

RD

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN



FOR ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS
OF DISTINCTIVE HOMES

VOL. 1, 2026

Scene Stealers



“The house really wanted to be a house in the forest, a house that occupied the treetops.”

— Gabe Hodge, Architect, Materia Prima Studio

Make space for listening to the landscape

"Sometimes landscape-responsive architecture affects designs in subtle ways, while for others, it's more profound. In the case of "Forest Retreat," place it on the "more profound" side of the ledger. For this home nestled in the rolling hills and farmland of northeast Pennsylvania, the lot and land completely turned the traditional floor plan on its head.



ALL ABOARD

From early in the design process, architect Gabe Hodge knew that to capture the potential – and the views – of the heavily wooded site, he needed to raise the main living space up. Not only was the hilly property calling for it, but there was also a unique, historic element at play: a more than century old, but long abandoned, railroad bed that cut through one side of the lot. This feature that once saw locally harvested ice and freshly cut timber transported by train through the area, now created a returned-to-nature buffer that made the perfect privacy berm for the home.

"It's unique because it's upside down. Our bedrooms are on the first floor, and our main living area and kitchen is on the second floor."

— Jenn, Homeowner



UPSIDE DOWN LIVING

Hodge sited the home along the railroad bed and placed the bedrooms on the first floor, creating calm, quiet, sleeping quarters. But then for the second floor, he designed a large, open, vaulted space. The effect is reminiscent of a wooden ship at sea, with warm wood, multiple beams, and natural views (oh, the forest views!) everywhere.

"I really wanted a house that felt like it had always been here ... a house that felt like it was part of the natural landscape."

— Bill, Homeowner



BLENDED INTO THE BRANCHES

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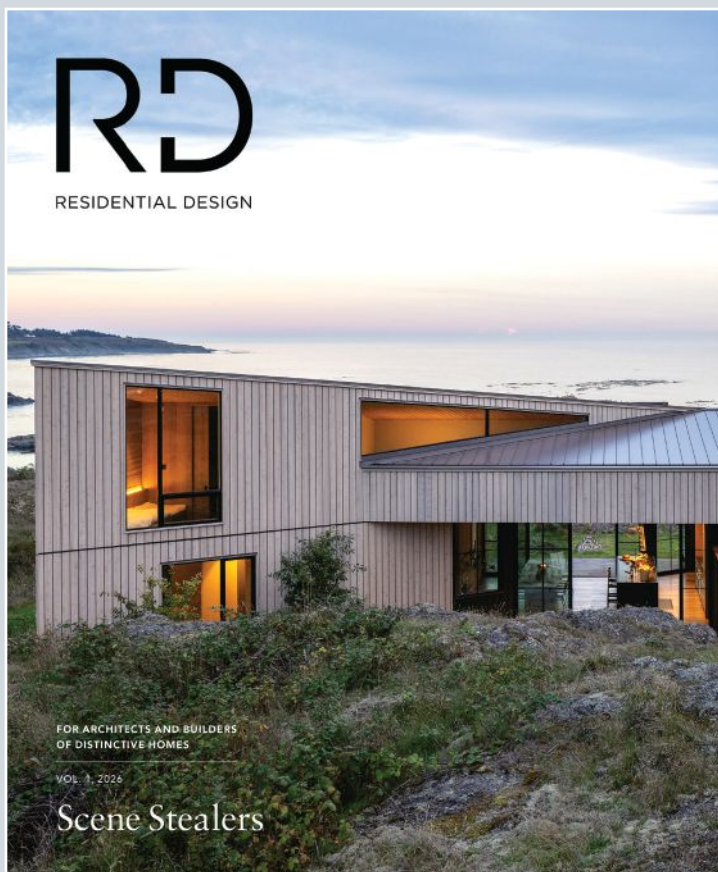
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Piché Architecture designs a Boulder, Colorado, home for exposure and enclosure.



On the Cover: False Bay by Heliotrope Architects.
Photo: Sean Airhart



Welcome to Volume 1, 2026, 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.

RD

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The Next Chapter



Ten years ago, a former colleague approached me with the idea of rebooting a venerable magazine for architects and custom builders. I had just moved with my family from Washington, D.C., to Atlanta, and was between jobs. I was busy packing up houses, selling houses, renting houses, and eventually buying a house, so the conversation slipped to the back burner of my mind as I tried to get life settled for my spouse, young son, and far too many pets.

In the meantime, the idea kept simmering with my former colleague and his business partner at SOLA, Inc., until they decided to give it the green light. Later came more conversations, several trips to Atlanta, and this magazine was born. For a print journalist, it was a dream job. SOLA's owners, Paul DeGrandis and Patrick O'Toole, supported me in every decision I felt was necessary to put together a top-notch magazine for my favorite audience.

Believe me, this doesn't usually happen in the publishing world. And, when it does, these resources are typically eroded over time and the editor faces compromise after compromise—until that sad day when the magazine ceases print production and moves exclusively online. RD and I were spared all this, and SOLA remains steadfast in its commitment to print.

I savor my good fortune, but, alas, the time has come for me to pass it on to the next print-loving editor. This is my last issue as chief editor of RD. And it's rather nice that it aligns with the tenth birthday of RD's conception. During the search for my replacement, my favorite residential architecture writer and longtime collaborator, Cheryl Weber, will serve as interim editor. You could not be in better hands than with Cheryl. I always told her that when she decided to retire, I would have to do so as well. I'm just beating her to it.

Given SOLA's unwavering support of RD, I am confident in the magazine's bright future. I'm also confident in the future of residential architecture. I started out writing about the profession in the early '90s, when architecture was reeling from the excesses of the '80s. Design has come a long way since then, especially modern architecture. It's shed much of the hubris that subjected clients and projects to "theories" and "ideas." And that new humility has brought riches of soul and heart to residential work.

We can give much of the credit for the maturation of the discipline to the regional modernism movement. Architects began to listen closely to the land, to local history and traditions, and to clients—of all people—about how they really want to live. This practice continues to yield wonderful, specific responses to site, client, and program that delight me to this day.

Rest assured I will be watching this space for your work and cheering you on as you reach for new heights on behalf of your clients.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

S. Claire Conroy
Editor-in-Chief
claire@SOLAbands.com

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A Letter from the 2026 AIA CRAN Chair

BY ELLEN PERKO, AIA

It has been more than a dozen years since I attended my first Custom Residential Architects Network (CRAN) Symposium in Newport, Rhode Island. At the time, I was leading a single-family residential group within a large Boston architectural firm. That symposium left a lasting impression on me with its inspiring home tours, which ranged from a grand Newport mansion to a “hard hat” tour of a house under construction. The event offered a variety of talks, including in-depth explorations of the design foundations of New England architecture and practical discussions on the benefits of collaborating with real estate and marketing professionals to grow our businesses.

From that first experience, I realized that I had found my professional community—people who share my passion and values. There was much to take back to Boston’s local Residential Design Committee, so that we could become more deeply involved in the national CRAN committee.

As of January 2026, I am honored to take on the role of chair of our CRAN Knowledge Community within the AIA. This new responsibility is both humbling and motivating. The previous year, led by the inspiring Marica McKeel, set a high standard, and I recognize that following in her footsteps will be a challenge. However, I believe there is still much we can accomplish together.

Residential architects hold a unique position to make a significant impact in every community where we practice. With the demand for housing in the United States higher than ever, each of us is uniquely suited to step up and contribute meaningfully. We are trained to deliver beautiful, thoughtful designs and to offer creative solutions that enhance our clients’ lives. Wherever your practice is based, remember that our work has the

power to improve lives in real, tangible ways.

The support of the CRAN community elevates the quality of our work. Knowing that fellow residential architects share similar experiences fosters valuable relationships and mutual understanding within our profession. When our local CRAN chapters interact with each other and with the national CRAN group, we become a powerful force.

In the coming year, you will have many opportunities to engage with CRAN. Look out for our AIAU presentations, where we strive to stay ahead of industry trends—this year, we are preparing a session on artificial intelligence. CRAN will also host a forum during the AIA Conference on Architecture & Design in June.

Please mark your calendars for the CRAN Symposium in San Antonio, Texas, from September 23 to 26. One of our first symposiums was held in Austin, Texas, and returning to the state promises to be an eye-opening experience, especially for those more accustomed to colder climates. Comparing and contrasting the design and functional challenges of the area should be educational. The event will feature presentations on San Antonio’s rich architectural history, showcase its talented residential architects and design professionals, and offer a few surprises. The home tours will undoubtedly be a highlight, and we also aim to spotlight new technologies in building products and design processes.

Throughout the year, the CRAN leadership will continue to work nationally and locally to highlight the value of good residential design. I hope you will join me on this journey.

Ellen Perko, AIA, is a Senior Associate and Senior Project Manager at EMBARC in Boston. www.embarcdesign.com



Ellen Perko, AIA

Photo: Kure Creative

Photo: Flaunt PHOTOGRAPHY



Photos: Brian Doherty

Left to right: EMBARC’s Boston-area multifamily projects include 147 Kent Street in Brookline, Terrazza in Wellesley, and 57 University Road in Brookline.

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The Pursuit of Perfection

JACOBSEN ARCHITECTURE
DELA PLANE, VIRGINIA

One of the most beguiling challenges in architecture is how to make minimalism look effortless. The late Hugh Newell Jacobsen was preoccupied with a variation on this challenge: how to bring the classic American farmhouse into the minimalist fold. What became known as “Monopoly houses” have a surreal perfection that can only be obtained



Photo: Jacobsen Architecture

Simon Jacobsen

through laborious attention to detail. In the firm's latest monograph, *American Modern Home* (Rizzoli, 2022), Paul Goldberger writes: "[They were] one part abstract, minimalist sculpture, and one part celebration of the symbolic meaning of the traditional house."

Hugh got the name recognition as a "famed Modernist architect" with a celebrity clientele, per his 2021 obituary in the *New York Times*. But for the last thirty years, his partner in crime was his son, Simon Jacobsen. And for most of that time, they were co-equal partners in Jacobsen Architecture.

"Here's the thing—we're both trying to solve the same problem, working together to continually refine the design of the buildings, the furniture, the lighting. Everything is minimized so there's no

extra little bits. That's very difficult. But that is the art form of our firm," says Simon, who speaks with enthusiasm about their shared obsession. To him, the work has felt like one long continuous project. "We would carry on the thing that we didn't get quite right in the last project—or the last five projects—into the new project," he says.

According to Simon, he and his father had something else in common: They both had to grapple with dyslexia and ADHD. "[Our neurodiversity] helped us be very creative in coming up with alternative ideas left and right, and we were always working around our problems. We made relationships and got through the side doors," he says.

Among parent-child collaborations in architecture, the Jacobsens' working relationship appears to be particularly harmonious. Starting at age 13,



Photos: Jonathan Reece

Opposite and this page: Completed in 2018, Bray House exemplifies the Jacobsen tradition of repeating patterns of taut gable roofs, which here expand the original 1663 structure. The siding looks traditional but is designed as a rainscreen system with heavy waterproofing behind it.



Photo: Robert C. Lautman

McKinney Residence, completed in 1994, soon after Simon joined his father's practice, features pocketing glass doors and transparent railings that were unusual for their time.

The siding is a rainscreen that is crisply detailed with corner boards and aggressively waterproofed in lieu of gutters and downspouts. The siding also covers the tops of the foundation walls, so that there is no distracting transition between the house and the ground plane. "We build to $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch, that's in our contract," says Simon.

Likewise, interiors are designed to be elegant blank canvases to showcase the homeowners' prized possessions and furnishings. Large glass openings and volumetric spaces create a prism effect of bouncing light and shadows.

Houses of Many Gables

Among the early projects that defined the firm's mission was the McKinney Residence in Wilmington, North Carolina. It was completed in 1994, and Simon had recently joined the firm. "Here he is basically starting what I'm going to finish 30 years later," says Simon. "This house radicalized me."

The house has a repeating pattern of distinctive pitched roofs, pocketing glass doors, and transparent glass railings, which were unusual in residential architecture at the time. It also had other innovative details: Hugh had figured out how to ventilate the roof by adding a continuous 1-inch-wide slot along the length of the roofline, which was barely perceptible but met the building code and eliminated the need for an overhang.

Nearly a decade later, in 2002, the Fletcher Residence in Nashville, Tennessee, would lean into the iconic gabled form by repeating it seven times—as if seven small houses were all huddled together in a pack. The historic references are clear, but it's an artistic interpretation of the forms and elements, including the windows on the façade, which are unusually small and surprisingly placed. The cleverness of the home is fully revealed in the floor plan: all the spaces are neatly organized into seven volumes, which are arrayed in three tiers to create a classically symmetric floor plan. (One of the seven "houses" is actually a garage, a way to completely conceal car storage within vernacular architecture.) A main corridor runs through the center so that "it's not like a rabbit warren as you're walking through the house," notes Simon.

Simon started helping out at his father's office in Washington D.C.'s, Georgetown neighborhood. He joined the firm in 1994 after studying architecture at the University of Illinois Chicago. In 2007, Hugh suggested that they start a new firm together, Jacobsen Architecture. By that point, says Simon, projects that he had done the lion's share of work on were gaining recognition, showing that he had mastered his father's aesthetic. "I was following his formula and winning awards," he says. Since his father's death in 2021, Simon has continued to run the firm, with a remote staff of four, out of a farmhouse in rural Virginia.

"I've got a long way to go in this business," says Simon, who is 60 this year. "I don't know what's next. But you'll still be able to tell it's a Jacobsen building."

Some of the signature elements of a Jacobsen building: gable roofs, traditional siding, structures that appear to be at grade; clean, modern interiors. But of course, perfection lies in the details. The gable roofs are always at a precise 45-degree angle.



Photo: Simon Jacobsen

Hugh's mirrored mausoleum is 6 feet wide (his height) and 3 feet 11 inches deep (his birth date).

A big part of the Fletcher Residence's charm is that not only is the house distilled to its essence, but so is the surrounding landscape. The house progresses up a gentle slope, surrounded by neat lawn—a white volume on a green plane.

“A lot of people make a mistake by planting around the foundation of a building, I think,” says Simon. “We’ve gone through all this blood and sweat and treasure to make this thing as pure as possible, so it should touch the ground beautifully. And if we put a bunch of bushes there, that’s just silly.”

Integrating New and Old

When confronted with the genuine article, the firm figured out how to incorporate it. Bray House was the oldest house in Maine, dating back to 1663, located in the seaside village of Kittery Point. (During the design of this project, which was completed in 2018, Hugh was very ill.) While the two-story, 1,800-square-foot home wasn't on the historic register, Simon presented a plan to the new owners where the original house would be retained as the centerpiece of a new home. To supplement it, he designed 7,000 square feet of gabled additions, creating a courtyard home around a pool and terrace. The collection of peaked rooftops mimics the organic way the homes of yesteryear expanded, adding more buildings as needs required.

The new additions pay homage to the past with their clapboard siding and tall casement windows. Instead of “borrowing” the windows from the original house, which Simon didn't think were very interesting, he went around the neighborhood and found ones that he liked better in the local church, which were distinguished by enormous frames that

“I don't know what's next.
But you'll still be able to tell
it's a Jacobsen building.”

—Simon Jacobsen



Photo: Robert C. Lautman

An artistic interpretation of historic forms, the Fletcher Residence is neatly organized into seven peaked volumes connected by a central corridor.



Built in 2007, the Spring Trail house in Stowe, Vermont, features tiny concealed overhangs in order to comply with city requirements while still maintaining the perfectly clean shape of the house.

cast deep shadows. “That’s what this art form is,” he says. “We’re pushing and pulling within these sacred shapes.”

To ensure that the original house retained its prominence, the architect was careful to keep the additions at a lower height. “We could not, in all righteousness, overshadow the old house,” says

Simon. “I was so worried about being arrogant and slamming into it and ruining its proportions.” The original house, which now contains the guest bedrooms, is connected to the new buildings on either side by glass-enclosed walkways, creating a distinctive transition and offering a sweeping view of the ocean. To distinguish new from old, the additions



also have 3-inch-wide clapboard instead of Bray House's 7-inch-wide clapboard, and standing-seam metal roofs instead of a wood-shingle roof.

Bray House itself got a complete retrofit, inside and out. "The old house had to be restructured as it was about to fall down," recalls Simon. "We tried to get as close as possible to materials and methods of 1663—we used wooden pins and dovetail connections in the ax-cut chamfered beams. We didn't want to disturb the truly ancient interior plaster finishes and millwork, so to accomplish this surgery, all the new ducting and wiring was installed from the outside. My main responsibility to the old house was to ensure that nobody would try to tear it down or think of it as too unrefined."

The black chimney caps are a wink to the original owner, John Bray, who was a supporter of the British during the American Revolution; Loyalists would paint a black stripe on their chimneys to let the British know not to bombard their houses.

The Latest Refinements

About to break ground is a 5,500-square-foot house in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. To Simon,

it represents the apotheosis—or about as close as he can get—of the classic white house that he has worked on over the past decades. It is a further abstraction of the Fletcher Residence in Tennessee, with a façade that is nearly windowless. The sharply defined forms appear to be made of board-formed concrete (but are actually clad in vertical cedar siding), with no overhangs. "The surprise is in the back, where it is all glass and the main great room ceiling rises to 23 feet, offering vast views of the pool and orchard arranged in straight alleys," notes Simon.

When asked about the future, Simon says it will depend a lot on what clients are looking for, but that he will continue the firm's approach of making a house more interesting by dividing it up into smaller volumes. "We want to have turns, and shadow lines," he says.

One of Simon's children is currently a freshman in architecture school, so chances are good that there will be another generation of architects in the family. "He is far more drawn to architecture and design at 18 than I was at 26," notes Simon. "I would love to have him in the firm, but it's not up to me."—*Lydia Lee*

The firm is about to break ground on Bloomfield Hills, a culmination of the strong, simple geometries Simon has been perfecting for years.



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AC/BD residence

THE RALEIGH ARCHITECTURE COMPANY
CARY, NORTH CAROLINA

A client with more than a passing interest in design is rare, but a client with a connection to a renowned 20th-century architect is next level. A physician couple relocating to Cary, North Carolina, had insight to the design process from a previous renovation they had undertaken and, more extraordinarily, from a personal tie to a pioneer of Modern architecture: one of their grandfathers was a protégé and then business partner of Mies van der Rohe.

During a planning meeting with the Raleigh Architecture Company (RACo.) and the Raleigh Construction Company (RCCo.), the owner with the

distinguished connection brought drawing scans of her grandparents' Modern residence in greater Chicago and fondly recalled her time there as a child. RACo. principal-in-charge Craig Kerins, AIA, knew then that their new residence would “honor her lineage and fascination with architecture.”

Another project objective, more related to logistics, was to keep the house's public and private areas separate. The clients' demanding careers meant they needed as much undisturbed sleep as possible, particularly when they are working different shifts.



Integrated but Distinct

Located in a walkable neighborhood buffered by woodlands, the home's trapezoidal site slopes gently from the road down to a stream at its northern edge. Public and private program areas interlock as L shapes, but the latter spaces are distinguished with rounded corners, softening the 2,050-square-foot modern ranch's otherwise orthogonal plan. Outside, private spaces are clad with a light-colored siding with fine vertical striations, while public spaces are rendered in darker cladding.

In section, the interior evinces the sloping site topography. Intimate gathering spaces such as the living room and primary bedroom nestle into the hillside a few steps down from the main level. A sloped ceiling reaching 13 feet high in the open kitchen and dining area transitions into a 15-foot-tall volume in the sunken living room, which offers full-height views of the wooded yard. "The roof lifts up as a lid to an aperture toward the rear [of the house]," Craig says.



Clockwise from top left: A composite wood deck leads to the sloped yard. The neighboring three-season room and living room offer full-height views outside. Dark cladding indicates public areas. Light colored, striated siding clads the curved walls of private spaces.





Top: The ceiling transitions from 13 feet high in the dining area to 15 feet in the sunken living room. Bottom: Daylight permeates the house through skylights and clerestory windows.

Welcome In

A full-height mahogany front door opens to a foyer illuminated overhead by one of the home's five skylights. Daylight from clerestory windows and a north-facing window wall washes curved walls and bounces off angled ceiling planes, basking the interior in a soft glow. "We try to get as much natural light into our houses as possible," Craig says. Fenestration in the guest bedrooms is limited to minimize views from the street, but a circular skylight in the primary bathroom highlights a round soaking tub, a nod to the design's occasional curve.

A favorite space of the owners and their beloved dogs is a north-facing three-season room that tucks within the home's rectangular footprint. A curtain wall of black-framed screens provides a permeable barrier to the outdoors. "It is critical to have screens because the mosquitoes are bad," Craig explains. "We found a local vendor that builds



the large-format screens in place like a storefront. From the outside, it blends seamlessly with the windows in the living room.”

The primary bedroom fulfills its nickname as a “sleeping chamber” with the help of an owner-made, full-height, blackout curtain that wraps the curved perimeter wall and shrouds the room in darkness. “You can cordon off the

entire room and turn on the white-noise machine, and it [becomes] a very cave-like space,” Craig says.

Durable Goods

The owners wanted their house clad with natural wood siding, but the project team recommended against it: North Carolina’s climate and intense ultraviolet exposure will quickly

deteriorate wood unless it is rigorously maintained. Instead, RCCo. installed an off-the-shelf synthetic product that emulates wood but needs little care. The installers cut the vertically furrowed panels into shorter widths to ease them around the structure’s curved corners. “When it goes around the corner, it’s a lot smoother,” Craig says.

One advantage of overseeing their projects’ design and construction is the ability to “get close” to the materials, Craig says. “While we’re designing, we can also be calling our subcontractors to understand their limits.” For the expanses of dark, smooth cladding panels, the team used exterior gypsum board.

Bold Surprise

White oak floors and cabinetry contribute to an interior palette of whites, blacks, and natural wood commonly seen in modern residences. But the owner’s charge to not “be shy about bold colors for this house” upends the predictability, Craig says. The first sign is a custom sectional upholstered in a rich blue textile that peeks up from the sunken living room. The second is more obvious: The kitchen’s upper cabinets and steel powder-coated backsplash are finished in a bright and unapologetic pink. The effusive hue pops even more with its juxtaposition against white oak



Top: The owner’s admiration of the 1980s Memphis Group of Italian architects and designers inspired the whimsical lighting forms. Bottom: Bright hues enliven a palette of whites, grays, and blacks.



Left to right: A skylight mirrors the round soaking tub. Owner-made curtains black out the primary bedroom. Striated siding wraps curved corners.

pantry cabinets, polished gray dolomite countertops, and a custom white oak dining banquette by RACo. and RCCo.

A vibrant floral quilt hanging prominently on the kitchen end wall

inspired and informed the pink color. The artwork was crafted by the owner's spirited grandmother, about whom the owner had many memorable stories. Though the pink finishes stand out

vividly in the modern interior, they ultimately won over the architects. "It's totally outside of our comfort zone," Craig says, "but we all love it."

—Wanda Lau

AC/BD Residence

Cary, North Carolina

PROJECT CREDITS

ARCHITECT: Craig Kerins, AIA, and Robby Johnston, AIA, principals in charge; Taylor Medlin, AIA, project architect, The Raleigh Architecture Company, Raleigh, North Carolina

BUILDER: Craig Kerins and Bryan Davis, The Raleigh Construction Company, Raleigh

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Chuck Lysaght, Lysaght & Associates, Raleigh

PROJECT SIZE: 2,050 square feet

SITE SIZE: 0.38 acre

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Keith Isaacs

KEY PRODUCTS

APPLIANCES: Fisher & Paykel (range, refrigerator/freezer); Zephyr (ventilation hood); Bosch (dishwasher)

BACKSPLASH: Custom, powder-coated steel

CABINETRY: Xylem Custom Woodworks

CLADDING: NewTechWood (rainscreen); Nichiha (cement board)

COUNTERTOPS: CRS Marble & Granite

DOORS: Southwood Doors (entry); Cortizo (large slider); Cavity Sliders (pocket doors)

ENGINEERED LUMBER: Boise Cascade

FASTENERS: Simpson Strong-Tie

FAUCETS: Brizo (kitchen); Kohler (primary bath); Jaclo (secondary bath)

FIREPLACES: Regency Fireplace Products (living room); Majestic (three-season room)

FLOORING: Rizo Tortora (bathrooms); solid white oak

HARDWARE: Emtec (front door handle)

HOUSEWRAP: Huber Engineered Woods ZIP System

INSULATION, ACOUSTICAL: Rockwool

LIGHTING, EXTERIOR: WAC Lighting

LIGHTING, INTERIOR: Hafele (undercabinet lighting); Tim Rundle (kitchen pendant); &Tradition x Vernon Panton (dining

pendant); Schoolhouse Electric (bathroom sconces); Modern Forms (bathroom)

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS, WALL PLATES, SWITCHES: Leviton Decora

PAINT: Sherwin-Williams (exterior and interior)

RADIANT FLOORING: Schluter Systems

ROOFING: TPO membrane

SINKS: Kraus (kitchen); Kohler (primary bath); E.L. Mustee & Sons (utility)

SKYLIGHTS: Velux

STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: Custom framing; Trus Joist I-joist

SUBFLOORING: Huber Engineered Wood AdvanTech

TILE: Daltile (bathroom floors and walls)

TOILETS: Glacier Bay

TUB: Kingston Brass (primary bath); Kohler (tub filler)

VANITY: Nameek's (bathroom)

WINDOW WALL SYSTEM: Cortizo (store-front glazing); PCA Products (large-format screens)

WINDOWS: Windsor Windows & Doors

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Conflict Studies

A house on a difficult lot creatively integrates a couple's opposing wish lists.

BY CHERYL WEBER

PARADOX HOUSE

ARCHITECT: S^A | SCHWARTZ AND ARCHITECTURE

BUILDER: DKG CONSTRUCTION

LOCATION: SONOMA, CALIFORNIA

Not all client couples have the same vision for their dream house, and it often falls to the architect to creatively reconcile those competing desires. It's a common enough scenario, but perhaps not to the extent of this San Francisco-based couple with two daughters. S^A | Schwartz and Architecture met with them after they bought a challenging lot in California's wine country. With its steep, rocky slope across nearly 3 acres, it wasn't intuitively obvious where to put the house. Further complicating matters, the husband wanted a multistory structure set high above the ground with views to Sonoma Mountain, while the wife envisioned a single-story house that hugged the land. He wanted a formal lawn and, almost whimsically, a pool that he could jump into from the house, while she wanted meandering paths through a garden.



Christopher Baile and Neal Schwartz, FAIA, finessed a high-low solution that seems to work for everyone. “The only place you could have both experiences was at the upper corner of the site,” Neal says, “which was the only point high enough to stand on the ground and see the view. We keyed the house to that natural point, but if you strung a line horizontally across the lot, the house would be floating up in the air, like having a two-story house, because the land sloped away dramatically.” It rests on almost 200 piers dug deep into the rocky soil.

On approach, the first thing you notice is a wedge-shaped, planted mound inset with abstracted stairs. They lead to an entry at the crack between two volumes. The



Clockwise from top left: Rocks excavated for the piers were used to stabilize the ramp from driveway to front door. Living spaces open on grade at the rear.



three-bedroom bar on the left runs roughly north-south, while the perpendicular living wing on the right extends to the rear, opening at ground level to a pool garden. This wing offsets the footprint's rigid geometry. It bends slightly north toward the front, where the dining and family room, office, and a fourth bedroom sit atop the garage.

"Because you're approaching the house from the lower entry road, it looks like a one-story house sitting on the ground," Neal says. "As you approach, you see the land is dropping away and the bedroom wing is floating. A change in perception from farther away to up close was another thing we were interested in."

That arrangement put the pool at the same level as the main living spaces and bedrooms, where a deck running along the pool's length does indeed invite the family to dive in. It also allowed the design team to create a natural grotto where the land falls away under the bedroom wing, next to the pool's retaining wall. "The edge of the pool forms the back of the grotto," Neal says. "We came up with the idea of a foundation spillway that activates the grotto. Water flows over the pool's 8-foot-high by 60-foot-long infinity edge. When it's on, it's like a huge fountain and contributes to the sound, impacting the quality of the space down there. It doesn't get a ton of light, but on a hot Sonoma day it's incredibly cool, and the gap between the pool and curving underbelly of the house pulls air through."

Behind the house, the land slopes up into the ridges of the valley, and the roof shapes reference the hills beyond. The triangulated forms also relate to the rip rap rockscapes that were incorporated into the design. Rocks excavated from drilling the piers were used to create sloping surfaces that act as retaining walls. In the grotto under the bedroom wing, the rock formations rise up and embed the cruciform columns, as if the columns were emerging from the earth. "There was a lot of

thought about how to make that a viable place, so it didn't feel like you were just under the house," Neal says. "Rather than a field of columns, its support depends on the two cruciform columns, tapered from the base to be more elegant. A little light at the top casts a glow down on them at night."

Inside Angle

Those angular lines continue into most interior spaces, as did the architects' efforts to reconcile the clients' competing preferences. The wife, of South African background, loves bold colors, while the husband, whose family came from Iran, prioritized black and gray. At the entrance, a diamond-shaped monitor with a chartreuse-colored interior drops down from



Top: A sculptural skylight with a chartreuse-painted interior helped satisfy the wife's love of bold colors, while black accents and grayed-out white oak millwork played to the husband's penchant for black and gray.



a skylight. Directly below is a “geode garden” that separates the kitchen and dining room. As Neal explains, “The husband had a collection of geodes, and I think he thought I’d hate the idea that the house was filled with them. He started to tease me about it, so I doubled down and said go for it. His love of geodes inspired the skylight and the geode planter underneath it.” That feature led to the creation of a second skylight above the freestanding divider between the dining table and living room. Earthquake-proofed with a mini moment frame, it contains a double-sided fireplace within a bar and media cabinet that rises into the skylight, essentially flipping the design of its counterpart.

This project pushed the architects in directions they wouldn’t normally go. “Most of our work tends toward a warmer palette of soft, natural wood,” Neal says. “In this case, the husband didn’t like any warmth in the wood. We had to beat the warmth out of the floor and cabinetry, which put us in a black-gray palette. The wife was super into really bold pops of color such as chartreuse and bright blue. We tried to lean into that and recognize that the palette would be more contrasty than is typical for us.” Christopher adds: “The walnut kitchen cabinetry was the only material that could go fully black. And we had to do many mockups to get the white oak floor this gray.”

A black-stained walnut stairway descends from the kitchen to the garage. Two stones with similar veining were used in the kitchen—a black slab for the black part of the kitchen, and a white-gray stone to comple-



Above: The primary suite occupies the far end of the bedroom wing and incorporates a pocket garden. Vertical fins, precisely angled and executed, create privacy or admit views in and out of the bedrooms and create a rhythm on the façades.



ment the lighter-toned wood at the island and elsewhere in the house. The wall above the countertop window is waterproof Venetian plaster, which also occurs in the primary bath.

The firm also designed the dining table. Its mirrored chrome legs, which the couple requested, took the shape of the bedroom wing's cruciform columns. They are detailed to reveal pieces of metal that lighten up the heavy wood slab. Custom wallpaper in a vibrant, deep-sea blue makes an appearance in the powder room. In this windowless interior space, a skylight at the top of the high ceiling and a wall angle that echoes the roof geometry lend a sense of drama. But the home's one anomaly is a circular terrarium window in the hallway between the two kids' bedrooms. "The husband announced there had to be a circle window because he thought I hated circle windows," Neal says. "It was another case where we were like, OK, let's put one here and make a planter out of it. A lot of the quirky elements started out through this rapport we had with the clients trying to push us and our buttons, and us embracing it as it made sense with the house."

Rhythm Section

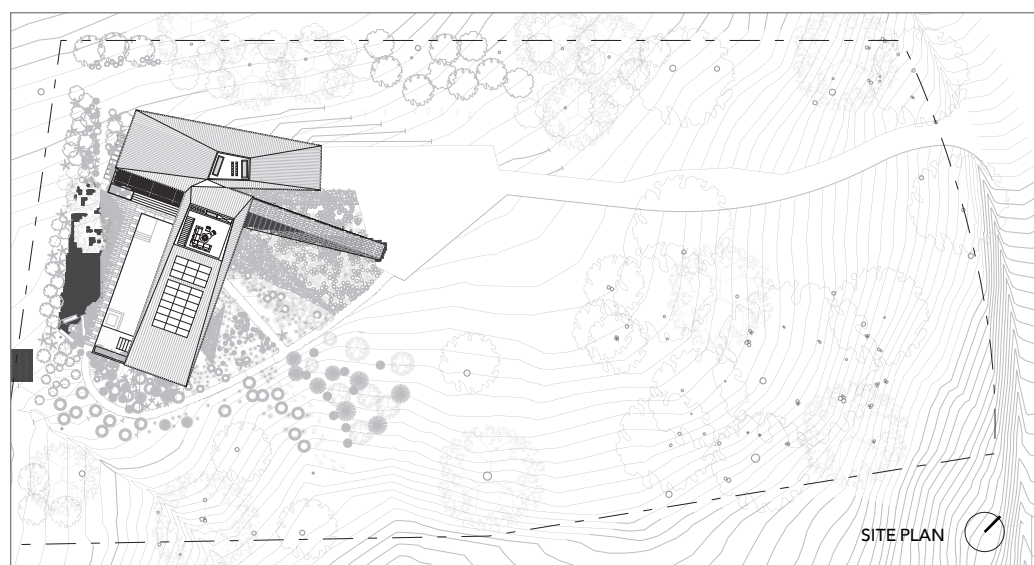
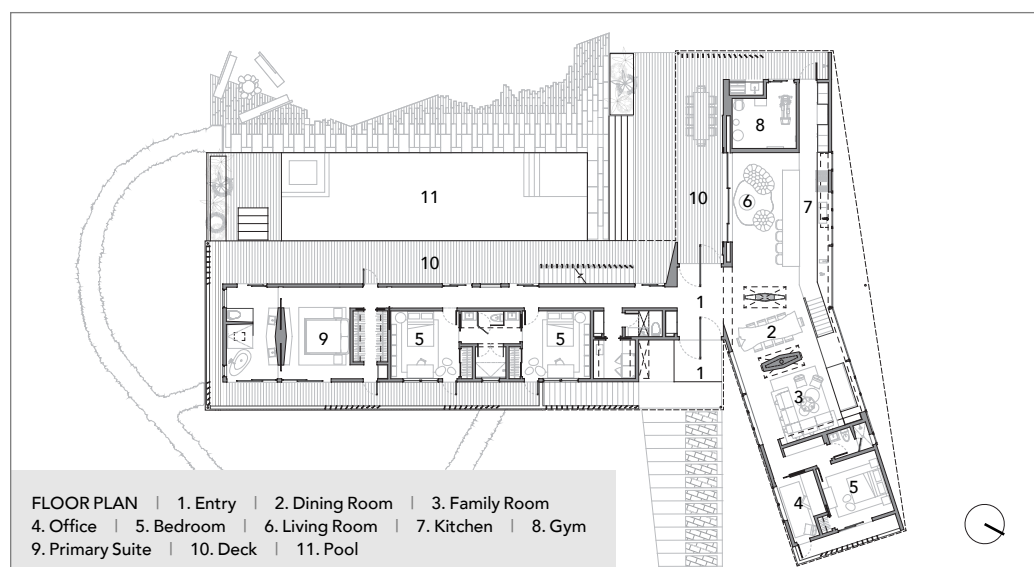
Thin and tailored, the house's silhouette received equally stringent detailing. The challenge, of course, was to create highly custom effects that weren't overly difficult to construct. To meet Sonoma's wildfire code, the architects used 6-inch-wide western red cedar siding, routing the boards to create an irregular rhythm. "We had the contractor rout into them to make each board look like three boards, with two smaller and one bigger," says Christopher. "It also relates to the screens where we have wood fins and metal in between, creating a rhythm as you move across the façade." Soffits are stained black "to make the roof shape feel like a volume. The

black, standing-seam metal roof hides the gutters, angling along the top and bottom like a cap."

Those tapered fins were meticulously engineered to provide screening for the bedrooms. Based on a study of views in and out, every fin is set at a different angle to create privacy or let in the long view and integrated with the guardrail along the front façade. Given the number of variations, the team developed a system that the contractor could easily install. They took a no-waste approach, basing the fins' height on the height of available cedar boards. Diagonal cuts yielded two fins per board. These were bolted into a structural metal shelf set on top of the 42-inch-tall guardrail and along the porch ceiling, with tabs that correspond to each angle. Where the fins occur, every third rung of the guardrail was dropped out



Top: The family frequently uses the deck outside the bedroom wing as a diving board for the pool. *Above:* In the grotto under the bedrooms, water flowing over the pool's infinity edge becomes a cooling feature.



Paradox House

Sonoma, California

ARCHITECT: Principal in charge: Neal Schwartz, FAIA; project architect: Christopher Baile, S[^]A | Schwartz and Architecture, San Francisco

BUILDER: Ronan Hanley, DKG Construction, Novato, California

INTERIOR DESIGN: S[^]A | Schwartz and Architecture

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Kara Stickley, Arterra Landscape Architects, San Francisco

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Stan M. Wu, SMW & Associates, Oakland, California

PROJECT SIZE: 4,500 square feet

SITE SIZE: 2.51 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Bruce Damonte Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

COOKTOP/VENT HOOD: Thermador

CLADDING: western red cedar

DECKING: Ipe

DISHWASHER: Thermador

ENTRY DOORS: Fleetwood Windows and Doors

FIREPLACE: Ortel

FLOORING: Amber Flooring

GARAGE DOORS: Hormann

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEM: Lutron

MILLWORK/MOULDING/TRIM: Millwork Management (custom)

OUTDOOR BUILT-IN GRILL: Artisan Grills

Ovens: Thermador

REFRIGERATOR: Thermador

ROOFING: Metal Sales

VANITIES: Millwork Management (custom)

WASHER/DRYER: Whirlpool

WINDOW SHADING SYSTEM: Hunter Douglas

WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Fleetwood Windows and Doors

WINDOWS: Fleetwood Windows and Doors

WINE REFRIGERATOR: Thermador



so they could continue to the floor. And strip lights embedded in the porch ceiling illuminate each group of fins.

Stucco-clad foundation walls have a subtle texture created with a custom rake. “We wanted grooves $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch deep and $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch wide,” Christopher says. “The lines are not perfectly straight, and you can feel it’s been worked on by hand.”

For builder Ronan Hanley, the grotto’s curved ceiling was his proudest piece of construction. Its smooth stucco coating brings softness and light to the grotto. “It was phenomenally difficult to build,” he says. “About 80 feet long and 35 feet wide, the ceiling had to come up and align with the gutters within $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch, perfectly flush like you see base-board against a floor. And we had to do it 15 feet in the air with the different subs—gutter installers, roofers, framers, electricians—lighting runs along it—and plumbers for the sprinklers installed in the ceiling. But it looks amazing.”

The house uses energy sparingly, thanks to its full off-grid capabilities, including solar panels, an on-site well and septic system, and a graywater catchment system for irrigation. In addition to radiant floors, passive design strategies help to warm and cool the house naturally.

For the design team, the project was an exercise in embracing opposable ideas. “It got us thinking about paradoxes,” Christopher says. “For me it meant that we don’t have to be this or that. Maybe these two things together can be something better.” For their part, the clients love the way the house lights up at night and feels a bit like a resort, Christopher says. And they do jump into the pool from their bedrooms. “They live in a condo on a high floor in San Francisco,” he says. “This is really different—their way of connecting to the outside.” 

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Scene Stealers

Three rural houses respond expertly to terrain, wind, and wide-angle views.

BY CHERYL WEBER



VIA43

STUDIO MM ARCHITECT
OLIVEBRIDGE, NEW YORK

The quiet hamlets of New York's Hudson Valley have long made it a special place for Marica McKeel, AIA, and her husband, who for years divided their time between there and New York City. After she founded her New York City firm Studio MM Architect, which is skilled at designing modern homes that connect intimately with their environment, they began spending more time at their Hudson Valley house with the goal of shifting her practice there. In 2021, the couple made plans to put down permanent





Left to right: The foyer steps into a gallery connecting the main house's two volumes. Wall-to-wall glass brings in views of the outdoors.

roots, purchasing a third-acre clearing with views of the Catskill Mountains. The intent was to build their dream home—one that included a studio large enough for her team of eight, and a separate bunkhouse where the city-based contingent could stay while they worked on local projects.

“When I first designed the house, we had more of a team in the city, and knowing they could come up to the office sometimes, I wanted a place where we could all be together,” Marica says. The resulting detached bunkhouse, which

sleeps six, is now used regularly by several employees. “The whole team pretty much lives up here,” she says, including several who are local. “There are two of us here every day, and three days a week there are four and sometimes five. The office is a good flex space where people can come together and work.”

Designed as two volumes linked by an entry gallery, the main house is laid out north-south near the top of a hill. To the left on approach, the southern volume houses the couple's living quarters on the first floor and their bedroom

above. The northern volume contains the garage, guest room, and gym. On the second level, the spacious architecture studio leads to a rooftop deck.

Separating the studio from the couple's living space was a deliberate move. “During Covid, I could see my desk from my bed, so here I wanted a lot of separation,” Marica says. “It's also why there are two staircases—I have to go downstairs and through the gallery to get from my bedroom to my office. I can step away from work and am less likely to feel the computer sitting there.”



Above and right: Commodious decks extend the living spaces outside in all directions, and the modular living room furniture can be rearranged to engage with the kitchen and dining room or the porches.



Inside Out

In many cases, the optimal solar orientation is at odds with a site's best views, as it was here. With bright living spaces a priority, Marica placed the kitchen, dining, living room, and media room on the southern end of the house, where they open to decks on three sides. "The place we were before was nestled into a valley; I realized I needed sunshine and open space," she says. The living room pushes into the backyard to capture views of the Catskills chain to the north. Near the office and guest room on the northwest, she preserved an old stone firepit with stunning mountain views through the tree trunks—a feature that informed the siting strategy.

The push-pull footprint creates voids that invite extensions for outdoor living. The doglegged living room floats within cedar decks that are continuous with both the dining room and the kitchen. One wall of the corridor connecting the two sides of the house is used as an art gallery, while the glassy exterior wall faces a rear courtyard stretching between them.

"The courtyard becomes this outdoor living room; at night the glass goes away and you can see that art wall from the courtyard," the architect says. "We have a 16-person table in the courtyard so people can experience that space, feeling the gallery and courtyard and views on either side."

White oak floors warm the interiors, including the living areas with their sliding glass doors, walls of windows, and fireplace made of thin stacked blue-stone. The fireplace volume extends to the outside, where a thin steel structure holds the wood. Because the living room is farthest from the entry, and you walk through the kitchen to get there, Marica wanted a bespoke kitchen that read as furniture. To that end, white storage cupboards are integrated into the walls, and two walnut islands—one with a bold marble countertop and waterfall edge—elevate the space. The living room was outfitted with modular furniture that can



Top to bottom: Walnut-and-marble kitchen islands read as fine furniture, while storage and appliances are flush with the white walls. The link between the two volumes doubles as an art gallery, stepping down to a stair hall between the garage and guest room.





Clockwise from top left: The studio wing's stair rail is spare but sturdy. Marica wove the panels on the other stair leading to the primary suite. A long teak vanity anchors the primary bath. Pops of color enliven the guest suite.

easily be shifted to face the fireplace, dining room, or decks.

Upstairs, the primary suite feels grounded and serene. The bedroom looks down on the living room's planted roof. In the bath, a long teak vanity, pocketing doors, and translucent glass add a sumptuous touch. In the opposite volume, the second-floor office contains a kitchenette, conference room, and powder room.

Partners in Craft

While Marica is a stickler for early decision making—her staff often directly manages the subcontractors and craftspeople, as they did here—she took the opportunity to brainstorm with them in real time. The plumber on the project soldered the light fixture above the brass-accented dining room table, also custom, that was brought from their previous residence. During construction she

sat on the office stairs with a metalworker and a woodworker—both friends and fellow Hudson Valley creatives—and sketched a design for integrating the railing into the stair. The top of the stringer was routed to create a channel for a steel bar system to which wood rails were bolted—a play on the slats that create a





Left and above: Perched atop the garage and guest suite, the architectural studio enjoys views of the wooded site and guest patio. *Below:* Built like a glass box, the bunkhouse sleeps six, with each boat-like bunk set facing a different direction.

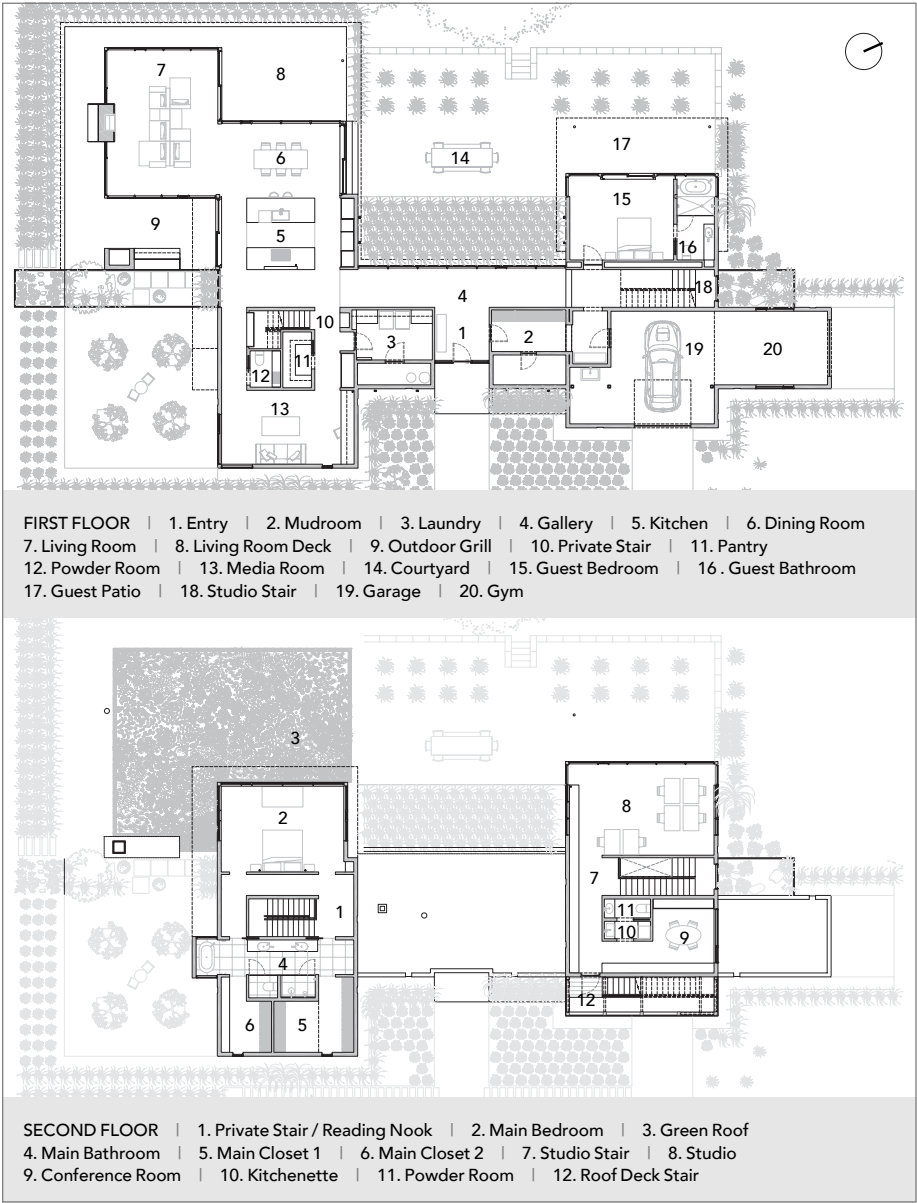
rhythm outside the house. “This allowed for a stable yet slim connection,” she says. “It’s a structurally elegant solution that celebrates each material.”

In the opposite volume, the stair to the primary suite incorporates mini tapestries made from parachute cord woven into a wood frame. They were inspired by an artist that Marica

admires, who creates “ephemeral, colorful, and tactile art pieces with string. The handrail is metal and the wood is the frame that I could weave,” she says. “The way the wood frame connects to the steel gives the wood square its rigidity.” Their gradient hues of orange, pink, blue, and green are a nod to her husband’s love of color.

“A lot of the things in the house are better because of the collaboration with amazingly talented craftspeople,” she says. While some of the objects reflect pure creative experimentation, others carry personal stories. Hanging over the stair to the primary suite is a radio-controlled plane that her husband flew as a kid.

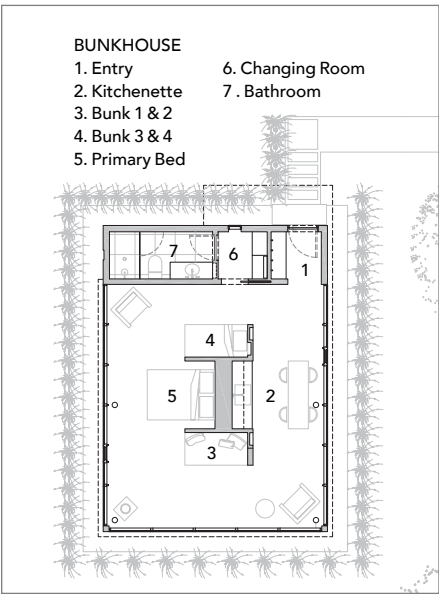
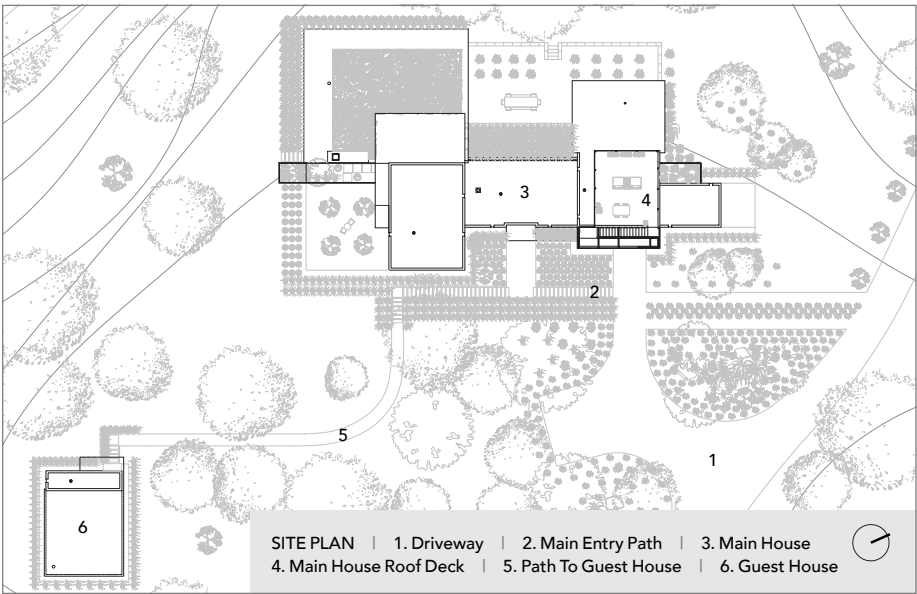




Likewise, the glass-box bunkhouse is detailed like a boutique hotel. Compact while providing privacy in a single space, its four built-in bunk pods and a queen bed each face a different direction and form the core of the space, along with a small kitchen tucked behind the queen bed, between the bunks. “It can house a lot of different groups—family or work team or individual,” she says. “One bunk faces the fireplace and can act as couch.” The building has three sides of glass, with a cedar-clad entry and bathroom creating an opaque façade facing the main house.

A sense of weightlessness prevails. “In a charrette we discussed how to make a thin roof on the glass box,” Marica says. “By moving the columns inside the glass, the windows continue up past the ceiling, so it feels like the roof is floating over the glass box.” A small reveal keeps the bunk edges from touching the floor and ceiling, as if they were suspended in space.

For Marica, these moments embody her collaboration with all the designers and makers who were involved. “I had no idea the house would be this wonderful,” she says. “After about a year, I realized there is an extra calm we have here. People talk about forest bathing and how nature lowers blood pressure. Watching the wildlife every day from the office has made such a difference in our lives.” 





VIA43

Olivebridge, New York

ARCHITECT: Principal in charge: Marica McKeel; technical director: Colbi Campbell; project managers: Gina Kim and Marisa Kaugars, Studio MM Architect, Olivebridge, New York

BUILDER: Max Stratton, Cherry Hill Construction, Accord, New York; owner / construction manager: Marica McKeel, Studio MM Architect

STAIR RAILINGS: Sandro Niessen, Orchard Group, Highland, New York

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Guided Leaf, Saugerties, New York

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Geoff Smith, TYLin, New York, New York

PROJECT SIZE: 4,645 square feet (house), 680 square feet (guest house)

SITE SIZE: 36 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Brad Feinknopf/OTTO

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY AND BUILT-INS: Braxton Alexander, Vernacular Design, California Closets

COOKTOP AND VENT HOOD: Wolf

CLADDING: Pioneer Millworks, Accoya (house); cedar STK (guest house)

COUNTERTOPS: Marble, teak

DECKING: Cedar STK

DISHWASHER: Miele

ENGINEERED LUMBER: LVLS

ENTRY DOORS AND HARDWARE: Marvin / Modern Swinging / Harbrook

FAUCETS: Blanco, Hansgrohe, Vola, Kohler

FIREPLACE: Steel, bluestone, Bodart & Gonay (wood built-ins), Morso wood stove

FLOORING: Hudson Company (white oak), EConcrete

GARAGE DOORS: Overhead Door Company

GREEN ROOF: Hudson Valley Green Roofs

GRILL (BUILT-IN): Grillworks

HOME CONTROL SYSTEM: Google

HVAC SYSTEM: Mitsubishi, hydronic radiant

INSULATION: Rockwool, ZIP

LIGHTING: Ledge, FLOS (exterior); Konzept, Juniper, Louis Poulsen, Soco, Muuto, Pablo Lighting

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEM: Lutron

OVENS: Miele

PASSAGE DOORS/HARDWARE: Emtek, TruStile

ROOF TRUSS SYSTEM: BLI Joists

ROOFING: EPDM

OTHER FITTINGS: Infinity Drain (primary bath shower)

PAINTS/STAINS/COATINGS: Benjamin Obdyke Homeslicker, Benjamin Moore

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero, Summit (undercounter)

SECURITY SYSTEM: SimpliSafe

SINKS: Franke, Duravit, Kohler

SOUND SYSTEM: MonitorAudio, Sonos

SURFACING: Fireclay Tile, Nemo Tile, WOW Tile

TOILETS: Toto

TUBS: Signature Hardware

UNDERLAYMENT: ZIP

WALLPAPER: Calico, Molteni

WASHER/DRYER: General Electric

WINDOWS: Marvin

WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Marvin / Modern Multislide, Harbrook



Gable House

KNOP KILLEEN ARCHITECTS
VAN METER, IOWA

It was the view of a neighboring angus herd that determined Gable House's footprint. Not that the cattle and a picturesque pond were even visible when Cody Knop, AIA, first set foot on the wooded site. It was so thick with trees that he used a drone to get the lay of the land, which comprised 6½ acres of virgin soil. He and his client then chose a natural clearing that allowed them to preserve as many trees as possible, positioning the house near the top of a rise.

Upon starting his firm a few years earlier, Cody had designed a New York City restaurant for the 40-some-



thing client, who then asked for a highly crafted, full-time residence for himself and his dog. Situated on the rural plains about 20 miles southwest of Des Moines, the house was the first ground-up project for both Cody and the builder, Ethan Schoeppner—one of several Ethan had begun at the same time. The two worked together to craft a house that is simultaneously refined and economically efficient. “Practicing in the Midwest, our budgets are modest,” Cody says. “Our client came with a comfortable budget but it wasn’t unlimited. We didn’t want to compromise quality.”

After exploring several different schemes, the architect found magic in two identical gabled buildings that were inspired by Iowa’s agrarian archetypes. The garage and

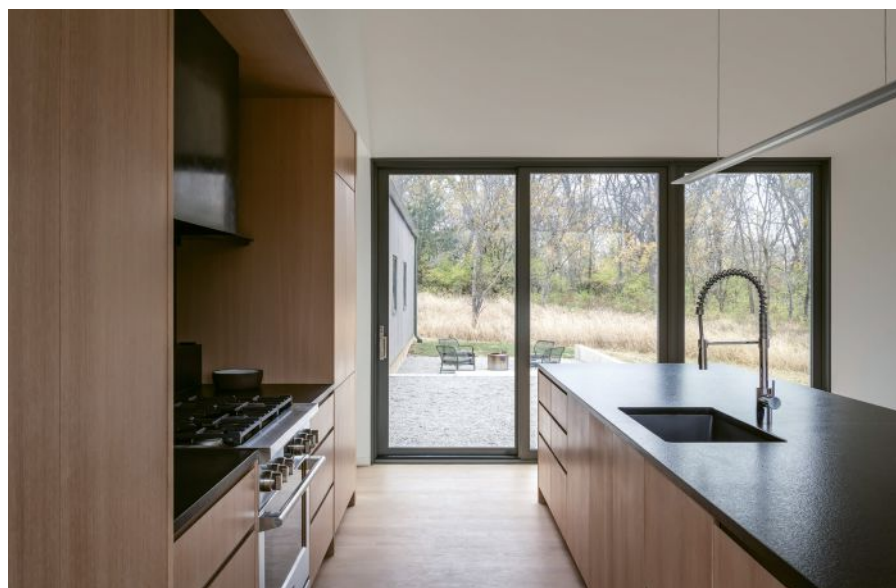




Clockwise from top left: The entry progression along the garage leads to a breezeway link and then the foyer, setting up the great-room view of a pond and pasture.

open-plan living spaces run north-south down the slope, extending from the driveway and culminating in a framed view of the distant pond. The bedrooms are aligned along the perpendicular axis, where surrounding trees provide privacy and a calming backdrop. These two bars are linked by a glazed breezeway that offers glimpses of the landscape in different directions.

Working closely with a local lumberyard that makes pre-engineered wood trusses, the architect leveraged common construction techniques—wood framing with conventional 2-bys—to provide a sense of poetry and simplicity and hit an aggressive budget. Twenty-two



Clockwise from top left: White oak floors and millwork take their muted color cues from the landscape. The kitchen and island are centered in the gabled space.

feet wide with a 14:12 roof slope and standard metal roof, the two wings have the same roof form but different ceiling profiles—vaulted in the living wing, flat in the bedroom wing. Those construction techniques “allowed us to dial in where we put apertures and connect the interiors back to the landscape,” Cody says. “We don’t see the house as having a front and rear elevation because its connection to the landscape was the main thing. There’s the hero view from

the living room, two bedrooms look into a grove of newly planted maple trees to the front, and the primary suite looks east for privacy.” Beneath the living wing is a daylit basement that walks out on grade—space for a future office and theater room.

Crafted Details

Working within those simple forms and a focused material palette, Cody made sure every detail supported the

storyline. The landscape procession sets up the big view of the pond. The front sidewalk extends from the driveway, floating within a 12-foot-wide gravel bed that mirrors the width of the glass breezeway, “so that inherently you know where the front door is and get the view to the pond when you step inside,” he says. The two wings partially enclose a rear patio that can be entered from the breezeway or the kitchen.

Cody also worked closely with the

Gable House

Van Meter, Iowa

ARCHITECT: Principal in charge: Cody Knop, AIA; project architect: Jackson den Herder, AIA, Knop Killeen Architects, Des Moines, Iowa

BUILDER: Ethan Schoeppner, Husk Homes, Waukee, Iowa

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Knop Killeen Architects

PROJECT SIZE: 4,000 square feet

SITE SIZE: 6.5 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$225 per square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: Brandon Huttenlocher

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY: White oak with custom stain

CABINETRY HARDWARE: Custom integrated pulls

CLADDING: Delta Millworks

COOKTOP AND OVENS: Fisher & Paykel

COUNTERTOPS: Honed granite

DISHWASHER: Fisher & Paykel

ENGINEERED LUMBER: TJI floor joists with LVL beams

ENTRY DOORS: TruStile Doors

FAUCETS: Miseno, Signature Hardware, Grohe

FOUNDATION: Concrete

GARAGE DOORS, OPENERS: Haas Door

INSULATION: ZIP System with spray foam insulation

LIGHTING: Rab Lighting (exterior), Visual Comfort & Co., Vode

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS: Legrand

PAINTS/STAINS: Benjamin Moore

PASSAGE DOORS: TruStile

REFRIGERATOR: Fisher & Paykel

ROOFING: Standing-seam metal

SINKS: Miseno, Signature Hardware

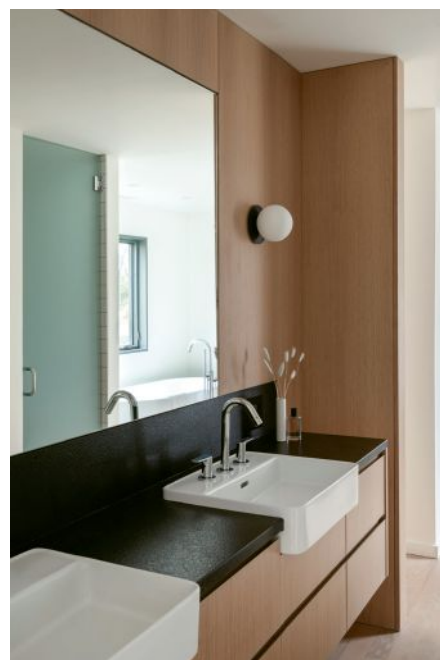
TOILETS: Duravit

TUBS: Signature Hardware

VANITIES AND PEDESTAL LAVS: Duravit

WASHER/DRYER: LG

WINDOWS: Pella

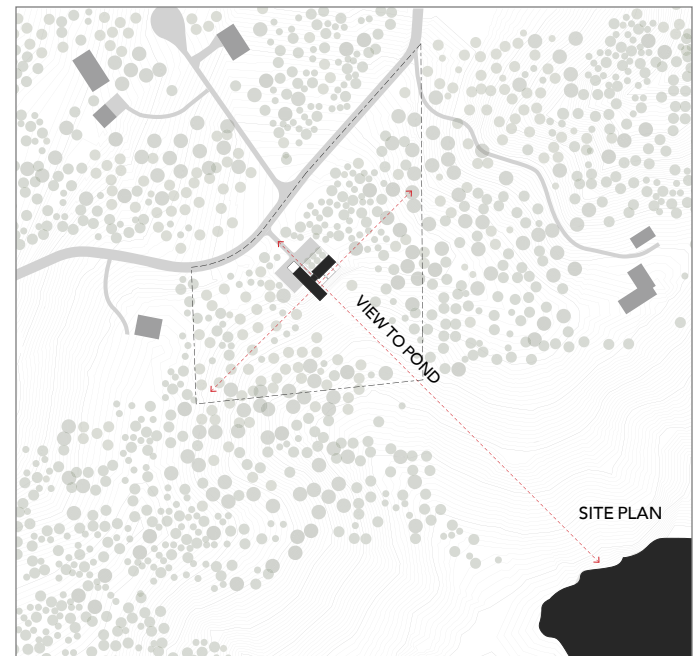
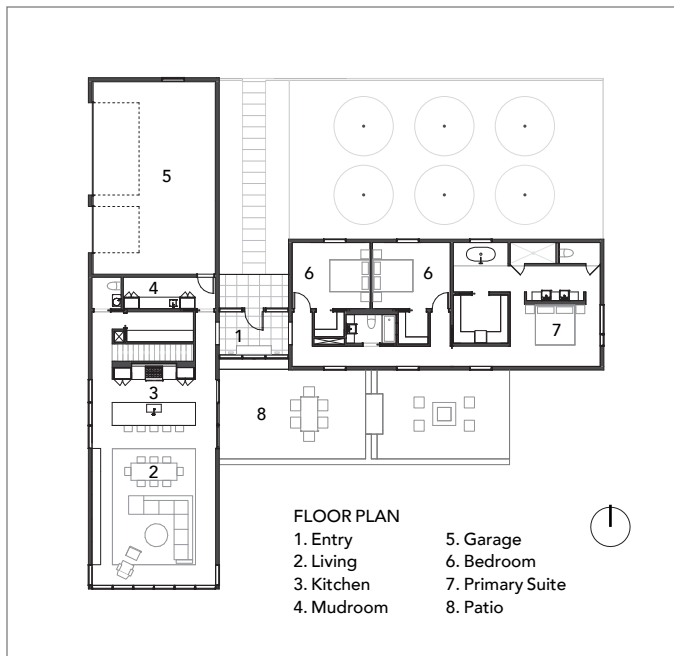


builder and subcontractors to ensure that trim profiles were minimal and well crafted. The half-round gutter system uses the same material as the roof, with round downspouts that blend with the house. Using a custom metal brake on site, Ethan's crew created a drip edge that folds back, as fascia, to receive an integral gutter on the bottom. The spruce siding, applied as a rainscreen and thermally modified to increase its durability, was finished with a custom stain inspired by the

bark on the surrounding trees. And the foundation and patio retaining wall were made with a metal pan cast-in-place concrete formwork system. The team collaborated to establish the formwork joint locations and finishing for the top of the wall.

Coming from a restaurant background, the client had strong ideas about the kitchen and appliances. "He was looking for calm interiors and wanted the kitchen to be simple with minimal clutter," Cody says. A back-





of-house pantry stores dry goods and countertop appliances, while the kitchen layout was driven by outdoor views. There, a 4-foot-wide island is centered on two 12-foot-wide openings—one leading through sliding doors to the east patio, the other a window facing west. Its 14½-foot length is centered within the vaulted gable volume and the big view of the pond to the south.

A spare interior palette of painted drywall and white oak floors and millwork keeps the focus on the Iowa landscape. “This was such a unique project for us—simple, yet so





many small details went into it,” Ethan says. The honed granite countertops and backsplash and a blackened-steel-plate kitchen hood and floating shelves lend darker accents. “To hit the budget, we had to keep the interiors simple and let the site do the work for us,” Cody says. “Ethan comes from a millwork background where the details matter; they were an incredible partner.” The builder set up shop in the garage and site-built the custom millwork, including the kitchen cabinets and the headboard and double vanity in the primary suite.

In a finishing touch, Cody and the client and contractor visited nurseries to hand-select the trees that animate the front of the house. “A lot of care went



into really sliding this simple gable form into the landscape, to make it feel like it’s been there for years,” Cody says.

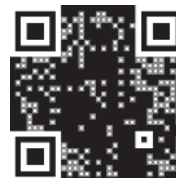
The result is a home that feels grounded in place while highlighting the best features of the surrounding landscape. **RD**



Photo Courtesy of Dan Ryan Studio

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False Bay

HELIOTROPE ARCHITECTS
SAN JUAN ISLAND, WASHINGTON

The creation of the False Bay residence is a classic San Juan Islands story. As a close retreat to Seattle, the islands draw city folks looking for a second home in which to decompress, despite the difficulties of building here. Chosen for its rugged scenery and proximity to the clients' friends, the 1½-acre site was one of the few remaining parcels on this part of San Juan Island, the largest in the archipelago. The owners, a couple born and raised in Seattle, enlisted Heliotrope Architects to help them imagine

the space for them and their two teenage children. Its distinctive form reacts to the rocky, open land—a condition that reminded Joe Herrin, AIA, of a famous enclave farther down the West Coast.

“The first time I visited, the site reminded me of Sea Ranch in Sonoma County, California,” he says. “I’ve always loved the 1970s Sea Ranch buildings with shingle cladding and windswept shed forms, and hidden courtyards to get out of the wind. This felt like a property that needed to handle similar kinds of weather situations.” Indeed, it is directly exposed to weather traveling down the Strait of Juan de Fuca from the Pacific Ocean. “Rain can blow at 80 miles per hour,” Joe says. “We visualized a fire hose being pointed at the house for an hour; that’s how we had to detail.”





Rock formations influenced the building's bowtie shape, as did the need to screen two neighboring houses, one of them a glassy structure that looked down on the clients' property. Joe and his team deftly positioned the east-west-oriented house between a large outcropping on the north and a smaller one to the south. With homes to the east and west, views are focused south to the water and north to the rock, remaining opaque toward the neighbors on either side. Visitors enter from the landward side on the north, where an open kitchen and dining area is tucked under a low-pitched roof. The gap between the front of the house and the rock creates an outdoor terrace pro-



This page: Black brick tiles offset the lime green wood stove between the kitchen and living room, where a prow offers views of the craggy landscape. *Opposite page:* Black accents continue in the kitchen and dining area, which flows out to a natural terrace between the house and a rock outcrop.





tected from the wind, while a slim, dark structure for stacking firewood screens the terrace from the entryway. To the right of the entry is the garage and, behind it, a prow-shaped living room.

“We bent the house around the south rock in a way that allows for a focused view of the shoreline,” Joe says. “The angle controls the view, so you’re not seeing houses on either side.” Above the living room, the roofline tips up to contain a loft bunkroom and reading nook, which has views northward over the top of the larger rock formation. On the other end of the house, the primary suite faces south, and guest quarters on the north form a wedge that helps to block the chilly offshore winds on the living-room terrace.

In section, the steeply pitched shed roof responds to the wind, sweeping it up and over the house. “The program helped us determine the formal response,” Joe says. “We needed two stories and it gets tall, so we broke up the roof form as a traditional gable on one side and we let the roof rise up for a loft for the kids. It’s a very small second floor, about 250 square feet.”

“We wanted to keep the form simple, because it’s probably the most exposed home we’ve ever done,” he adds. “On the approach from the west side, all you



see is the corner, like a little lantern, then you drive around the rock. The second floor is tall enough to look over the top of the rock and across neighboring properties to the northwest along the coast.”

Choreographed Views

Despite its exposure to weather, the site itself was fairly easy to build on, Joe says. However, building on an island is never simple. Heliotrope has been designing homes here for years, using local carpenters and builders. But because worker housing is scarce and expensive

now, this is the first house in which the firm worked with an off-island builder— Bellevue, Washington-based David Elwell, whose crew had another house underway nearby. “We used a mix of island contractors and contractors from the mainland all through the project,” David says. While two of his full-time employees live on the islands, the others often spent the night in on-site RVs.

It took several weeks of jackhammering through bedrock before the cast-in-place foundation could be installed. And the original plan for a



Above and top, left and center: Above the living room, the wood-lined loft contains bunks and a prow-shaped lounging area. Above, far right: Built into a cedar alcove, the primary suite tub has a lid that hangs on the wall when not in use, lending a spa-like vibe.

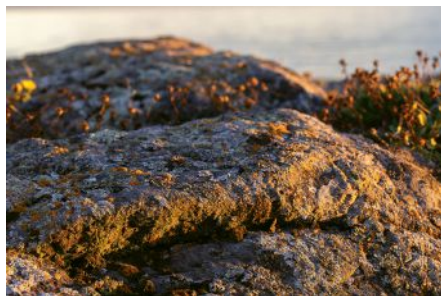
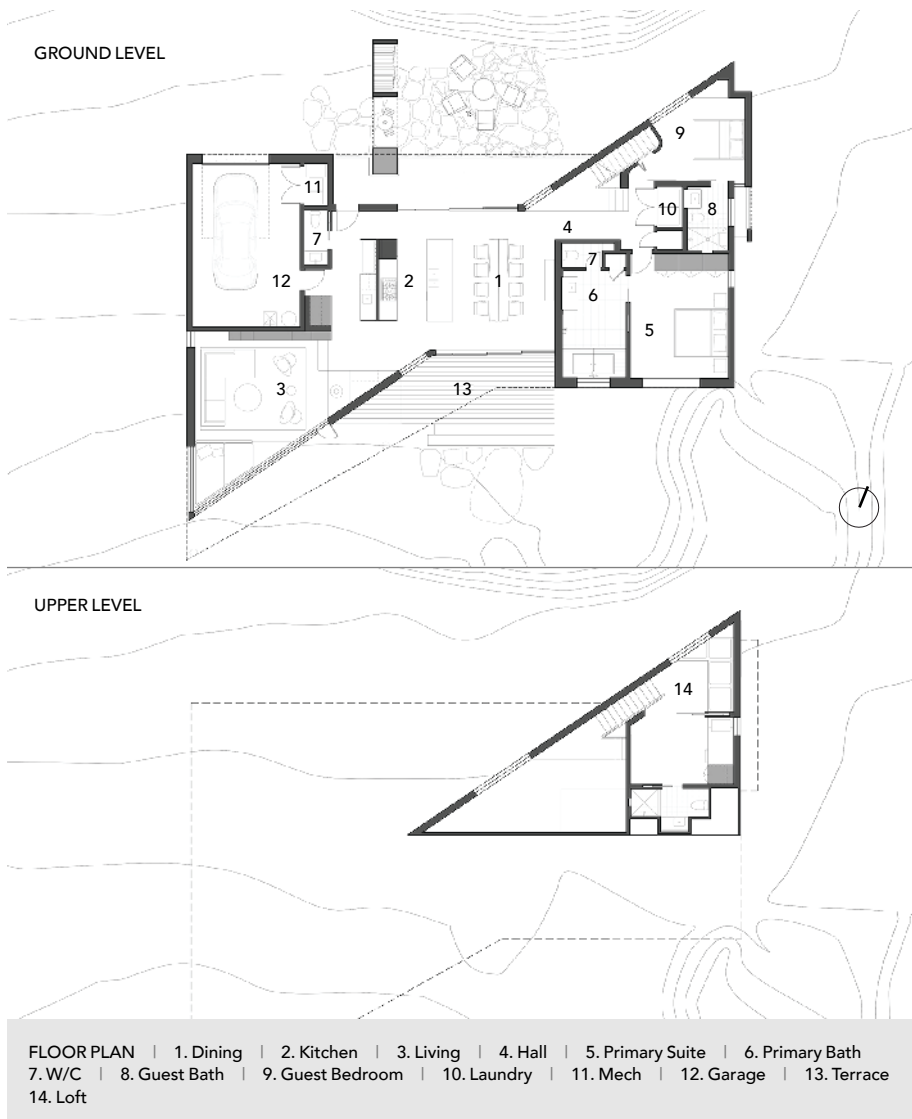
slab on grade structure was changed to a crawl space because gravel fill was so expensive. “We sent our in-house framing crew up there to assemble the house and to execute the special details that were very important to Joe, such as the way the interior ceiling comes together in a knife edge over the kitchen, and making sure the staircase was legal in terms of fall hazards, yet integrated,” David says. The house is clad in western red cedar, with a darker-stained bump-out in the guest bath, where slats screen a window from the neighbor.

Inside, the rooms focus on different aspects of the land. The kitchen has a panoramic view of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, while the living room sees more land and waves crashing on the beach. There, a raised platform in the prow offers 180-degree views of the water. Sliding doors on both sides of the kitchen and dining area strengthen the indoor-outdoor relationship, and cedar

panels further blur those lines. “We elevated the finishes sparingly,” Joe says. A cedar-clad alcove and tub create a spa-like experience in the primary bath. When not in use, the tub is covered with a cedar lid that hangs on the wall.

A muted material and color palette echoes the natural surroundings. Floors are prefinished white oak, and the white oak kitchen cabinets have a custom veneer with knots that lend character. Dark accents tie the interiors together—black granite countertops, a custom steel log holder, and black brick tile wall behind the wood stove, which allows its earthy green color to pop. At night, light from the loft filters down the stairs to the vaulted kitchen and dining room, creating a glow.

With features such as an insulated crawl space, conditioned attic, rigid insulation, and 24 solar panels, the house generated twice as much energy as it used in the first year, though it’s not a



False Bay

San Juan Island, Washington

ARCHITECT: Principal in charge: Joe Herrin, AIA; project manager: Chris Wong; designer: Rachel Belcher, Heliotrope Architects, Seattle

BUILDER: David Elwell, DME Construction, Bellevue, Washington

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Garden Artisan Landscapes, Friday Harbor, Washington

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Swenson Say Fagét, Seattle

MECHANICAL ENGINEER: Beyond Efficiency, Santa Cruz, California

GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEER: Stratum Group, Bellingham, Washington

PROJECT SIZE: 2,474 square feet

SITE SIZE: 1.44 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$880 per square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: Sean Airhart

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETRY: Stained white oak with custom grain

CABINETRY HARDWARE: Mockett, Kartners

CLADDING: Kiln-dried western red cedar

COOKING VENT HOOD: Best

COOKTOP: Fisher & Paykel

COUNTERTOPS: Absolute Black granite (kitchen), Oregon & Marble basaltina (primary bath)

FAUCETS: Aquabrax, Kohler, Signature Hardware

FLOORING: Oregon Lumber

LIGHTING: WAC (exterior), Nora Lighting, Kelvix, Anchor Ceramics, LZP, Astro Lighting, custom dining room pendant by artist Yuri Kinoshita (interior)

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS: Lutron

OVENS: Fisher & Paykel

PAINTS/STAINS/COATINGS: Daly's (exterior), Rubio Monocoat, Benjamin Moore 971

PHOTOVOLTAICS: Sunpower

REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER: Sub-Zero

ROOFING: Taylor Easy-Lock standing-seam panels

TILE: Mutual Materials, Ann Sacks, Bedrosians

TOILETS: Toto

TOWEL HOOKS, BARS, TOILET PAPER HOLDERS: Kartners Circo Collection

WASHER/DRYER: Electrolux

WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Fleetwood

WINDOWS: Frontline, Marvin

WOOD STOVE: StoveStack



full-time residence. “We are signatories of the 2030 Challenge, but have to question it for second homes,” Joe says. “You’re not there in the heating season, so should you use all those resources to make it Net Zero? We’re doing two houses on islands where there are no services and they will never be full-time residences, so what’s the right thing to do?”

While the architects consider that question, the clients have been settling in and figuring out how they’ll use the house in the future, potentially full-time as they age. Designed with multiple generations in mind, this nature-inspired retreat can welcome their parents now and any grandchildren to come. 





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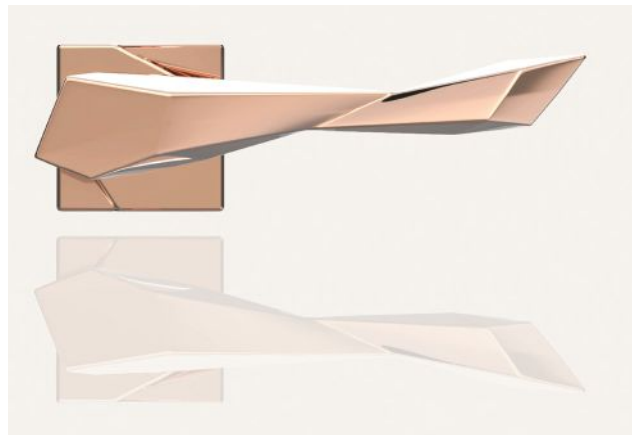
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4

1. THE COLOR PURPLE

Professional-grade kitchen appliance maker BlueStar has named Purple Violet its 2026 Color of the Year. Curated by Shumaker Design Associates, it's seen as a harmonious next step toward a richer, nature-driven hue after years of neutrals and corresponds with the growing preference for coziness and warmth. [Bluestarcooking.com](https://bluestarcooking.com)

2. A GOOD SOAKING

Hastings Bath Collection has debuted its Mediterranean-inspired Duna Tub. Its models include the Duna Ofuro, a 51-inch soaking tub with integrated seat, and the freestanding Duna 63-inch tub. Both are made from scratch-resistant matte resin with options in white, bicolor, and full color. [Hastingsbathcollection.com](https://hastingsbathcollection.com)

3. PORCELAIN PLUS

Caesarstone has added eight new, nature-inspired colors to its 12mm porcelain portfolio. The manufacturer is also making its most popular colors available in 20mm slabs, including Snowdrift, Sleet, Circa, Mirabel, Marbannova, and Lucillia. The non-porous, easy-to-maintain materials are suitable for both indoor and outdoor surfaces. [Caesarstoneus.com](https://caesarstoneus.com)

4. ON THE EDGE

Il Bronzetto's new Edge door handle is designed with a faceted geometry that captures light and creates visual depth, transforming it into an architectural feature. Its finish options—from brushed nickel to bronze, satin chrome, and gold variants—allow it to blend in or stand out. ilbronzetto.com



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Clean Sweep

CANOPY
BOULDER, COLORADO
PICHÉ ARCHITECTURE

Tree canopies, panoramic views, and the possibilities for solitude inspired the design of this house, on a steep and rocky wooded site. Created for newlyweds in their early fifties, Piché Architecture partners Amanda Christianson, AIA, and Mike Piché, AIA, designed a large flat roof that offers pockets of protection from the wildly windy setting, and a concrete, granite, and metal exterior that withstands wildfires.

“The trees have broad canopies, and the house’s horizontal planes allude to the panoramic view of the Front Range,” Mike says. Fit hand-in-glove to the land, the upper level plays with opacity and transparency, using granite on the approach and opening like a glass box to the view on the downhill side. The natural stone echoes the colors of the landscape, its pulled-apart joints creating shadows and depth.

“The roof is treated as one plane with a couple of holes through it,” says Amanda. One cutaway exposes the north patio and fireplace to the elements, and an oculus over the front entry creates “a peekaboo moment. You step through the deep portal of the front porch, getting under that strong canopy.”

Indeed, a sense of seclusion is as important as views on this exposed site. A secret courtyard occupies a niche between



the garage and house, screened by granite block latticework. “The owners want to add landscape amenities over time,” Amanda says. “We’re interested in seeing what kind of inspiration comes to them.”—*Cheryl Weber*

Project: Canopy; architect: Amanda Christianson, AIA, and Mike Piché, AIA, partners, Piché Architecture, Boulder, Colorado; builder: Buildwell; project size: 4,600 square feet; site size: 1.65 acres; renderings: Piché Architecture

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