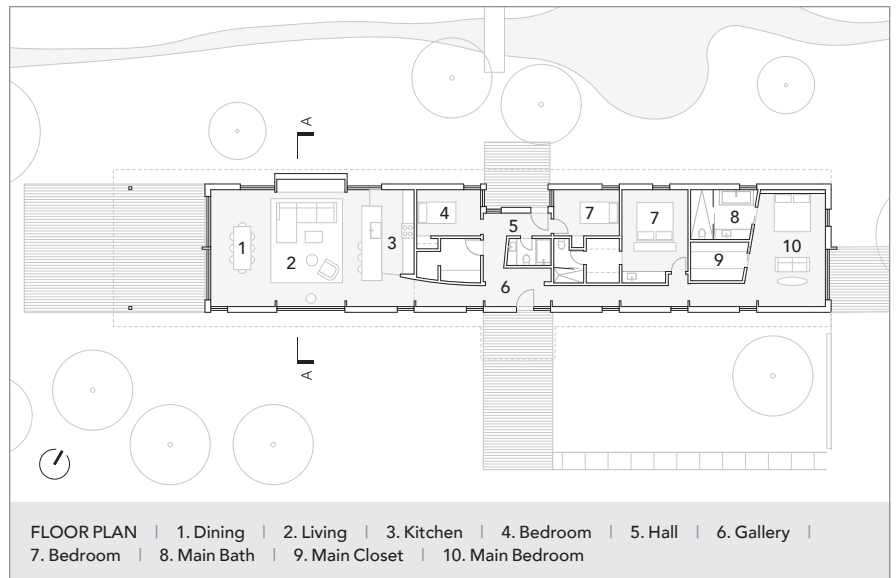
says. “The new garage has a less interesting but practical rollup door that I use with a clicker, like everyone else.” A later addition to the oxidized steel-clad garage contains a lounge and the many objects Eric collects.

In 2001, the family home grew into a small compound with the addition of a separate guest studio that doubles as a yoga and workout room. A complement to the main house, it’s a simple shed building open to the view. Guests are greeted with a fireplace in the open kitchen, dining, and living area, and a beckoning deck.

Indeed, the decks were a checkmark in the “what’s working” column. Using them to extend the house is an idea that gets repeated often in Carney Logan Burke’s residential work. “The living/dining/kitchen space is extended by more than half its length visually because of the huge deck on the west end of the house, half covered, half not,” Eric says. “Over the lifespan of our house, that heroic porch notion has proved to be a transition space with a lot of flexibility for furniture groupings.” He adds, “Having decks on all four sides of the house lets us either find the sun when it’s

cold or find the shade when it's hot, or be in or out of the breeze.”

About five years ago, Eric replaced the raw MDF kitchen cabinets with brighter and more robust white-lacquer maple plywood cabinetry, complemented by a new backsplash and countertops made of hot-rolled steel. And last year he installed a corrugated steel roof—a triumph that took only 24 years to achieve. The original drawings had the same spec, but the neighbors threatened a lawsuit, Eric says. “The HOA design review committee said they didn’t want the house to look like a barn. We had to back down, and what was intended to be this rusty roof in a beautiful land-



## Logan Pavilion and Lounge

Jackson, Wyoming

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** Eric Logan, AIA, principal, CLB Architects, Jackson, Wyoming

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:** CLB Architects

**PROJECT SIZE:** 2,475 square feet

**SITE SIZE:** 2.44 acres

**CONSTRUCTION COST:** Withheld

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Kevin Scott

### KEY PRODUCTS

**COOKTOP:** Wolf

**COOKING VENTILATION:** Wolf

**DECKING:** Ipe

**DISHWASHER:** Asko

**ENTRY DOORS:** Schlage

**FAUCETS:** Kohler, Chicago Faucets

**FIREPLACE:** Rais

**LIGHTING:** Grainger Lamp Holders

**OVENS:** Wolf

**REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER:** Sub-Zero

**PAINTS/STAINS:** Sherwin-Williams

**SINKS:** Kohler, Elkay

**TOILETS:** TOTO

**TUB:** Diamond Spa

**WASHER/DRYER:** Kenmore

**WINDOWS:** Weather Shield



*This page:* The main house has now been joined by a yoga and exercise studio that doubles as a guest suite. And a new garage accommodates Eric's growing collection of cars, motorcycles, and vinyl records. Together, they form a small family compound.



scape ended up as a wood-shingle roof.” Now that metal roofs are allowed, a few others have sprung up in the neighborhood, but none—at least not yet—that will weather to a rust-colored patina, Eric says. In addition, the whitewashed wood cladding was refurbished with a black stain, and they rebuilt and enlarged some of the decks.

### Staying Power

The young couple’s constrained budget and schedule resulted in a streamlined design that over time has proven infinitely adaptable. “We try to bring this to all of our work; the more elemental we can make solutions, the more timeless the forms, the more lasting they are,” Eric



The original house has proven remarkably resilient and flexible over the years, demonstrating that Eric nailed the most important decisions right from the start. The most enduring choice was the vast, partially covered deck that amplifies the great room.

says. “This is a beautiful and extreme place. I have seen that with fussy roof forms, peaks and valleys, Mother Nature can be very cruel. We’ve never had a leak in this simple building.”

The grounds have kept pace with the buildings. This two-and-a-half-acre lot in a larger-than-life setting has evolved too, as the need arose for shade and privacy. When the house was built, the

remaining budget was spent on seed to reclaim areas disturbed by construction. Since then, the couple has established a cottonwood and aspen grove along the entry sequence and added five spruces to the existing landscape of sagebrush, ryegrass, and two scrubby willows. “The color and birds and other wildlife that comes with adding all these trees has been amazing to watch,” Eric says.

Efficient and smartly designed, the house’s solid bones have allowed it to stand the test of time, with a few tweaks. “As an armature for our family in this landscape, it has proven so far to be very flexible for our needs,” Eric says. “It’s our interest for the next generation of our family to hang out on this spot in this beautiful part of the world.”  
—Cheryl Weber

# The Sleek Shall Inherit



1



2



3



4

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## Fire and Water

BACKWARDS SKY RANCH  
TEXAS HILL COUNTRY  
CLAYTON KORTE

There's a bend and widening of Texas' Dry Frio River, where the water lingers year-round in a swimming hole. This is where principal Brian Korte, FAIA, design lead Camden Greenlee, AIA, and the rest of the Clayton Korte team are building a rustic modern getaway for Houston clients.

The house will hover high above the waterline, its long sides maximizing views of the river to the north and hills to the south. "The house is positioned on a big stone outcropping embankment and slopes down to the river," says Cam. "To the west is a big open meadow. And the primary bedroom is to the east, so the clients can wake up to the sun."

The house will contain nearly as much unconditioned space—in sheltered terraces and covered patios—as conditioned space. Like a cruise ship, you can do laps around the perimeter deck. Deep overhangs will shade glazing and interiors from hot Texas sun.

Full immersion in the river view happens best on the elevated boardwalk that extends toward the Dry Frio, opening the long views east and west along its flow. The boardwalk will terminate in a steel firepit built into the support pier—picturesque and practical at the same time.

Over time, earthy materials—Western Red Cedar, Cor-Ten steel, and limestone—will anchor the house to its landscape. "The patina will help tell the story of the house as it ages," says Brian.—*S. Claire Conroy*



Project: Backwards Sky Ranch, Texas Hill Country; architect: Brian Korte, FAIA; Camden Greenlee, AIA; Javier Castro, AIA; Josh Nieves, Assoc. AIA; Brandon Tharp, Clayton Korte, Austin and San Antonio, Texas; builder: Monday Builders, McAllen, Texas; project size: 8,848 square feet (4,427 conditioned); site size: 48 acres.



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