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OF DISTINCTIVE HOMES

VOL. 5, 2023

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On the Cover: Spring Mill House by Robert M. Gurney, FAIA, Architect. Photo: Anice Hoachlander



Welcome to Volume 5, 2023, of *Residential Design* magazine. We are the only national professional publication devoted to residential architects and custom builders. We're dedicated to providing you with expert insight and substantive information on high-end residential design and construction.

Our print edition is published every other month. And our newsletter is published twice a month. If you are not already a subscriber and would like to be, please go online to: ResidentialDesignMagazine.com/subscribe.

If you have an exceptional single-family residential project you'd like us to write about, or an interesting and instructive business story you'd like to share with other professionals, please email Claire@SOLAbrands.com.

We look forward to having you join our *Residential Design* community.

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Publisher
Paul DeGrandis
Paul@SOLAbrands.com

Group Editorial Director
Patrick L. O'Toole
Patrick@SOLAbrands.com

Editor-in-Chief
S. Claire Conroy
Claire@SOLAbrands.com

Art Director
Bill Murphy
Bill@SOLAbrands.com

**Creative Director
& Production Director**
Tracy Hegg
Tracy@SOLAbrands.com

West Sales Manager
Paul DeGrandis
Paul@SOLAbrands.com

Midwest Sales Manager
Zach Stenberg
Zach@SOLAbrands.com

East Sales Manager
Dan Miklosz
DanM@SOLAbrands.com

Southeast Sales Manager
Dan Agostinacchio
Dan@SOLAbrands.com

Product Resource Section/Classifieds
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbrands.com

Audience Development
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbrands.com

Projects Manager
Heidi Riedl
Heidi@SOLAbrands.com

Digital Programs Manager
Tim Steingraber
Tim@SOLAbrands.com

List Rental
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbrands.com

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Don't Give Up on Cities



Sometimes I think I read too much for my own good. As a veteran journalist, it pains me to consider tuning out the news more often but it might be time to do so. Apart from the horrifying number of natural disasters the globe has experienced this year, we are apparently also seeing our most vital cities turn into crime-ridden battle zones. I live in Atlanta, I am from Washington, D.C., and I recently traveled to San Francisco for the AIA National Conference. All three cities are allegedly under siege, if you believe the headlines.

Maybe I just want to put my head in the sand and tune out what's really happening, but the journalist in me questions the intensity of these dire reports. How much of what we read, see, and hear on the news is pumped up to achieve revenue goals of the various publishers and broadcasters? Even trusted sources appear to have abandoned any measured approach to their coverage.

While I love a periodic escape to the countryside, I'm not ready to give up on cities yet, because it feels like giving up on humanity. There's too much benefit to living in a community. My neighbors look after each other. We haul trash cans back to each other's houses on pick-up day. We collect mail when someone is traveling. We have backyard cookouts on summer holidays. And we recently had an outdoor memorial service for a neighbor who lost her battle with cancer. We're not friends of the heart, but we all feel less fragile and alone knowing there's a safety net close to home.

These are some good reasons to choose cities; there are many more—proximity to work, school, shopping, cultural attractions—and sustainability, of course. Density is an important component of how we address climate change going forward.

Still, we all need a sense of protection and comfort—a little patch of the world where we feel in control, where we have dominion over our surroundings. That's the theme of our Design Lab (page 42) this issue—urban houses and the variety of ways architects have balanced the opposing needs for separation and connection.

Noise mitigation is a big concern in cities, and the primary one Neal Schwartz tackled for a house in Menlo Park, California. It's on a busy corner street, across from a high school. The solution entailed careful acoustical engineering. Yes, he built a wall, but then he found dozens of ways to open the house to nature, light, and air. Architect Marc Manack designed his own in-city house with a sharp focus on the fabric of the neighborhood. Lacking Neal's noise challenge, he emphasized the home's relationship to the street and neighbors. And lastly, Ben Waechter's house for his stepmother integrates her new home with an adjacent meadow open to the public. His courtyard plan perfectly titrates separation and connection in a way that supports everyone.

No matter what the question is, architecture is often the answer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Claire Conroy'.

S. Claire Conroy
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See You in Salt Lake City

BY WARREN LLOYD, AIA, CRAN CHAIR

When our AIA CRAN colleagues gather in Salt Lake City this October 11 through 15, it may be the first on many fronts. As far as I know, this is the first nationwide AIA gathering of architects in the Beehive State of Utah for an architectural conference. It is likely the most ambitious, with four days of continuing education sessions, three days of off-site tours, and events across four counties—ranging in elevations from 5,000 to 9,000 feet. You should plan to stay well hydrated and be ready for changing weather. While several CRAN colleagues have shared stories of memorable ski and hiking trips in the Wasatch, I’m guessing that for many, Utah has remained a flyover state or at best a convenient Western hub. Whether this is your first time here or you are a seasoned Westerner, we look forward to immersion in new insights and inspiration.

Our sessions on Thursday begin with former University of Utah Architecture School Dean Brenda Scheer, FAIA, sharing the unique “Plat of Zion” development pattern of Salt Lake City. To follow are panel discussions about critical housing affordability issues facing the West and the strain of development on our natural resources.

Custom residential architecture will be front and center during the symposium, with Tom Kundig, FAIA, presenting his vision of architecture within the larger landscape con-



Photo: KK Dundas

Tom Kundig discusses “Designing for Place” at this year’s symposium.

text, prior to our tour of his Wasatch House at the foothills of the Wasatch Range. Lindsay Schack, AIA, will address Passive House methodology and its techniques to quantify and improve energy efficiency and building performance, particularly as they pertain to climate resilience and climate-positive actions.

Bobby McAlpine, AIA, and partner Greg Tankersley, AIA, will highlight their poetic journey through classicism and modernism while we enjoy an evening at one of their



This page: This year’s home tour will split into two days and include Tom Kundig’s Wasatch House, an 18,000-square-foot house designed as a series of pavilions to capture mountain views.



Photos: Matthew Millman Photography

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This page: House at 9,000 Feet by MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple is another stop on the home tour.



Photos: Nic Lehoux


projects—the beautifully restored Walker Estate.

As we gather to learn from recognized architects about iconic houses, we are also excited to be learning about emerging work. New York-based CRAN veterans Namita Modi, AIA, and Dennis Wedlick, FAIA, will

explore the ways in which custom residential architecture is frequently at the leading edge of building science and design. They argue that residential

design commissions with complicated programs, challenging sites, and high-end budgets require next-generation thinking—about how to minimize environmental impact, specify and deploy zero-carbon building materials, employ computational engineering, and apply artificial intelligence feasibility studies.

The AIA CRAN Knowledge Community is currently operating in more than 20 regions across the U.S., with local CRAN groups providing practice- and design-related programming to an increasingly diverse network of residential architects. Gathering this group of busy architects together for a four-day, in-person symposium is a heavy lift that happens only through the support of many hands: AIA CRAN national leaders and staff, local CRAN leaders, and our generous corporate partners.

As we gather out West in some unfamiliar settings, an ambitious agenda, miles of tours, inspiring buildings to experience, and ideas to share, we hope you will recognize one familiar tradition at the 13th AIA CRAN Symposium: a warm welcome from our growing network of residential architects as friends, mentors, and colleagues. We look forward to seeing you in the “Crossroads of the West” in October. 



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The Warmth Within

ROBBINS ARCHITECTURE
WINNETKA, ILLINOIS

Warm is seldom the first word that comes to mind when describing modern architecture, but Winnetka, Illinois-based Robbins Architecture has proven the pairing successful project after project. The firm's designs slip modernist homes into nature in a way that blurs building and landscape, while its layouts create outdoor moments that seamlessly transition into inviting indoor spaces.

Architecture was always in the cards for principal Celeste Robbins, AIA. Growing up in Ohio, she was fascinated not by the clichéd Legos, but by space-making with endless blanket forts and outdoor refuges tucked among trees. An entrepreneurial spirit accompanied her talent in physics and art; she frequently canvassed her neighborhood selling “literally anything I could get my hands on,” she says.

Celeste entered The Ohio State University to study engineering, but

while touring the office of an architect who worked with her father, a civil engineer-turned-facility planner at Goodyear, she caught sight of architectural models and drawings and changed course.

She transferred to Cornell University, where her family hoped its robust architecture program would strengthen her job prospects; her mother worked three jobs to help pay tuition. The bet paid off. Upon graduation, Celeste moved to Boston and worked largely in higher education design for Michael Dennis, Jeffrey Clark & Associates, Shepley Bulfinch, and Perkins&Will.

After several years, the Midwest beckoned her back. She relocated to Perkins&Will's Chicago office, where she worked until her first child was born. Around that time, she found a kindred spirit in Berta Shapiro, who was launching a new career in interior design. As Celeste helped Berta with drawings,



Photo: Kyle John Photography

Celeste Robbins

Berta became her unofficial mentor in residential design. “We pulled the best from each other out,” Celeste says. “My takeaway was an understanding about how a home lives. When you walk into a room, where do you want to sit? What do you want to see? How do you have a good conversation? These things are about life and not something you learn at Cornell.”

With her formal training in architecture and her informal training in creating warm, livable spaces, Celeste opened her own practice at 30. Finding work was no problem—Berta's glowing recommendations led Celeste to many choice commissions, including a condo renovation for actor John Cusack and a gut renovation of a house in Winnetka, on Chicago's North Shore. Clients would recommend Celeste to their friends and become repeat clients themselves.

For nearly a decade, Celeste handled everything on her own, from client meetings to construction administration to billing. Her typical work hours fell between 8 p.m. and 1 a.m., while her young children slept. But architecture was her essence—her “lung,” she calls it. “I loved every minute of all of it.”



Photos: Roger Davies Photography

Home on the Ranch: For her first ground-up project, Celeste took inspiration from the ranches of Wyoming's rugged landscape and crafted a home that blends her modernist architecture sentiments with a traditional Western aesthetic. Home on the Ranch pairs outdoor rooms in full view of the Teton Range with intimate furniture settings to support family gatherings.

Photos: Roger Davies Photography (interiors); Steve Hall, Hall + Merrick + McCaugherty (exteriors)



Into the Woods: Wood window frames and stained wood panels create a lexicon on the exterior and interior at *Into the Woods*, Celeste’s own house. The site’s thicket of trees is prominently featured through walls of glass, particularly in the dark, cozy living room, while the brighter kitchen invites circulation and lingering.

ture. But Celeste doesn’t believe they are seeking a particular architecture style or formal design statement. Instead, she says, they want a home they can enter, “have their shoulders drop, and feel like they’re where they can recharge.”

This is perhaps what distinguishes Celeste’s approach to modernism. Yes, her houses sit typically low to the ground and embrace daylighting, open floor plans, clean lines, and expansive glazing that merges indoor and outdoor spaces. But she also adapts each design to the site and ultimately to what the owner wants without concern about maintaining any formalism.

Unlike one of her own influences, Frank Lloyd Wright, who was notorious for commanding design control even post-occupancy, Celeste welcomes client input. The results balance her design principles with the client’s lifestyle. “That’s where the warmth and richness comes in—that real honesty to how people live,” she says. “The home is not forcing them into something.”

Confident of her core design values—continuous connection to the site, organic movement through a space, a

Big Break

Celeste’s efforts in the Winnetka renovation led to her first ground-up commission for the same client, this time in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Berta designed the home’s interiors. “They didn’t interview anyone else,” Celeste says.

Understanding that this site was one the family intentionally chose as their destination, their retreat, Celeste focused on designing a home for relaxation and enjoyment of life. The ranch-inspired structure blends modernism with the rugged forms of the region’s dude ranches and the adjacent mountains of Grand Teton National Park. Completed

in 2006, *Home on the Ranch* was published in *Architectural Digest*, giving national exposure to Celeste and her design aesthetic. The project, which also led to her first staff hires, demonstrated that Robbins Architecture could design homes anywhere. Today, the firm has completed projects across the country, including in Idaho, Colorado, Michigan, and New York.

Design Flexibility

Prospective clients often approach Robbins Architecture after seeing its portfolio of modern homes interwoven in breathtaking composition with na-



Midwest Sanctuary: Ramon Gray limestone clads the summer home *Midwest Sanctuary* while hand-carved niches into the stone add a personal touch. The house wraps around the courtyard and makes extensive use of glass to fulfill the owner’s wish for uninterrupted views of the pool terrace and neighboring golf course.



Photos: Roger Davies Photography



Photos: Roger Davies Photography (interiors), Steve Freihon (exteriors)

Mountain Modern: The solidness of vertical board-formed concrete contrasts with the transparent walls of glass at Mountain Modern. Dark stained oak adds warmth inside as well as to roof overhangs. A double-height wall hides the structure for the floating treads of the sculptural stair.

layout that “unfolds” for its residents, and homage to artistry and craft—she is unfazed when her clients present a late-game challenge. “If the client says, ‘Oh, I actually want this over here,’” she explains, “it’s not going to unravel this whole setup that you’ve done.”

Such a change occurred at a house on Chicago’s North Shore for client Robyn Tavel and her family. While standing on-site with Celeste at the location of her future office, Robyn admired a nearby bridge and ravine and said, “Celeste, you told me how much you loved the bridge that you can see from your house and how it’s lit at night,” she recalls. “Now we’re looking at the bridge by my house. Instead of the wall here, why wouldn’t we make this a window?” And Celeste said, “Absolutely. Let’s do that.”

Robyn now savors the time at her floating desk, gazing out through her floor-to-ceiling window wall. “When you walk into the office,” she says, “it seems like the exterior is inside.”

Celeste feels a particular sense of pride whenever she hears a client proclaim, “This was my idea!” “It probably

was their idea,” she affirms, “and I used it, and the project is even richer for it.”

Test of Time

Perhaps the greatest validation of Robbins Architecture’s work is its success long after the housewarmings end. Nearly eight years after moving in, Tavel continues to relish the experience of coming home. “In one word,” she says, “I feel happiness.”

Celeste knows this firsthand, having designed her own home in 2010 on Chicago’s North Shore. The project exemplifies Midcentury Modern— asymmetry, extensive use of glass and wood, clean lines, and rectilinear volumes—while mixing in a few idiosyncrasies, like a ledge on the staircase that Celeste admits “makes no sense,” but adds a soulful element that assures you not everything is perfectly formulated.

At the time, her neighborhood was full of more traditional-style architecture, so when she opened her home as part of a school-fundraising tour, curious onlookers who had watched its construction lined up. To Celeste’s

delight, the air was soon filled with “I didn’t know I would like modern,” “It’s so warm,” and “I could live here.”

Her house became a calling card for attracting clients, including Tavel. And Celeste realized that her work as an architect stood out to people. “I never let go of that,” she says. “I made sure everything would have that warmth, and I would never rely on something just because I did it before.”

Furthermore, her home was the start of a longtime collaboration with builder Jake Goldberg, president of Chicago-based Goldberg General Contracting, Inc., which has worked on four homes with Robbins Architecture. “Working together is great because Celeste often asks us to get involved very early on in the projects,” Jake says. Whenever the owner, architect, and contractor “can rely on each other for opinions and advice, they have a vested interest [in the project] because they’re going to be working together.”

Along with regular check-ins with the contractor for insights on pricing, buildability, and potential leads, Celeste



Rendering: Robbins Architecture

On the Boards: For a home that will be completed in 2024, Robbins Architecture orchestrated stunning views of Lake Michigan from the front entry through clear and decorative glass panels.

engages other collaborators early in the design process. From the first sketch of the project, her team is already envisioning how a project might relate best to its natural surrounds. By the time the landscape architect enters the picture, the team has already started a dialogue on how a project interior and exterior might interweave, providing ideas for the landscape architect to take to the next level. “Whatever they do always makes it better,” Celeste says. “Nature is timeless. You’re never going to regret a house you designed in the ’90s if nature remains the focal point.”

The firm also specifies materials that are contextual to their environment. Natural stone makes appearances in the form of paneling, surfaces, seating, flooring, and stair treads. The project in Jackson Hole uses stained cedar, while a cottage on Lake Michigan uses cedar shakes. At a spacious summer retreat north of Chicago, vertical recesses hand chiseled into the fossil-imprinted limestone cladding imbue a human scale. For a home in Aspen, Colorado, nestled in the Rocky Mountains, the firm used board-formed concrete to withstand the

harsh climate. “We wanted the texture of wood, and the color is beautiful with the mountains,” Celeste says.

Not surprisingly for a firm in Greater Chicago, the influence of Prairie-style architecture can also be seen, through such elements as long lines and deep overhangs that help shield building materials and the interior from precipitation and harsh summer sun. “It’s practical, smart, and also beautiful,” Jake says.

Architecture as Business

Perhaps from her early days of selling wares to her neighbors, Celeste has always felt comfortable engaging with clients. But as her firm grew to 10 employees plus outside consultants working across multiple projects, she had to learn how to manage a business—something historically not taught in architecture schools. Celeste often spends her free time reading business and motivational books. “I take it as an honor that people choose to come to work in this office,” she says. “I want them to feel that they are challenged and that they enjoy what they do.”

An active member of the design community, Celeste participates in AIA Chicago’s Custom Residential Architects Network, which she co-chaired for three years; the Chicago-Midwest Institute of Classical Architecture & Art; and the Design Leadership Network (DLN), which hosts national events for firm leaders and executives in architecture, interior design, and landscape architecture, as well as more intimate gatherings among peer groups.

From these meetings, Celeste became inspired and motivated to publish a monograph of her firm’s work. “I’m proud of our projects and I wanted them to be more available to be seen,” she says. A DLN peer recommended a book agent, who agreed to work with Celeste.

Recently released by Monacelli, “The Meaningful Modern Home: Soulful Architecture and Interiors” collects nine Robbins Architecture homes across the country. It entailed more than two years of preparation by Celeste and a team of collaborators, including a writer, editor, and graphic designer. She also hired a photographer and stylist to capture the experience of living in a home by her firm beyond the documentation of its architecture.

Not only was she delighted to revisit her projects, one of which had been lived in for 17 years at this point, but she revamped her firm’s website with the new imagery to “communicate what I saw to the world.” Now decades into cultivating her aesthetic and brand, she knew she wanted to convey the warmth, softness, and livability her modernism delivers, along with her joy in creating architecture that fulfills her clients’ goals and desires.

“People walk away liking to work with us because they got the house they wanted,” Celeste says. “They know their home was a passion that we lived and breathed for them.”—*Wanda Lau*

The Vision: Craft every detail of the home with purpose, including the view.



Tommy Everson | Principal | Everson Architect | Orono, MN

Nestled in a nature reserve, this idyllic home showcases floor-to-ceiling walls of glass that flood the interior with light and views. The blend of traditional forms, modern detailing and rustic materials is reinforced by the clean lines and steel aesthetic of Kolbe's VistaLuxe WD LINE windows and doors.

Explore the entire home at kolbewindows.com/orchard-creek

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519 Indiana

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Urban lots are not for the faint of heart, especially when surrounded by existing dwellings that predate zoning codes. Such was the case for Studio 804’s 519 Indiana project, one of several the design/build student group led by architecture professor Dan Rockhill has completed in this desirable neighborhood near the University of Kansas campus.

The Studio 804 program has built dozens of homes and other buildings over its nearly 30-year history, each more polished and impressive than the last. Although



This page: Carving outdoor and indoor space from the tight in-city lot was Studio 804's biggest challenge. They solved the problem by turning the plan upside down.

entirely student built with Dan at the helm, they are indistinguishable from the work of veteran residential architects and custom builders.

“If it’s not perfect I’ll make them take it all out and do it again,” says Dan. “I tell them, if it’s not done perfectly, you will embarrass me, the program, and yourselves.” Instead of embarrassing anyone, the program has won many national design awards in competition with seasoned professionals.

Part of how they achieve this high level of execution is by keeping the forms straightforward, and by designing and building multiple mockups before they tackle the real thing. Dan does not encourage them to design amoebas and then try to figure out how to build them. After all, these

are speculative projects that require a broader appeal—they have to sell for a fair price to fund the next year’s project.

“I prefer something that is minimal and stripped back and that’s how I guide them,” he says. “And I’m not going to work on a building I don’t like.” Apart from aesthetics, many of the design decisions here were dictated by the constraints of the lot. It has two neighboring buildings impinging on its setbacks, which had scared away opportunistic developers without the vision to conquer the flaws.

The challenge was to gain breathing room for outdoor entertaining space on the ground level, along with requisite parking. The team’s solution was to build the first level smaller than the sec-

ond. The upside-down plan carves out enough space on site for a covered patio, parking, and a detached garage. Partially pushed into the 11% slope, the smaller first level contains two flexible rooms, a bathroom, and a mechanical room for the home's sophisticated systems. The entrance is several steps below grade.

Hovering over the patio space, the second level comprises an open living/dining area, a commodious deck, and main bedroom suite with a walk-in closet and a smaller deck perfect for two. During the course of the day, the sun tracks from the east-facing main bedroom to the west-facing great room, ensuring that all the spaces optimize their solar exposure, while remaining shaded by their deck overhangs.

Although the main bedroom faces the street, the orientation "puts the living area in the canopy of trees," Dan explains. "It was an orphan lot, but a beautiful site three blocks from downtown. You can walk to the university and, at the end of our street, you're able to access the Lawrence Loop, a 20-plus mile walking/running trail."

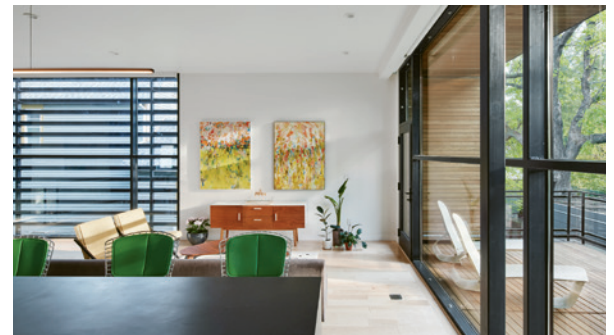
As Dan and his fifth-year architecture students have perfected their formula, one area that has benefited greatly is the interior fit and finish of the houses—an aspect of homebuilding that

challenges even the professionals. Yes, the forms of the houses are fairly straightforward, but the interiors do not lack ambition.

Custom light maple veneer cabinetry lines the entry-level walls, offering plenty of storage and streamlining the entertaining spaces on the upper level. The warmth of the wood, also applied to the stairs, balances the practicality of budget-minded polished concrete floors. Upstairs, the custom cabinetry reappears, along with tongue-and-groove maple plank flooring, in contrast with dark Richlite kitchen counters and custom metal railings and passage doors.

Lower-level siding, soffits, and decks are sassafras and the upper-level siding is phenolic, high-pressure laminate from Austria. Solar panels supply most of the power needs of the house, which is heated and cooled by mini-splits, and an ERV replenishes fresh air in the super-insulated house. Stormwater is managed with a green roof on the garage, permeable surfacing for the driveway, and a rain garden.

Given all these high-performance features, the sophisticated design, and the proximity to the best aspects of intown living in Lawrence, it's no wonder 519 Indiana sold before the open house—



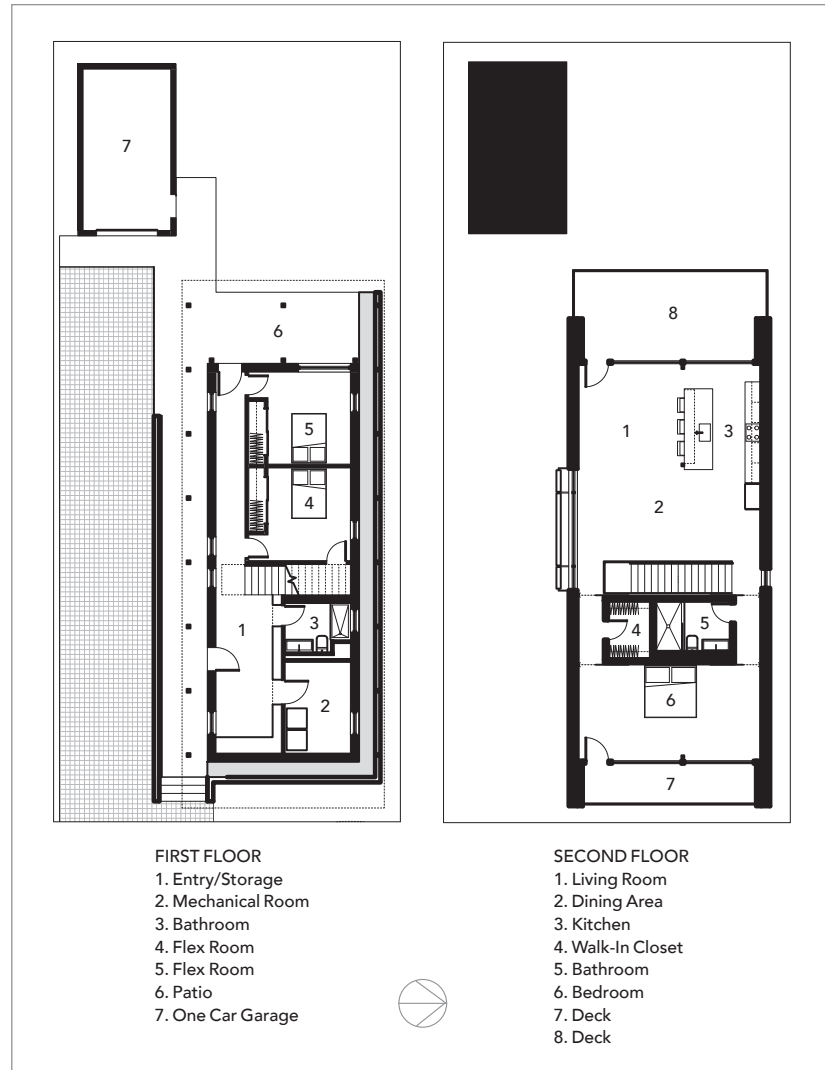
This page: Most student-built projects avoid the tough finish work, such as custom cabinetry, plank flooring, and metalwork. Dan Rockhill's design/build class embraces it all.



to experienced buyers. “Our demographic is no longer first-time buyers—there are plenty of programs that support that. Our demographic is usually a second- or third-time buyer. Sometimes they’re looking toward retirement,” says Dan.

“519 sold to two faculty who came here from Texas—a co-hire for the university. They already had a house in Texas that had solar collectors, so they knew about what we were doing and were happy to jump right in. Their August heating bill—our heaviest load here—was 83 cents.”

—S. Claire Conroy



519 Indiana

Lawrence, Kansas

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Studio 804, Lawrence, Kansas

PROJECT SIZE: 2,060 square feet (house); 400 square feet (garage)

SITE SIZE: 0.13 acre

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Corey Gaffer Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

APPLIANCES: GE Café

BATH VENTILATION: Broan

CABINETS: Custom by Studio 804

CABINETS HARDWARE: Linnea

CLADDING: Fundermax

COUNTERS: Richlite

DECKING: Robi Decking

DOORS/DOOR HARDWARE: Masonite, TownSteel

FASTENERS: Simpson Strong-Tie

FAUCETS: Elkay (kitchen), Duravit

FOUNDATION: Stego vapor barrier

GARAGE DOORS: Amarr

HUMIDITY CONTROL: Broan ERV

HVAC: Samsung mini-splits

LIGHTING: ConTech Lighting

LIGHTING CONTROL: Convergence

PAINTS/COATINGS: STEEL-IT, Sherwin-Williams, Minwax

PAVERS: Oldcastle

PHOTOVOLTAICS: Qcells

ROOFING: GAF, Stellar, OMG Roofing Products

ROOF WINDOWS/SKYLIGHTS: VELUX

TILE: Daltile

VANITIES/LAVS/SINKS: Duravit, Elkay (kitchen)

WINDOWS: Quaker Commercial

WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Archon Fenestration Technology



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Home Court Advantage

Natural landscape contours enfold a sporty house for an active couple.

BY CHERYL WEBER

ARCHITECT: ROBERT M. GURNEY, FAIA, ARCHITECT

BUILDER: THINKMAKEBUILD

LOCATION: NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Despite its glassy walls and an Olympic-size indoor volleyball court, Spring Mill is a house that keeps its secrets. It's not until you walk inside that you experience the expertly knit public and private spaces and how the landscape participates in the interior. In part that's because it's built into a hill that slopes about 10 feet from the street to the back of the house, allowing architect Bob Gurney, FAIA, to sink the lofty volleyball volume into the grade.

In fact, the house is designed around the clients' love for the sport. A young couple with no children, they asked him to help them find a lot that would accommodate the volleyball court and generously sized entertaining areas, along with intimate spaces for themselves. The site they landed on, in a Northern Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C., comprises 3.5 acres with picturesque woods and pond and a slope to strategically minimize, if not quite hide, the bulky court. "This isn't a family house," Bob says. "It's very client-specific, designed for a couple who likes sports."



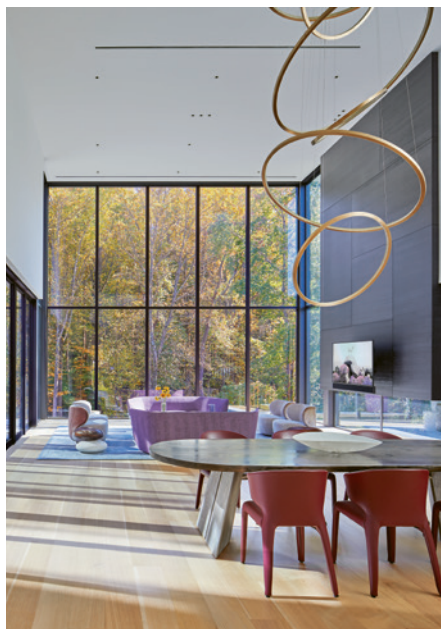




This page: The 18,000-square-foot house breaks down into a series of artful volumes to encompass the clients' hefty list of private and public spaces—including an Olympic-size indoor volleyball court and an indoor pool.

Wellness, relaxation, and other forms of exercise were priorities too. Stretched along the roughly east-to-west contours of a ridge that determined the house's orientation, the interiors include a pool and spa, a gym and locker room, and a sizable game lounge. There is also a two-bedroom guest suite above the garage, a primary suite above the main entry, and a double-height living/dining volume with stacked offices. All of this, including the volleyball building, encompasses more than 18,000 square feet, but the staggered buildings, interwoven courtyards, and glass spine running through them help to minimize the scale. Along the spine, for instance, the architect has shaped scenes that pull visitors through the house and landscape, sometimes through subliminal cues. Each space reads differently depending on the time of day and the season, making the house a journey of discovery.

Indeed, it is the interplay of indoor and outdoor, public and private, real and perceived that elevates the experience to something beyond just another large, glamorous house. From the approach, the house reads as three two-story,



This page: The double-height living area immerses occupants in the wooded view. The kitchen cantilevers beyond the main volume to gain secondary workspace. Kitchen cabinets are oak with a custom gray stain atop lacquered bases; flooring is white oak.



rectangular boxes. At the gravel car court, the garage/guest volume is pulled forward to partially hide the volleyball volume to the left and define the central parking court. Above the garage are two en-suite guest bedrooms at the front and a sitting room at the back.

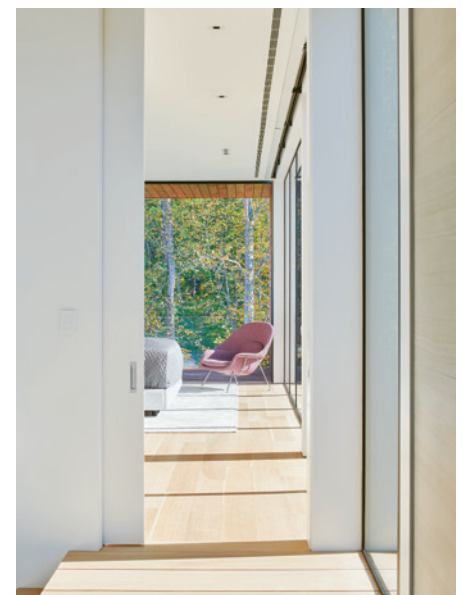
On the central volume, glass doors beckon visitors into the entry corridor, which offers an axial view through the house—to the gym in one direction and the main living space in the other. Upstairs in the primary bedroom, separate baths

and dressing rooms sit on opposite ends of the floor plan, and a mahogany-wrapped covered porch looks out on the trees to the north. But it is the main living volume that opens most dramatically to the landscape, and where the couple spends most of their time. The open-plan living room's double-height glass walls bring in the leafy rear view of woods and sky.

Designed as a slatted glass box, the kitchen cantilevers beyond the main structure, creating an airy cooking core and room for a secondary prep counter and coffee station behind



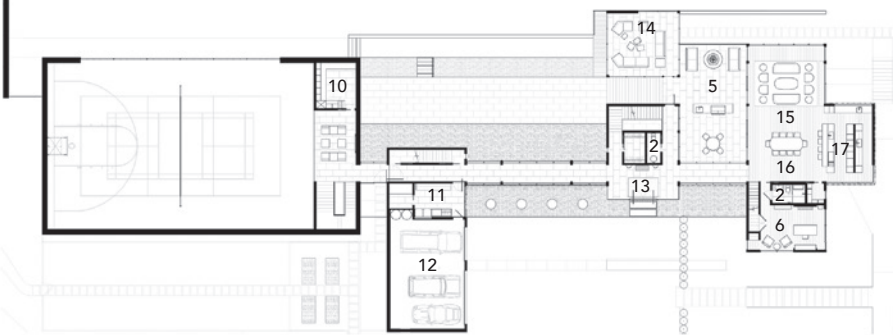
This page: Smaller-scale private areas offer refuge from vast entertaining zones. The main suite has a mahogany-wrapped porch facing the woods.



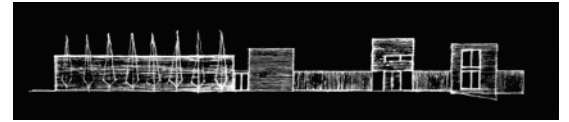
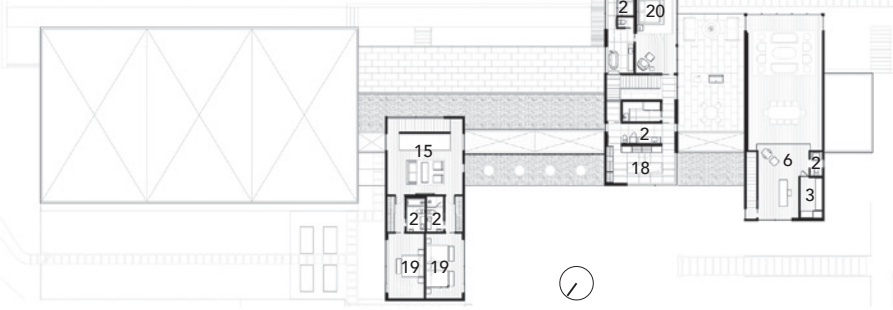
BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

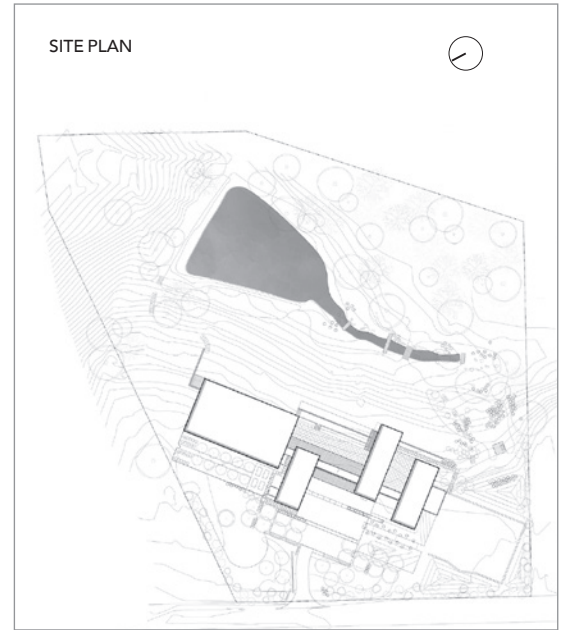


SECOND FLOOR PLAN



- 1. Volleyball Court
- 2. Bathroom
- 3. Mechanical/Storage
- 4. Swimming Pool
- 5. Terrace
- 6. Office
- 7. Gym
- 8. Game Room
- 9. Bar
- 10. Locker Room
- 11. Mudroom
- 12. Garage
- 13. Entrance
- 14. Screened Porch
- 15. Living Room
- 16. Dining Room
- 17. Kitchen
- 18. Dressing Room
- 19. Bedroom
- 20. Main Bedroom

SITE PLAN



This page: The game room links to al fresco dining, the pool and gym, and, ultimately, the volleyball court. Within walls of hot-rolled steel, the bar is lined in salvaged oak and Golden Eagle stone.



This page: The property's 10% slope gave the architects just enough discrete cover for the volleyball court's 32-foot-high structure.

it. This main volume also stacks his-and-hers offices on the front façade. Perched on top, his office has a large window with electrostatic glass for nighttime privacy.

Downstairs, a side wall of glass sliding doors off the living/dining room leads out to a large courtyard and a screened porch, which are also accessible from the spine and the entry pavilion. This area acts as the main hinge to the lower entertaining level through indoor and outdoor staircases. “The stairs at the living room courtyard take you down to the long terrace spanning the volumes and pool terrace,” Bob says. “It creates connectivity to outdoor spaces between different levels. No matter where you are, you have a view toward the landscape and park.”

Game On

The house has many social centers, adding to the sense of discovery. “There are a lot of public spaces in the house,” Bob says. “They entertain a lot around volleyball events, using the house as a central area to host friends, often overnight.” But volleyball isn’t the only game in town, and much of the activity spills out from the lower-level spaces. “The lower level has a very different feel than the double-height spaces floating above the landscape,” Bob says. “Here you feel you’re in the landscape; you experience it in a different way.” Under the living volume, for example, is a massive game lounge that flows out to a more intimate pool terrace and a covered eating area. “Originally we had the swimming pool outdoors, but they wanted to use it year-

Spring Mill House

Northern Virginia

ARCHITECT: Robert M. Gurney, FAIA, principal in charge; Nicole L. de Jong, AIA, project architect, Robert M. Gurney, FAIA, Architect, Washington, D.C.

BUILDER: Darren Kornas, ThinkMake-Build, Annapolis, Maryland

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Therese Baron Gurney, ASID, Baron Gurney Interiors, Washington, D.C.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Champion Hruby Landscape Architecture, Annapolis, Maryland

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: United Structural Engineers, Sterling, Virginia

AV CONSULTANT: Casaplex, Kensington, Maryland

PROJECT SIZE: 18,595 square feet

SITE SIZE: 3.5 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$295 per square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: Anice Hoachlander

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY: Gray-stained white oak, Kalamazoo (exterior), Poliform, Abet Laminati, Soho Vanities

CLADDING: Delta Millworks Accoya Texas barnwood, corrugated Cor-Ten

COOKTOP/COOKING VENTILATION

HOOD: Gaggenau

COUNTERTOPS: Golden Eagle, Stone Source

ENTRY DOORS & HARDWARE: Pivot Door Company, Hoppe electric lockset

FAUCETS: Dornbracht, Fantini, Graff

FINISH MATERIALS: Boffi, Stone Source

GARAGE DOORS: Clopay Avante

HVAC: Hottel HVAC, geothermal

OUTDOOR GRILL: Kalamazoo

OVENS: Gaggenau

POWER SYSTEMS: Tesla Powerwall

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero

SINKS: Elkay, Kohler, Urban Edge, Julien, Galper, Lavabo

SKYLIGHTS: Wasco Velux Commercial Circular Units

TUBS: Azuma, Wetstyle

VOLLEYBALL COURT: Performance Sports Systems

WASHER/DRYER: LG

WINDOWS: Fleetwood, Western Window Systems

WINE REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero



This page: The 74-foot-wide, sliding glass wall for the pool room was one of the biggest that builder Darren Kornas has ever installed. Domed skylights help bring balanced daylight in from above.



round,” he says. “We added a swimming pool and spa with a 74-foot wall of slide-and-stack doors.” Its skylit roof became a viewing garden along both sides of the first-floor spine between the entry volume and volleyball building.

While larger conceptual issues permeated the design process, there were also practical matters to address: At some point, a scale this ambitious tips toward commercial construction. “The pool’s sliding door system was one of the largest we’ve ever done,” says builder Darren Kornas. “And the room had to be conditioned properly so the pool smell doesn’t migrate to the rest of the house. Ideally you want it so airtight that the water would stay in the room if you flipped it upside down, and there must be negative pressure so air is pulled into the room. We put in a standalone dehumidification system.”

Installing all the pool equipment inside the house raised other improvisational puzzles, such as how to get the 10-inch diameter pool heating vent pipe through the house and out in a place that everyone could agree on. To mitigate equipment noise, “we did mass-loaded vinyl in the walls of the pool equipment room, making sure every penetration was sealed up tight,” Darren says.

The volleyball building, of course, was another residential construction anomaly. From the backyard its full stature is revealed, though you catch an interior glimpse on an axial view from the game lounge. The second-floor guest suite has direct access, too. A flight of stairs descends to a small lounge and locker room overlooking the court and continues down to the court and a full bath and drinks station. Also on this



basement level is a gym with a glass wall looking out on the pool and landscape.

Twelve-foot-wide footings were required to support the court’s massively tall poured-concrete walls, which measured 32 feet from footing to roof. “It looked like the Hoover Dam,” jokes Darren, whose crew handled the building’s commercial-style detailing. On the north side, a translucent polycarbonate panel admits natural light while eliminating glare, and the composite gym floor was chosen for its amount of “give.” “The clients visited volleyball courts all around the country,” Bob says. “They liked the look of open-web steel




trusses and decided to leave them exposed.” This 50-foot-by-80-foot box has a Cor-Ten skin that echoes the entry volume cladding, while the garage and living volumes are wrapped in Shou Sugi Ban wood. “Cor-Ten is relatively budget friendly,” Bob says. “I knew I had to clad large expanses of walls and didn’t want to break the bank on an exterior material.” On the driveway side of the glass spine, slats made of FSC-certified mahogany provide a sense of privacy as you’re walking through the volumes and are a visual tie-in to the cantilevered kitchen.

Grounded

Despite the volumes’ discrete functions, their palette of materials contributes to the fluidity of the floor plan. If the exteriors are minimal and crisply detailed, the interiors, too, form a quiet backdrop to pops of texture and color—particularly purples and oranges, which the clients requested. Flooring in the main living spaces is white oak, and Cambrian Cream—a natural stone quarried in Wisconsin—threads together the spine, exterior stairs and terraces, and lower-level spaces. The upper kitchen cabinets are oak with a custom gray stain, paired with lacquered base cabinets. Downstairs in the game lounge, the combination of raw and polished materials lends an appropriately lively vibe: a mottled wall of hot-rolled

steel, reclaimed oak behind the bar, and a black Golden Eagle stone countertop with graphic gold-and-cream swirls.

What is not as visible is the technology that addresses energy efficiency. Rooftop solar panels lighten the electrical load and support the zoned geothermal heating and cooling system. In addition, four Tesla power walls provide backup battery storage. “There’s an impressive mechanical room at the other end of the house from the lower-level lounge,” Darren says. If power goes out, he adds, this backup system is robust enough to run the spaces the owners use every day.

Serving as a unifying element for the discrete boxes, the landscape grounds the house with its organic quality. Champion Hruby’s planting plan sets up a dynamic dialogue between the interiors and exteriors. A grove of trees animates the car court, along with clipped shrubs contained in Cor-Ten-edged beds. The plantings become breezier at the back of the house, where locally quarried stacked stone walls and swaths of native grasses define the terraces and a flat lawn for outdoor volleyball. Farther on, a path invites a stroll around the woods and pond. “The clients are super-private but I know they share their house with their group of friends,” Bob says. “The feedback has always been that they love it. I think their lives revolve around all the living experiences of the house.” 

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Defying the Grid

Three in-city houses use setbacks as a path forward.

BY CHERYL WEBER AND S. CLAIRE CONROY



Modal Home

SAN FRANCISCO
S^A | SCHWARTZ AND ARCHITECTURE

It's becoming increasingly difficult to escape the sound of traffic these days. Even inside suburban houses, you can often hear the thrum of a freeway. In busy urban environments where traffic is up close and erratic, however, there's less chance that the ear learns to tune it out. That was the case for this house near downtown Menlo Park, where the clients of Neal Schwartz, FAIA, had family and were looking to build. It sits on a corner lot beside a fast road and across from a high school, and the noise was too loud to live with. "A soccer coach had this blaring whistle that, when I first visited the site, was worse than the road noise," says Neal, "but there is not much



land to build on in this area.” They walked around a run-down existing house to the backyard, where the family of four found the ambient sounds tolerable. “They said, if you can design a house that cuts the noise to this level, OK,” Neal says. “Before doing anything, we hired an acoustical engineer to measure the decibel level, using it as a baseline. From there the engineer could tell us what to do to bring down the decibels on the rest of the site.”

It wasn’t as simple as building a barrier wall. The engineer had specified a freestanding 14-foot-tall wall along the front and side roads, which lowered the noise by 15 decibels to achieve their goal of 48 decibels over 80% of the site. However, the town planning department rejected that solution because the wall had to be structurally part of the residence. That meant pushing the house to the front and side of the lot to avoid a useless front yard. While some would



This page: Noise on this urban corner lot was intolerable until the firm deployed a board-formed concrete wall and designed a house around it.



not envy the prospect of cozying up to a solid concrete wall, the S^A design team proposed interior moves that bring out its softer side. To compensate for the loss of sound and views, they pulled the house away from the wall to create a narrow courtyard that turns the corner with the wall and covered the courtyard just enough to meet the connection requirements. Leaning into the concept, they treated the covered sections as an opportunity to frame special views and celebrate the nuances of natural light—a theme that recurs throughout the design.

“It would be easy to come in the house and do this indoor-outdoor thing where you see the garden,” Neal says. “We tried to do more;



This page: Adequately attenuated from the noisiest part of the lot, the house opens to curated courtyard living. Glass-framed views top and bottom replace light and add delight to key interior spaces.





“You respond to it on the exterior as a hard, bold thing, and on the interior as a much more beautiful thing, softer and watery.”

—Neal Schwartz, FAIA

within the outdoor-indoor spaces are experiences that make you pause at the quality of light or a framed view of the sky or a tree. It’s not either/or—house or garden.”

Abstracting Light

The residence’s U shape preserves several existing trees and encloses a private backyard. From the side road, visitors enter through a metal gate in a fence whose irregularly spaced slats mimic the patterns of the board-

formed concrete wall behind it. “The wall is quite strong at the corner, but as you come toward the front door, the wood and landscaping make the house more approachable,” Neal says. The wall formwork was made with boards of several different widths and thicknesses, and the concrete oozing between them was scraped off randomly, leaving a craggy texture.

Inside the front door, where the wall bends down a long hallway, a hidden skylight slot washes its face



with light. “You respond to it on the exterior as a hard, bold thing, and on the interior as a much more beautiful thing, softer and watery,” Neal says. “We wanted to keep the entryway abstract and calm.”

A foyer wall hung with a nest sculpture—a nod to the wife’s fondness for photographing nests—hides the service core—powder room, mudroom, pantry—that faces the side courtyard garden and concrete wall. As enticing as the wall appears in sunlight, it is the porous bookcase to the right that draws you into the open-plan living spaces. There, the kitchen has a view of the courtyard inside the front acoustical wall, which is plastered and has thick, fixed windows to preserve the sound barrier along the main road.

To edit out extraneous views, all of the house’s visible skylights come to a razor edge—a move inspired by artist James Turrell’s Skyspaces. “It makes you hyper aware of the movement of clouds in the sky,” Neal says. “We tried to make the spaces contemplative. One roof opening is under a big oak tree; you just see the branches of oak in an abstract way.” Other skylights are hidden, including one in the dining area that scatters light along the wall. “If you don’t see the source, the changing light makes it a bit more animated and mysterious,” Neal says.

In the living room, a clerestory provides a sight line through the rear courtyard’s roof opening and is paired with a glass ribbon along the floor—or “floorstory,” as Neal calls it. These layered outdoor views were inspired by the team’s deep dive into Trans Modal Neuroplasticity—the idea that the brain can turn up the volume on one sense to compensate for the loss of another. In the architects’ playful interpretation,



This page: Despite the severe site constraints, the plan preserves existing trees and captures the best breezes and sunlight for courtyard spaces. “Inside, your eye is always moving and encouraging you to meander,” says Neal. “The landscape does that too.”

Modal Home

San Francisco

ARCHITECT: Neal Schwartz, FAIA, principal in charge; Wyatt Arnold, Laura Huylebroeck, Christopher Baile, project architects, S^A | Schwartz and Architecture, San Francisco

BUILDER: Steve Webb, Webb Construction, San Francisco

INTERIOR DESIGNER: S^A | Schwartz and Architecture

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Studio Green, San Anselmo, California

ENERGY CONSULTANT: Loisos + Ubbelohde, Alameda, California

LIGHTING DESIGN: PritchardPeck Lighting, San Francisco

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: iAssociates, Alameda, California

PROJECT SIZE: 4,948 square feet

SITE SIZE: 0.75 acre

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Bruce Damonte

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY HARDWARE: Sterling WoodCraft

CLADDING: Delta Millwork Accoya

COOKING VENT HOOD: Best Cirrus

COOKTOP: Thermador

DISHWASHER: Miele

ENTRY DOORS: Fleetwood

FAUCETS: Dornbracht, Fantini

HVAC: Messana

OVENS: KitchenAid

PASSAGE DOORS: Golden State Lumber

SINKS: Kohler, Duravit

SOUND WALL: High fly-ash concrete

THERMAL/MOISTURE BARRIER: ZIP System

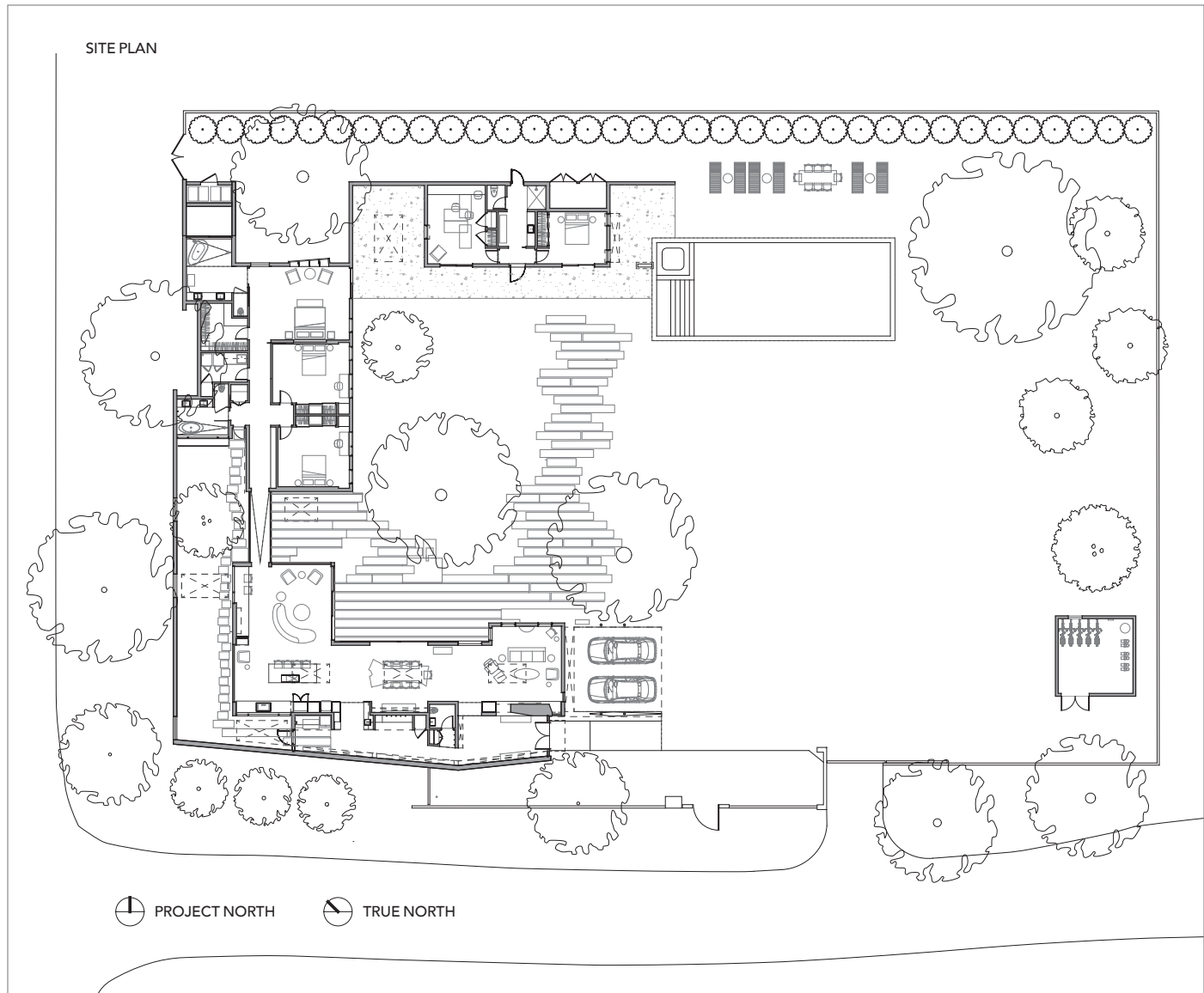
TILE: Ann Sacks, Fireclay, Stone Source

TOILETS: TOTO

TUB: Badeloft

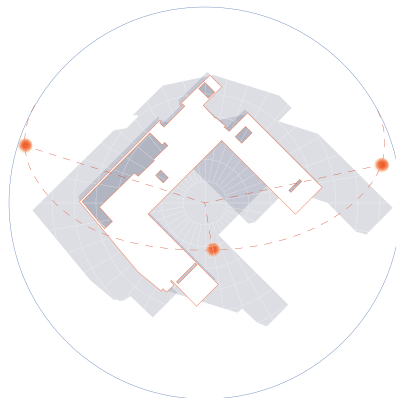
WASHER/DRYER: Electrolux

WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS/WINDOWS: Fleetwood

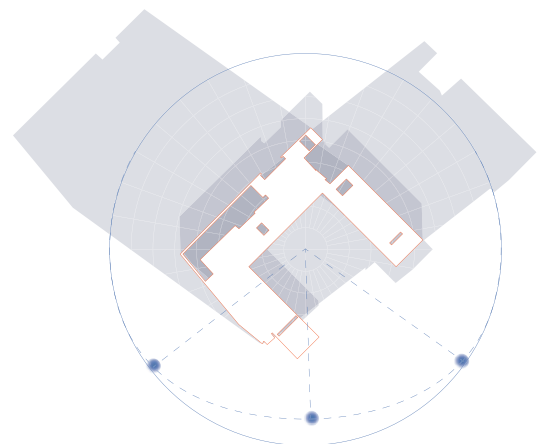


SUN POSITION IN RELATION TO COURTYARD
 LATITUDE: 37° 26' 58.1" N
 LONGITUDE: 122° 11' 34.3" W

Coordinating with existing site constraints (i.e. traffic noise, existing trees), the courtyard is designed with the most advantageous use of prevailing wind flow and sun positions in mind.



DATE: 06/21
 TIME: 07:00, 12:00, 18:00



DATE: 12/21
 TIME: 08:00, 12:00, 16:00

Data Source : Climate Consultant



a heightened sense of light and views compensates for the cloistered setting.

“I love the living room because there are about seven ways to see outside,” Neal says. “You’re seeing through multiple spaces, including the glassy connector ramp to the private zone and the outer courtyard.” Across that ramp are two kids’ bedrooms, a shared bath, and the primary suite, which opens to yet another private courtyard designed around an existing tree. The third leg of the U shape contains a guest suite that doubles as a pool house.

Embracing Color

Inside and out, the material palette melds the couple’s cultural sensibilities:

he is Indian and she has Scandinavian roots. The exterior cladding is quiet, a combination of Shou Sugi Ban cedar and lighter cedar accents, while the Cor-Ten steel carport enclosure recalls Indian *jali* screens. Inside, whitewashed oak cabinets and white oak floors lend a Scandinavian vibe.

Neal admits that initially, the clients’ quest for color pushed the team beyond their comfort zone: the kitchen island is cobalt blue, the guest bath has orange wall tile, and the pool changing room is covered in blue wallpaper with a tree mural. “They definitely pushed the use of color, more than we might naturally do,” he says, adding that it all works. “The primary bath floor is

a red concrete tile balanced with gray crackle wall tile. In that space the floor is vibrant, and the tile is very organic. You turn and look into this super-serene courtyard with soft plasterwork.”

In the backyard, staggered pavers meander between the public spaces and the guest/pool house, echoing the fluidity of the floor plan. “Inside, your eye is always moving and encouraging you to meander,” Neal says. “The landscape does that too.” Despite its solid presence on the street, the Modal Home softens the divide between inside and out. Its airy courtyards, leafy views, and gentle light offer up a meditative response to the demands of urban dwelling.

—Cheryl Weber

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Meadow House

EUGENE, OREGON
WAECHTER ARCHITECTURE



As the name suggests, Meadow House benefits from a next-door neighbor that's not usually found in an urban grid: a preserved grassland with walking paths. Years ago, the landowner turned it over to a nonprofit but kept a 100-by-100-foot corner parcel. This was later sold to Ben Waechter's client, a semi-retired woman who happens to be his stepmother. Located in the College Hill neighborhood of Eugene, near the University of Oregon, her new house rests as a solid, serene presence that metaphorically absorbs the community meadow surrounding it.



This page: The courtyard arrangement of this house abutting a public meadow allows it to enjoy nature and views on its own terms. A central slice of meadow or “clearing” hints at what lies beyond the home’s four segments.



“Her son and stepdaughter live across the meadow and have a couple of young kids,” says Ben Waechter, FAIA. “She wanted a house close to the grandkids, and this was a special property. She asked for a single-story house of about 2,300 square feet with three bedrooms and two and a half baths. That was about it. The real design driver was the meadow, trying to elevate the experience of the meadow with whatever this new house would become.”

His initial sketches explored ways to embrace the adjacent public space, called Madison Meadow, without being completely exposed to the locals enjoying the park. That, and the square-shaped lot, led to the development of a squarish courtyard house with a private meadow, or “clearing,” at its center. “On one hand, the public meadow has big beauty to it; we wanted the building to be subservient but also have a scale appropriate to the largeness of the meadow,” Ben says. “So we envisioned the house as having a sculptural presence.”

The completed design accomplishes the delicate task of standing out while blending in. With its walls, roof, and soffits wrapped in standing seam metal, the 2,000-square-foot house reads as a monolithic, flat-roofed structure one and a half stories tall, “as if carved from a single shape,” Ben says. “The idea was that the simple shape would fit well within the bigness of the meadow” while respecting the scale of mostly one-story houses around it. Inside, however, the cantilevered rooflines slope down toward the courtyard. Pitching all the rainwater to the inside eliminated the need for a gutter system and its seasonal upkeep. More poetically, the design



invites the owner to experience rain as a kind of theater. “When it rains, the roof is a dynamic sculpture in a way,” Ben says. “You see the water falling in sheets if it’s really pouring.” The courtyard’s frothy native grasses were selected for their tolerance to the heavier downpours that occur in winter, and an overflow system diverts excess water outside the building footprint.

A Sense of Place

Much like the natural world outside its door, the architecture achieves a harmonious balance. Ben envisioned the floor plan as four pavilions—one anchoring each corner of the courtyard—with the cantilevered rooflines providing continuous outdoor cover. Linking the pavilions are four terraces, or breezeways—two open and two



This page: Interior finishes are restrained and serene to keep the focus on the natural world beyond.



enclosed with glass—that invite courtyard living in all kinds of weather. Visitors enter through a gate on the north between the one-car garage and the entry/kitchen pavilion, which contains a mudroom/laundry, powder room, kitchen, and pantry. Abutting it on the southeast is a full-glass dining room and lounge breezeway that connects to a third solid pavilion housing two guest bedrooms and a bath. A 90-degree turn takes you to the second glassy space—the living room—and then to the enclosed primary suite on the southwest corner. Completing the rotation, an open terrace between the bedroom and garage faces both the larger preserve and the interior meadow.

In the best architectural tradition, the exterior responds to the landscape’s scale, but inwardly it makes an almost magical shift to human size. The feeling comes as a surprise. “When you walk into the courtyard, because of the angle of the roof, it’s a more intimate scale because you’re perceiving the lower eave,” Ben says. The metal cladding is Bonderized, a dipped coating typically used as a primer that is durable on its own. “It isn’t a solid color; there’s some visual movement that will patina,” he says. Although the material and application are unusual for a house, his stepmother trusted him with the choice. “A painted metal wouldn’t fit in as well with the natural tones and textures of the meadows,” he says. “Even though maybe she wouldn’t have thought of it, she liked the idea that it doesn’t need to be repainted, and because of the form, there are no gutters to maintain.”

It was builder Randy Chalus’ first introduction to the material, too. One hurdle for him and the metal

Meadow House

Eugene, Oregon

ARCHITECT: Ben Waechter, FAIA, principal in charge; Lisa Kuhnhausen, project architect, Waechter Architecture, Portland, Oregon

BUILDER: Chalus Construction

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Grummel Engineering

PROJECT SIZE: 2,000 square feet

SITE SIZE: 0.22 acre

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Lara Swimmer

KEY PRODUCTS

DISHWASHER/RANGE/RANGE HOOD: Miele

DOORS: Sierra Pacific

FAUCETS: MGS, Watermark

LIGHTING: WAC, Foscarini, Artemide, Kuzko

PAINT: Benjamin Moore

RECESSED ROLLER

SHADES: Lutron

REFRIGERATOR:

Blomberg

SHOWERHEADS:

Watermark

SINKS: Kraus, Duravit

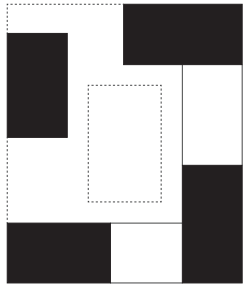
TOILET: Duravit, Starck

TUB: Blu Bathworks

WASHER/DRYER:

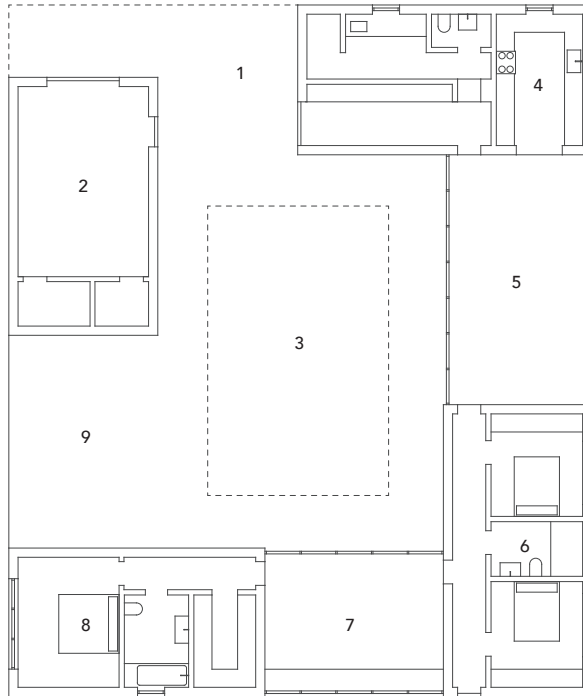
Samsung

WINDOWS: Sierra Pacific

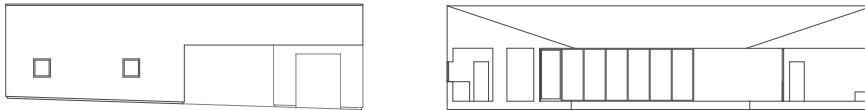


FLOOR PLAN

1. Entry from Street
2. Garage / Workshop
3. Courtyard
4. Kitchen / Mudroom / Pantry
5. Dining Terrace
6. Guest / Bedroom Suite
7. Living Terrace
8. Main Suite
9. Meadow Terrace



ELEVATION



SITE PLAN



The standing seam roof cantilevers from the walls and dips to shed water into the central meadow, providing shelter for pathways and eliminating the need for gutters.



subcontractor, who builds pole barns, was making sure the standing seams on the roof and walls were perfectly aligned. In the absence of gutters, another puzzle was creating the cleanest look possible with custom metal flashing and positioning the drip edge precisely to shed water into a gravel gutter along the planting perimeter.

“It was a matter of combining the reality of what rain does and what they were looking for,” Randy says. “Between me, the guy doing the work, and the guy bending the metal, it was something we had to work through.”

Beneath the trussed roof, the attic space contains forced-air heating and cooling equipment.

Interior materials are durable,

“The public meadow has big beauty to it; we wanted the building to be subservient but also have a scale appropriate to the largeness of the meadow.”

—Ben Waechter, FAIA

calming, and recurring to keep the focus on the open-air courtyard: slab-on-grade terraces, white oak floors and quartersawn white oak cabinetry, quartz-composite countertops, Sheetrock walls, tiled baths, and

aluminum-clad wood windows.

The meadow-within-a-meadow scheme is a satisfying example of the firm’s guiding design approach to all of its work, which they call the Clarity Project. “The outcome of organizational clarity is a building that is easy to understand upon first glance,” they write. “The resulting form is made up of solids and voids, where the solids have purpose embedded within them and the voids invite us to inhabit the building.... Clarity in experience leads to a sense of being more grounded, more comforted, and more at home.” It’s certainly an apt description for this indoor-outdoor dwelling, which honors the preserve’s signature character and value to the community.—*Cheryl Weber*



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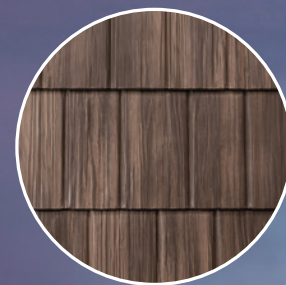
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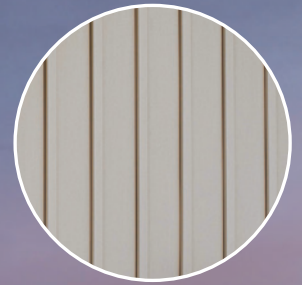
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Steel Louise

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
SILO AR+D

Steel Louise takes its name from the corrugated cladding and standing seam roofing that wrap its jaunty geometry, but it also suggests the mettle required by owner/architect Marc Manack to get it built in this transforming neighborhood in Charlotte, North Carolina, during the height of the COVID pandemic.

“We acquired the lot in Belmont from one of the firm’s first clients. It was really close to Uptown, which is our downtown in Charlotte. It was 2017 and at the front end of the neighborhood’s transformation,” Marc recalls. “The original houses here had been built by the mill owner for the people who worked there. Many had become rentals; many neglected. Our



house on the lot had been very neglected—and it was poorly constructed originally. We had to demolish it. That process took us about a year. Then we started to design in 2019—and then the pandemic happened.”

Having spent the previous few years since their relocation from Arkansas living—and, eventually, working remotely—in studio apartments, Marc and his wife were eager to finish the three-bedroom project. But they encountered the severe obstacles familiar to everyone whose house dreams collided with 2020 and its aftermath: major supply chain disruptions, escalating prices for building materials, and—in their case—an inflexible timeline for their bank loan.





This page: Deeply recessed openings lined in black painted wood contrast the white corrugated metal cladding.

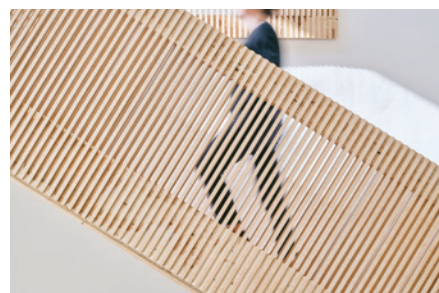
These elements combined with life experience, an uncertain economy, and a transitioning neighborhood to encourage Marc to take (for him) a somewhat conservative path with design choices. “This is actually the second house we’ve done for ourselves,” he says. “Mood Ring was the one I built for us in Arkansas, and it was about half the cost of this one—I’m used to being extremely resourceful. For this house, we had a lot of conversations about doing something





with broader appeal—something with walls and windows as part of it. We thought of this as the tame, marketable version of our last house.”

Mood Ring (named for the multi-colored light schemes that illuminated different aspects of the architecture) was arranged in an upside-down plan. The first level of the T-shaped house tucked workspaces and a laundry/pow-



This page: For the interiors, contrasts are softened to warm woods and white walls, with the black kitchen island a striking accent.



This page: Multiple skylights collaborate with dynamic ceiling angles to convey natural light through the house.

der room next to the garage. The larger second level contained all the main living spaces, along with two bedrooms and baths. And, yes, doors and walls were scarce. It was, says Marc, a “way less conventional house.”

Right Side Up

Steel Louise sticks with the expected floor plan of entertaining spaces on the first level, plus a guest bedroom suite and garage. Upstairs, the main suite, an adjacent porch, and an additional bedroom slot in among the angular rooflines.

Despite its unusual geometries, the house follows the general cadence of neighboring homes, allowing it to fit in while standing out. And there are no moody lighting effects here, just a play of light and dark elements, solids and voids, and an Escher-like shift in planar relationships.

Although they certainly create architectural interest, they were not mere architectural indulgences. “The geometry bends and inflects to grow toward the light and the view,” Marc explains. “It’s almost like 3D connect the dots.



But it’s not as composed as other architects might have done. We like to see what happens and then refine. We set up some parameters and constraints and then see what it looks like. Really, the

roof shapes are as mundane as what we needed for drainage points.”

There are no storm sewers that serve Marc’s lot, so the house must deal with its stormwater on site. “One gutter is like a fountain that extends out. And on the other side we have a scupper that drains into a catch basin. The house is surrounded with French drains.”

The elevations’ voids are a series of porches and recessed windows that control light and views into and out of the house. They create a sense of visual drama, but they are also in keeping with the traditions of the mill housing. “There’s a strong front porch culture here in the neighborhood and in Charlotte. And the entire front porch entry sequence of our house is like the old mill houses. The geometry moves from the scale of those houses and the new houses, but keeps with first principles of design,” Marc says.

“We were aware that we are in a transforming urban neighborhood. We were interested that the house present to the street differently from new construction that follows a more suburban disposition of pulling into and out of the house by car. We wanted to help extend the neighborhood from the street. Our living space becomes like a front porch—you can see from the street to the back of the house and the yard. People walk down the street and wave.”

Even the main bedroom faces the street with a porch and a wall of glass—with optional curtains, of course. Because the exposure is western, the deep porch also serves to shade the interiors, while inviting in filtered natural light. Skylights and carefully placed windows combine with those porches and shifting ceiling planes to convey light throughout the house.

“If you look at the plan, it’s square and that motif moves out,” he explains. “It’s subdivided in fours



Steel Louise

Charlotte, North Carolina

ARCHITECT: Marc Manack, principal in charge; Frank Jacobus, principal, SILO AR+D, Charlotte, North Carolina

BUILDER: SILO AR+D

INTERIOR DESIGNER: SILO AR+D

PROJECT SIZE: 2,400 square feet

SITE SIZE: 0.167 acre

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$210 a square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: Keith Isaacs Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY: Fine Grit (kitchen); Q&N (main bath); Ikea (guest baths)

CLADDING: MBCI corrugated metal

COOKING VENTILATION: Zephyr Monsoon

COOKTOP/RANGE: Wolf

COUNTERS/BACKSPLASH: absolute black granite (kitchen island); fantasy blue marble

DISHWASHER: Asko

DOOR HARDWARE: Sure-Loc

ENGINEERED LUMBER/ROOF TRUSS SYSTEMS: Boise Cascade

FASTENERS: Simpson Strong-Tie

FAUCETS: Grohe (kitchen), Kohler, Signature Hardware (outdoor, main), American Standard

FIREPLACE: Empire (outdoor)

FLOORING: concrete, solid maple

HOME CONTROL: Kasa Smart

HVAC: Amana

LIGHTING: WAC

LIGHTING CONTROL: Lutron

PAINTS/STAINS/COATINGS: Sherwin-Williams

REFRIGERATOR: Fisher & Paykel

ROOFING: Deal's Metals standing seam metal

ROOF WINDOWS: VELUX Wasco Skylights

SINKS: Ruvati (kitchen), Q&N, Ikea

THERMAL/MOISTURE BARRIERS: Tyvek

TOILETS: American Standard

TUB: CLARKE Products (main bath), American Standard

UNDERLAYMENT/SHEATHING: Huber Blue subfloors

VENTILATION: CVS Series Central Ventilation Centrifugal Multi-Port Exhaust Fan, Whole House Bath Fan

WASHER/DRYER: LG

WINDOWS: Sierra Pacific Windows

WINDOW SHADING: SelectBlinds

WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS/SLIDING

DOORS: Quartz Luxury Windows, Quaker, Fenestram



and half of the house is living space. You transition when you enter onto an 8-foot-deep, all-black porch. All the porches are visually connected—you can see the upper porch from the lower one, and the lower one from the upper one. As you move into the living space, it becomes open and bright. All of the geometry is moving toward light and view—the way the ceiling slopes up to the top of the stair and into the skylight.”

Interior materials continue the contrasts of light and dark. “There’s a black and white farmhouse trend here in Charlotte,” says Marc. “And

one of my colleagues at the university is showing what you can do with that palette—but a lot better. Instead of decorative, it’s spatial.”

In addition to the yin-yang of lights and darks, Marc’s house also contrasts smooth, refined finishes—white painted walls, honed granite and marble—with raw, textured finishes—unpolished concrete floors, plywood stairs with exposed veneers, spruce pine 1-by-2s with exposed nail holes.

Despite all the bumps on the way to getting her built, Steel Louise emerged with her composure and grace in-

tact. “We started the project in dire constraints,” Marc says. “I acted as the general contractor as well as the architect. But that enabled me to be resourceful, put in sweat equity, and pivot as needed to get it done. I think, considering all that, we achieved a high level of execution with a modest budget.”

Louise would no doubt agree she received champagne treatment on her beer budget. And best of all, longtime neighbors appreciate the house. “It’s flattering,” Marc notes, “but we feel we’re starting to see weird imitations.”

—S. Claire Conroy

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2. PIPE DREAM

This fall, Kohler and Ann Sacks are launching a new collaboration with designer Shea McGee, encompassing kitchen and bath faucetry and accessories, vanities, and tile. Shown here is the Castia bath faucet, a refined riff on pipe fittings. Available in various finishes and flow rates. Kohler.com

3. MINING THE VEIN

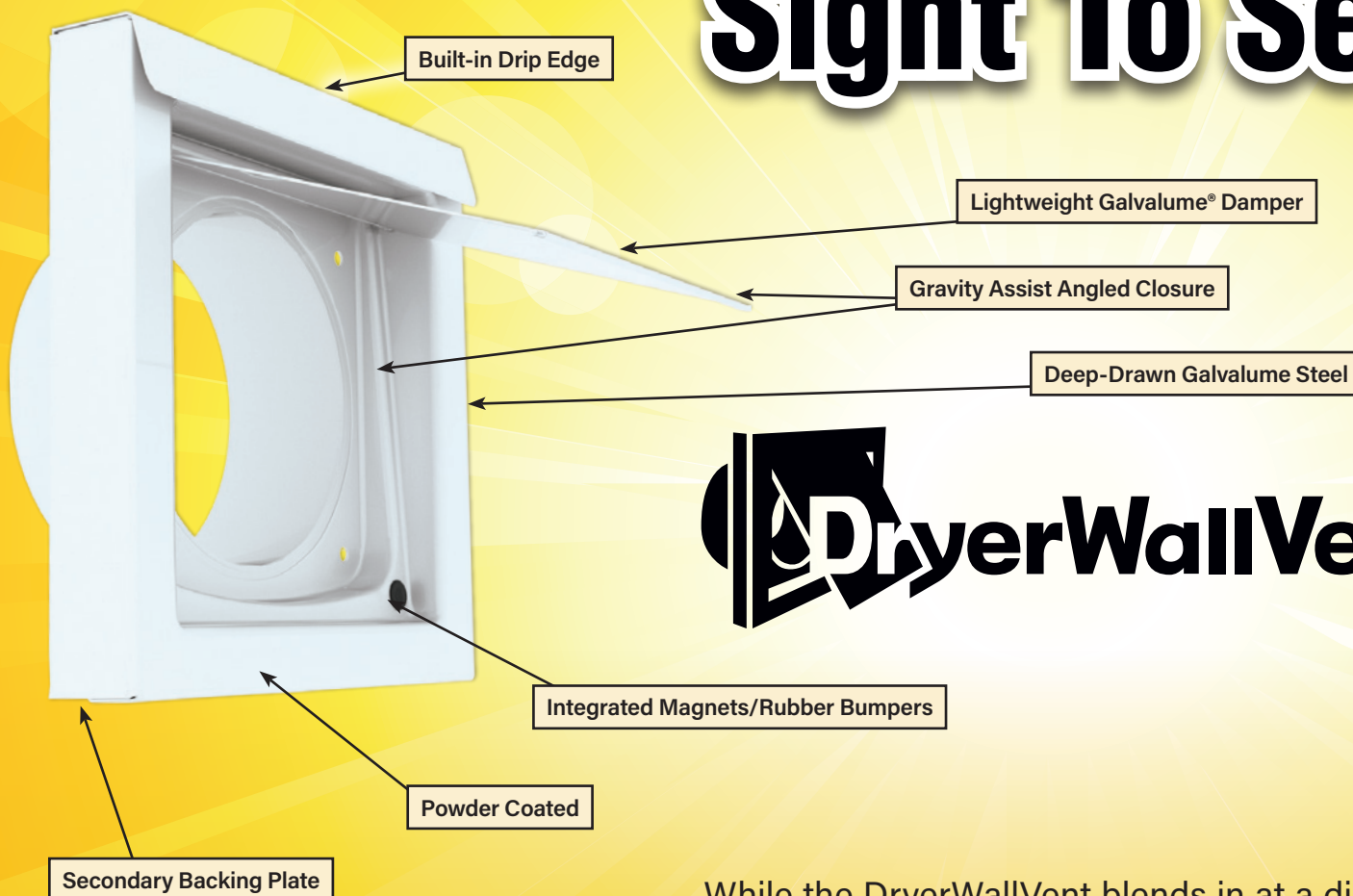
Suggesting precious marble, Porcelanosa's Xtone large-format sintered stone tiles offer more flexibility in size and thickness and more consistency in coloration than natural stone. Two new boldly veined hues join the collection, Blue Roma (shown here) and Alpinus White. Xtone-surface.com

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Wild Thing

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When your site has a steep vertical rise, no part of the design or build comes easily. Brian Korte and Germán Spiller’s developer client complicated matters even more by requesting a very large, marquee property—more than 10,000 square feet of conditioned space, plus bountiful terraces for outdoor living. The team’s solution is to “battle our way up the hill” with an upside-down floor plan.

“Our client wanted the house to be the jewel in the development,” Brian says. Wildcat Hollow is a collection of six high-end residences in Austin’s West Lake Hills area. Several of the city’s noted architects are designing houses there, but Clayton Korte is the only firm doing two—this, the largest one, and another about half the size next door.

Germán enumerates the list of highly curated spaces they’re designing: “There’ll be a wine room, exercise room,



gift-wrapping room, a four-car garage with lift, and a man cave over the garage.” Oh, yes, there’s also a guest suite on the lowest level, three bedrooms and baths on the second level, and a luxurious main suite on the top level, where the best views lay.

In cooperative weather, the top level, which also contains the key living and entertaining spaces, can open fully to a covered terrace, outdoor fireplace, barbecue, pool, and 270-degree views of the Austin skyline and rolling hills beyond.—*S. Claire Conroy*

Project: Rolling Hills Residence; architect: Brian Korte, FAIA, and Paul Clayton, AIA, principals; Germán Spiller, associate and design lead, Clayton Korte, San Antonio, Texas; builder: Foursquare Builders, Austin, Texas; project size: 10,196 square feet; site size: 4.497 acres; visualizations: Clayton Korte



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