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from the editor

respect your builder

the time is right to shed those outmoded adversarial roles.

by s. claire conroy

magine you're Vincent van Gogh. You're a brilliant artist with a distinctive vision you wish to convey. You're eager to put brush to canvas and make it real.

But wait, imagine also that you can't work the brush yourself—a contractor has to do the job for you. If you were van Gogh, you might cut off your other ear in frustration.

different strokes

Contractors seldom execute those details exactly the way you saw them in your mind's eye. It can drive you crazy.

It's especially difficult these days, when even the most reliable general contractors are having trouble getting and keeping qualified people. All you want is for your project to look like it did in your head. If it doesn't, you'll be disappointed—and, even worse, your client will be disappointed, too.

Of course, you might consider yourself lucky to have your project built at all. The booming economy has most talented custom builders booked many months in advance. Very few of them will take the time and spend the money to bid jobs anymore. They're in a great position, able to turn down annoying clients and accept only negotiated or cost-plus contracts.

glasnost

Could this be a blessing in disguise? Maybe getting your work of art done right means choosing the best people for the job, treating them with respect, and paying them fairly for their hard work. Ditching the bidding process helps break down the rigid lines of the client-architectbuilder triangle.

The time is right to take down these walls. Custom home clients, with more money in their pockets and more interest in highquality craftsmanship, are less compelled to choose their builder solely on price these days.

The benefit to you is that builders are compensated fairly for their time and thus are more inclined to spend that time getting the job done right. They'll find the material you specified, they'll make the extra phone call to your office when they don't understand the plans, they won't badmouth you to the client because they feel they're losing money building your complicated designs.



real deal

In the article "Relationship Building," on page 80, we look at a number of successful architect-builder arrangements. Each of the architects we interviewed cultivated rewarding working relationships with custom builders before the building boom started to roar. The result is they have great people available to turn their plans into reality. Be sure to read closely what their builders have to say about why they keep coming back. Good times or bad, the bottom line is these builders want to work for these architects.

In "Good Form," on page 62, you'll see a portfolio of three rigorously designed custom homes that demonstrate why you

Photo: Katherine Lambert

can't take talented custom builders for granted.

But we also profile an architect who was, shall we say, bold enough to tackle the job himself. Our cover story, on page 48, examines what Stanley Hallet learned from designing and building his own cutting-edge house in a conservative Washington, D.C., neighborhood.

Hallet's glass-fronted house, lit from within, looks especially beautiful on a starry night. Van Gogh would be proud. ra

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neighborhood watch

enjoyed the editorial
 in the January 2000
 issue ("Good Neighborhood Policy, page
 13) exhorting architects to get involved with production housing. I share your wish for this to happen
 but I think architects are only partially to blame for the current situation, in which 98 percent of the housing being constructed is done so without their services.

In this part of the country, most buyers are buying Neo-Colonials (to me, the term "Colonial architecture" is almost an oxymoron). It's very difficult to turn out good-quality housing when the developer, thinking that he is representing the tastes of the market, designs the housing and then turns to the architect to develop his lowest common denominator sensibilities into "product."

In Europe, developers somehow have more enlightened attitudes, and also face more thoughtful planning controls that make decent design more likely. In Denmark, for example, all housing projects are done by architects and landscape architects and the results are much better than you will find here.

Have a look at the two low-cost housing schemes of 40 years ago by Jorn Utzon (architect of the Sydney Opera House) outside of Copenhagen. They're wonderful!

G. Mackenzie Gordon, AIA Gordon & Gordon Architecture & Landscape Design Lakeville, Conn.

a planning problem

have to disagree with Michael Medick's opinion that architects have "ignored" production housing (January, "Production House Proud," page 32). That was the same battle cry of architects 10 years ago when I was chairman of the AIA Housing Committee and 20 years ago when I started my involvement with the housing market.

The truth is that there are plenty of architects ready, willing, and able to address production housing. Architects are in fact more involved with production housing than at any other time in history. The reasons for the disjointed landscape described in the article are more complex than that.

The answers to why we continue to have uninspiring urban sprawl have more to do with aggressive public planning policies than with a lack of talented architects and planners. Many production builders have no choice but to build low-density, land-wasting, single-use, segmented communities because that is the only solution mandated by the local planning boards.



Currently, many builders, architects, and planners are working within such organizations as the NAHB, the Urban Land Institute, and the Congress for the New Urbanism to reform the citizen planning process so that quality mixeduse communities like Celebration, Fla., and Harbor Town, in Memphis, Tenn., can face an easier path to approval in more jurisdictions.

Incidentally, thanks for the great article on Barry Berkus ("Full Circle," page 48).

> James W. Wentling, AIA Principal James Wentling/Architect Philadelphia

one community's solution

enjoyed the editorial and articles on builder production housing in the January issue.

Here in Hunterdon County, N.J., the county planning board has spent the past year and a half researching and organizing "town meetings" and design charrettes to determine the best way to contain our suburban sprawl. They have *continued on page 22*



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letters

even enlisted representatives from various wellknown design firms, such as Looney Ricks Kiss Architects, to assist with their planning efforts.

The result will be a planning document that recommends the best way to achieve proper growth within the county. This "design guide" will provide illustrations and written information on commercial and residential design, including agricultural open space, vistas, historic elements, and maintaining rural road corridors. Most people move to Hunterdon County because they enjoy its rural character, so open space is important.

In greater detail, the document will discuss proper design and material to be used in residential construction. Unfortunately, builders in this region seem to build what is "saleable" to achieve maximum profit. Hopefully, this document will alert the greater planning and design community, including prospective homeowners, that there is an alternative to subdivisions.

Most builders in the New Jersey region are smaller developers. They design and construct subdivisions containing 5 to 25 units.

The builders are squeezed financially by government regulations, resulting in the need to cut costs. They don't want to pay an architect to design more livable and saleable homes and communities; they want to do what markets best and sells fastest. They follow the herd, not knowing there is a better solution.

Over the past 15 years, I have tried to educate my residential builder clients about the importance of planning and building livable communities. The results have not been promising. The builders think they know best—best in terms of their pocketbook, not the community.

Realtors are a big problem, too. They claim that buyers will not accept anything less than a 3- to 5acre lot with a 3,000- to 4,000-square-foot house just like the one in the nextdoor subdivision. Also, Hunterdon County is something of a mini corporate bedroom community. Families tend to move in and out of these subdivision within three to five years. These buyers want the security of the same housing and community type they left. In "Production House Proud" (page 32), Michael Medick



states that the "cookie cutter houses ... could be anywhere." Precisely the reason the buyer wants this type of environment!

The bottom line is that both here in New Jersey and in the rest of the nation we need the AIA and building organizations to educate and promote betterdesigned communities. We need to set goals for better communities and strive to achieve those goals. I believe our county has begun to do just that.

> Frank Joseph Bell, AIA, Architect Pittstown, N.J.

devine justice

he January issue included an article for which I was interviewed ("Going Local," page 40). It was a nicely done piece, but I do have one significant correction. Tom Devine did not work with me at Wieland, and we did not work together at Ryland. The link between us is that he took over the southeast regional architect position at Ryland about a year after I left to work with John Wieland. Tom is an excellent architect and I'd have been honored to work with him. The article on Barry

Berkus was really well done. He is certainly passionate about and committed to doing better production homes.

> **Bud McIntire VP/Architecture** John Wieland Homes & Neighborhoods Atlanta

redlines

n "The Practical Bath" in the November 1999 issue, the contractor for the project on page 60 was Paragon Designers & Builders, of Minnetonka, Minn., not Paragon Constructors of Minneapolis.

In the January issue, the story "Cutting-Edge Communities" included an incorrect photo credit. For the Bellevue, Wash., project, shown on pages 82-83, the photo credit should be © Pro Image Photography.

In the February issue, the title given for Ed Binkley, AIA, was incorrect. Binkley, author of February's Perspective column, winner of the 1998 Homes for Habitat design competition, and a judge for the '99 contest, is head of Bloodgood Sharp Buster's Orlando, Fla., Design Studio. We regret the errors.



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maine man

rchitect Scott Simons' own house in Yarmouth, Maine, won one of the two excellence in architecture awards given by AIA Maine's 1999 design awards jury. The jurors cited its successful blending of traditional New England house forms with a Modern openness. "In Maine, we're surrounded by really strong vernacular forms—they're everywhere," says Simons. "We tried to design a Modern house, but one that used the memory of those traditional shapes." Known as Hillside House, the home measures 2,400 square feet; simple detailing kept construction costs to less than \$100 per square foot.—*meghan drueding*





Photos: © 2000 Brian Vanden Brink, Photographer

An unassuming front elevation (above) masks this award-winning home's expansive, sunlit interior (right). Architect Scott Simons, AIA, took advantage of the house's private site by lining its rear with floor-to-ceiling windows (top right).







glass with class

ometimes, standard glass windows just don't cut the mustard. For architects and their artistically inclined clients, Architectural Glass Design, in Napa, Calif., has a solution. Unlimited solutions, as a matter of fact.

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Courtesy Architectural Glass Design

office politics

a nother reason to start brushing up on home office design and technology: Statistics culled from the inaugural SOHO (Small Office/ Home Office) Summit, which took place last spring, in Carlsbad, Calif., indicate unprecedented growth in this arena. According to conference speaker Raymond Smilor, of the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, in Kansas City, Mo., 13 million Americans are now running their own businesses from home—full time. Forty-five million Americans, or 35 percent of all U.S. households, work out of home offices, reported fellow speaker

Ray Miller, general manager of Zeeland, Mich.–based Herman Miller for the Home. And, says Miller, the market for home office furnishings and equipment is growing 10 to 12 percent annually.—*m.d.*

Illustration: Leo Espinosa

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home front

calendar

renaissance '00 design competition

entry form/payment deadline: april 1 completed binder deadline: may 1



The Renaissance '00 design competition, sponsored by *residential architect's* sister publication REMODELING magazine and the NAHB Remodelors Council, recognizes excellence in residential and light commercial remodeling. For information, call 202.736.3450, or visit www.remodeling.hw.net. A Renaissance '99 winner by Estes

& Co. Architects of Newport, R.I, is shown at left.

scale: the architectural league's young architects forum 1999

through April 16 national building museum, washington, d.c.

This exhibit showcases winning entries (such as this addition by Vrinda Khanna and Robert Schultz) from the Architectural League of New York's 18th annual



competition for young architects.

national design triennial

march 7-august 6 cooper-hewitt national design museum, new york city

A comprehensive look at American architecture, product design, and graphic design. Call 212.849.8300 for details, or go to www.si.edu/organiza/museums/design/ndm.htm.

kitchen/bath industry show

april 7–9 mccormick place, chicago

More than 600 exhibitors including Duravit, manufacturer of Michael Graves' Dreamscape collection (soap dish shown)—are expected to showcase their latest kitchen and bath products at the National Kitchen & Bath Association's annual show. To register, call 800.367.6522.

coverings 2000

may 2–5 orange county convention center, orlando, fla.

For information on one of the world's largest ceramic tile and natural stone expositions, call 800.881.9400, or visit www.coverings .com. Among the 1,000-plus companies exhibiting their products will be Faus Floor, makers of Faus Tex faux clay tiles (right).

132nd annual national aia convention and expo may 4–7

pennsylvania convention center, philadelphia

Look for residential design seminars and product booths at the AIA's yearly conference. Keynote speakers are (from left) Andrew Young, former mayor of Atlanta, and architects Zaha



Hadid and Christian de Portzampare. For details, e-mail convention@aiamail.aia.org, or call 202.626.7300.

frank lloyd wright: furniture

through june 18 high museum of art, atlanta

View various pieces of Wrightdesigned furniture, each displayed among large-scale photographs of the homes and buildings for which they were designed. Shown: oak armchair with leather upholstery (ca. 1901), from the architect's Prairie School years. For information, call 404.733.4437, or visit www.high.org.

the politics of place: cnu 2000 june 15–18

portland, ore.

The eighth annual Congress for the New Urbanism will convene to discuss methods of creating better communities. Call 415.495.2255 for details, or go to www.cnu.org.



Courtesy High Museum of Art, Virginia Carroll Crawford Collection

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CONTINUING EDUCATION EVENTS					
WHEN		LOCATION	DESCRIPTION		
APRIL 29	AIBD Societies Meeting	Myrtle Beach, South Carolina	Rekindling a tradition from the past, the North Carolina and South Carolina Societies of AIBD will be hosting two seminars on building products and materials. Contact James Dalrymple at JWDalrympl@aol.com.		
MAY 2-3	AIA/CES Providers Conference	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	This event is designed for AIA/Continuing Education System Providers both old and new. Learn how to play a key role in the professional development of architects and about new guidelines for 2000. Contact Kay Kane at kanek@aiamail.aia.org.		
MAY 4-6	AIA 2000 Convention & Expo	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	The AIA 2000 Convention, "New Century-New Vision," will provide a forum to address the profession's impact on the future of our communities. Visit www.aiaconvention2000.com for more information.		
MAY 12-14	AIBD Mid-Atlantic Conference	Lancaster, Pennsylvania	Highlights of this conference include a tour of old Lancaster, the Amish country and seminars on the historic significance of farmhouse structures and timber framing. Contact Elaine Farrell at efarrell@farrell-assoc.com.		
JUNE 9-11	AIBD Texas Society Convention	Corpus Christi, Texas	Headquartered on the beach, this convention will feature a tour of Heritage Park – a group of historic buildings that were restored after being moved to a city park from various locations around Corpus Christi. Contact Lilli Gonzalez at texasaibd@aol.com.		

Circle no. 281

home front

what's up down under

Kip the 12-hour flight and take this armchair tour of contemporary Australian house design instead. There's a lot to see in George Michell and John Gollings' *New Australian Style*, a sleek showcase for Australia's best and brightest young residential talent. You may find yourself hungering for a bit of depth and perspective, however, as the authors rely on Gollings' stunning photography to tell the story with minimal text and—regrettably no floor plans.

The authors organize 59 residential projects under the headings City, Suburb, Beach, and Bush. Within this four-part structure, design expression evolves from the tight constraints of urban work to the least inhibited houses—those found in the bush.

City projects range from minimalist infill houses to apartment buildings and a factory-turnedhotel. The work emphasizes clever solutions to the typical urban challenges of tricky sites, reuse of forgotten buildings, and working around view obstructions. The suburban work is a bit freer. Metal and glass are the preferred materials, with several impressive timber examples as well.

Beach houses run the gamut from idyllic clifftop villas to stripped-down sandboxes. The architects of these houses feel free to explore unconventional building materials, such as tree trunks and rusting metal. The bush houses are the most eclectic, and the most site responsive: A weekend retreat in sheep-grazing country evokes a corrugated-metal shed. A glass pavilion affords its owners unbroken views of a distant mountain range. An ecologically sensitive house in the woods uses traditional mud brick and solar power.

Australia may be several continents away, but the houses featured in this handsome collection are relevant to architects and designers in both hemispheres. —susan bradford barror

New Australian Style. *George Michell and John Gollings.* 208 *pp. Illustrated. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.* 1999. \$40 (hardcover). 415.537.3730; www.chroniclebooks.com.





A typical elevation at the former Frederick Douglass and Stanton Dwellings emulates the covered entries and traditional brick exteriors characteristic of the project's Washington, D.C., neighborhood.

full of hope

S ilver Spring, Md., architects Torti Gallas and Partners/CHK and Bethesda, Md., developers Mid-City Urban/Integral are combining forces to rebuild as one mixed-use community two dilapidated public housing projects in Washington, D.C. Partial funding for the estimated \$85-million venture will come from a \$29-million HOPE (Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere) VI Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The 600 units in the former Frederick Douglass and Stanton Dwellings will be divided into three price ranges—subsidized, affordable, and market rate. Unit types include duplex, single-family attached and detached, and bungalows for seniors. Half of all unit types at the as-yet unnamed community will be available for rent, while the other half will be offered for homeownership or leaseto-purchase.

"Our goal is to create a place not easily identifiable as a public housing neighborhood," says John Torti, AIA, one of the project's principals in charge. "This is more than a physical renovation —it's a social regeneration program."

Construction on the project will begin in the fall, with completion slated for 2004. Existing residents will have the right of first return.

HOPE VI is the first HOPE program to allow developers to tear down existing public housing units before redeveloping them. Founded by HUD in 1994, the HOPE programs' goal is to physically revitalize 100,000 of the most distressed public housing units in the country by transforming isolated enclaves into mixed-income communities.—*hillary jaffe*

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*See actual warranty for full details. **Compared to next closest competitor, 2000 *Residential Architect* magazine survey. ©1999 Koch Materials Company. TUFF-N-DRI® is a registered trademark of Koch Materials Company.



A) TUFF-N-DRI waterproofing system's flexible membrane is spray-applied to span foundation setting cracks. B) A quality foundation board insulates, protects the membrane, reduces condensation and helps drainage.



perspective

quality time

fewer and fewer single-family homes are being designed by architects and it shows. a boston architect calls for a new approach.

by jeremiah eck, faia

hen I was a child, one of my joys was to explore partially constructed houses. Sneaking across a plank between firm ground and the new foundation, I would imagine the rooms yet to be fully realized and wonder at this new object in the neighborhood.

Back then, the relatively few houses that were built were generally constructed on lots in or near the center of town by small contractors we all knew. I would pore over the drawings but seldom saw the name of an architect.

Such market-driven houses, built with simple drawings, have always been around in one form or another. Like the houses in my neighborhood, they were most often part of a controlled, gradually evolving environment.

How times have changed! In the last 30 years, the scope and scale of their construction has dramatically altered our landscapes, and the chasm between these so-called "builder" or "production" houses and custom, architect-designed houses is now vast. The questions I keep asking





myself are: "Why aren't architects more involved in production houses?" and its corollary: "Why aren't owners, builders, or developers asking architects to be involved?"

reasons

Each year, more than a million single-family homes are built in this country. Last year, the number was close to a million and a half. It comes as no surprise to architects that only a very small percentage of those homes are products of the design process that they were trained for houses of good design and high-quality construction that are responsive to the site and environment and unique to their owners. The issue of sprawl, now on *a*.

proliferation over the past 30 years of houses like the one at left, I have decided that any contribution I can make to the single-family housing market is better than sitting on the sidelines. I designed the Salisbury, Conn., residence above for a specific site and client, but the house is generic enough to be applied to a variety of sites and consumers.

In view of the explosive

all our minds, is as much about these houses as it is about planning.

The architect and planner Andres Duany identifies four potential roles for owners in their relationship with architects: patron, client, consumer, and victim. I find these categories useful, as I suspect one of the reasons architects aren't *continued on page 44*

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perspective

involved in designing more single-family houses is that they tend to think of themselves as providing services to either patrons or clients. Thinking of their clients as consumers runs counter to their sense of professional and, perhaps, ethical standards.

There are other reasons, too. Designing a truly "custom" house is not easy. It is often subject to the whims of owners, mothers-in-law, builders-the list could go on. A good house also takes more time. As an owner, why should you spend a year or longer with an architect in design and construction when you could find most of what you want "off the shelf" through a builder right now, or in a few months? Who needs an architect to design a house, anyway?

And then there is the money. Why pay 10 percent to 15 percent—sometimes even more—of the cost of construction to an architect? The builder or developer throws in the design essentially for free, and will even customize the kitchen cabinets. I'm being facetious, but you get the point.

The truth is that bankers, brokers, builders, and borrowers don't see the value in working with architects on most single-family homes, and most architects don't know how to provide the services they need.

So how do we get the two sides together? One

it's time for all of us—architects, owners, builders, bankers, and brokers—to reconsider

our relationships.

could easily say the solution is too complicated wrapped up, as the singlefamily home is, in economics and taste. But I'd like to suggest a few possibilities.

solutions

First, we need more early art education, not just for architects but for all of us. When you produce art, you construct an object with admirable shape, proportion, color. That's a rightbrain experience. Once you've done it yourself, you're more likely to appreciate the process of making beautiful objects (yes, I used the word "beautiful") and you'll appreciate better houses. Without such an education, you will come to rely on advertising slogans and images to make up your vision of a house.

At upper levels of education, it's time for students of architecture to study the single-family house again. I was encouraged to hear that three such studios were recently offered at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. For many years, this had not been the case.

It's also time for practic-



ing architects to offer various kinds of residential architectural services with a variety of fee structures, not just for clients who want a custom, one-of-akind house, but also for clients who will be satisfied with a more generic house-the "consumer" clients. This is not a new idea in the Boston area. Some of the early houses of Carl Koch, Hugh Stubbins, and Royal Barry Wills are models of good design easily adapted to a range of client needs.

Architects are professionals trained to examine changing demographics and to respond with an appropriate physical design. Often people don't know what they want until they see an interesting alternative; the introduction of foreign automobiles into the American market is one good example.

I've sold a few plans of houses, designed for individual clients, that had more universal appeal. I struggled with that issue for years but decided that the quality of most stock plans is so low that any contribution I could make to the single-family house market was better than sitting on the sidelines.

Architects have not emphasized their talent at controlling the quality/cost equation. As unresponsive design and poor construction in the suburbs become more evident, value----in both good design and good construction-is of increasing concern to consumers. I renovate a lot of older, well-designed houses. But can anyone really imagine renovating today's disposable houses 20 or 30 years from now?

Finally, it is time for all of us—planners, architects, owners, builders, bankers, and brokers—to reconsider our relationships, recognizing that we all have talents that can be brought to the mix. My dream house may not be yours, but quality is recognizable in many forms.

Like all good investments, this approach will require sensible reflection by all of us and, naturally, time. An alternative house —better sited, designed, and constructed—could be the result.

Our environment and our health depend on it. **ra**

Jeremiah Eck, FAIA, a principal of Jeremiah Eck Architects, in Boston, specializes in residential and academic work. This article is reprinted by permission from Architecture Boston, Winter 1999.

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Mark Robert Halper

stanley hallet, faia,

learned his first lesson in housing design the hard way. As a Boy Scout on an overnight camping trip, he cut boughs from a fir tree and lashed them into a soft bed. Then he pitched his tent, laid down and went to sleep, only to awaken hours later in a puddle outside the tent, in a drenching rainstorm. "The experience left a great impression on me in terms of weather protection, geology, and how you drain around an entryway," the architect says. "Many years later I realized it had an important effect."

Some 40 years after that incident, the design and building of Hallet's own house, perched on a steep wooded hillside on the edge of Washington, D.C.'s Rock

Creek Park, provided equally important, if more sophisticated, insights. In some ways the tall, austere house with its slender posts is a triumphant culmination of the perspectives Hallet has gleaned from a lifetime of world travels, ideas he's carried around in his head for years. During the building process, the construction site also became a real-life lab for Hallet and students at The Catholic University of America's School of Architecture and Planning, where he teaches and served as dean from 1991 to 1996. And now that he's lived with the house for four years, able to observe how it ages and to indulge an architect's penchant for obsessing over the details, its ongoing lessons help refine his private architectural practice.

"overseeing the construction got me out from behind my

desk and brought me closer to the elements of rain, sleet, and lots of snow."

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Alan Karchmer

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For Stanley Hallet (opposite), supervising the construction of his Modernist house also meant calming the trepidations of his neighbors in the predominantly Tudor-style community.

Hallet's design explores the cave metaphor of retreating into the back for support and privacy but moving to the front to experience space, light, and volume. During warmweather parties, he expands the space further by opening the living-room doors and putting down Berber rugs on the deck.

open house

A la

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Alan Karchmer

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"the planes thicken and thin with respect to the front or back of the house. i enjoyed that logic."





ancients and moderns

The house's high vantage point gives Hallet and his wife, Judith Dwan Hallet, an independent filmmaker, a bird's-eye view of the rolling terrain. Built on a semi-suburban lot near one of the city's main thoroughfares, the cypress-clad box has a glass street facade that glows at night like a lantern slipped between pin oaks. Steel columns anchor the house and front porch to earth, while the upper ends support a high-flying deck and finish in "fishing rods" that disappear into the sky. Inside, an exposed structure of pine posts lift the living room ceiling to 22 feet. The first floor has few interior walls, so the kitchen and dining room on the rear of the house look across the living room to landscape views, as do the perfect cubes of his-and-hers offices on the mezzanine above. Three bedrooms, including the master suite with its treetop deck, form a penthouse retreat on the third floor. And a finished basement houses space for Hallet's part-time architectural practice and for Judith's film production.

The tall, slender structure and its decks on tenuouslooking posts were inspired by the vernacular architecture of Nuristan, a remote mountain village in Afghanistan. open house



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Alan Karchme



See and





"you understand

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nits and potential of craftsmen and acknowledge that architecture is highly dependent on many people's input."



culation space, the black slate foyer is a safe area where party guests can see in every direction and slip in and out easily, Hallet has observed.



On the mezzanine's edge, chairs invite conversationswith-a-view, and small aluminum shelves offer a perch for coffee.

At first glance, this house appears to be another pristine example of Modern architecture, but a closer look offers up clues of something more: elements that come from ancient cultures and the vernacular architecture of remote outposts.

the road less traveled

Hallet has never struggled to find his professional niche. Spurred on by winning a high school design competition, he enrolled in the architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the 1960s. Like many students of that heady era, Hallet often fought with the faculty over the politics of architecture. He railed against the star architects who weren't addressing the larger issues of civic space. "I was more concerned with what the proletariat was building than with what individual architects acting as prima donnas were building," he says.

Instead, Hallet took refuge in simpler works that were equally beautiful, opting to study vernacular housing systems. And so, in 1964, with a fresh undergraduate degree, Hallet chose to go with the Peace Corps to Tunisia rather than accept a cushy travel scholarship to Italy. "I was anxious to look at housing problems in developing countries and felt that looking at the great treasures of the past would get in the way," Hallet says. "So I struck out naively. It took time for me to fully appreciate the masters."

His Peace Corps experience gave him a chance to explore the relationship between architecture and such other disciplines as anthropology, geology, and filmmaking. "In these areas of the world, houses were dug into the sides of mountains or into the ground," he says. "The opening

open hous



scenes of *Star Wars* showed a combination of building types I had studied in Tunisia. I still lecture about the material we explored." And it was there he met his future wife. During breaks designing hotels for the bureau of tourism, Hallet traveled the countryside with Judith, documenting the Berber architecture of southern Tunisia on paper as well as through the lens of a camera.

In 1967 Hallet returned to MIT for graduate studies, writing a master's thesis that studied settlement problems in Third World scramble up ladders and across each other's decks to get to their own homes. "I was struck by the remarkable complexity, beauty, and appropriateness of traditional architecture and its ability to house a culture and express not only its needs but its aspirations," Hallet says.

poetry in motion

Those elevated decks and their slim supports are reinvented on Hallet's own hillside perch. They're part of a rigorous layering exercise that organizes the thickening starts to occur, with narrow walls separating the kitchen, dining room, and stairwell. The house's rear wall and another wood-and-mesh fence with vines draw the final lines in the landscape.

"The planes thicken and thin with respect to the front or back of the house," Hallet says. "And as you move up, the house lightens. I enjoyed that logic." The front porch moves up to a balcony suspended over the third floor, and finally to a glass roof that covers the balcony. Even the col-

with my students I tried to keep up the discussion of how to regain the poetic at differe<mark>nt stages."</mark>

countries. The degree led him to a teaching post at the University of Utah, and, four years later, to a Fulbright fellowship that involved setting up an architectural school in Afghanistan. Then, on a fateful trip to Nuristan, an ancient mountain village in the northeastern part of the country, Hallet came upon an extraordinary sight. Stacked against a steep hillside was a whole village of interlocking, row-house-like structures with tall decks supported by spindly-looking posts. The shared walls were a fortress against attackers and the decks a lookout for the tribesmen, who would

site and structure. The front plane-the found landscape, Hallet says-is formed by two 80-foot-tall pin oaks, followed by a group of steel columns that march across the site, holding up their end of the decks. At intervals, jasmine climbs a mesh screen stretched between the poles, intertwining landscape and architecture. The third plane is the mostly transparent front wall of the house. Inside, four parallel pendant lights suggest a more ethereal separation of space, followed by 2x6 pine posts placed 6 feet on center at the edge of the foyer and central corridor. Then a

umn tops dematerialize into thin pieces of metal that flip around in the wind. "You don't find fishing rods on houses but you do see weather vanes or TV antennas something that tells you the roof is a different world than the ground," Hallet says. "I was trying to recognize other ways of exploring those differences."

Logical, layered, and utterly consistent, the house does have its own visual poetry. The large living room with smaller rooms rotating around it borrows from the Islamic notion of a covered court surrounded by more intimate spaces. So does the raised music

Smooth birch cabinets and black granite countertops keep the kitchen sleek and spare. The thinness of the countertops is echoed on a music-room bench and on shelves in the dining solar and upstairs offices. "There's a planning requests to it, a dictionary of parts to it, a dictionary of parts to receve

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open house

The dining room, with its three walls, recalls a stage set. A small pass-through to the left of the window lets the chef ferry food and table supplies between the kitchen and dining area.

CAN GOT

Alan Karchmer

17-14-

room, which evokes a sitting area in a Middle Eastern bazaar. But Hallet also composed his design with a playful sense of theater and film. Window openings reveal carefully cropped views, and shafts of light falling through a row of small, square clerestory windows remind one of the light emitted from a movie projector.

The first floor's transparency also lets each room become a stage set that can be lit or dimmed on cue and viewed from many different directions. When lights in the living room are low, for example, one has more of a sense of the dining room. "The stage keeps shifting," Hallet says. "One can be totally caught up in the space one is in, but with a change in position or gaze, take in other parts of the house, becoming a spectator."

street theater

The metaphor fits, given the number of students, colleagues, and community members who gathinantly Tudor-style community were quite concerned about the structure going up. The idea of building anything is always a disappointment to neighbors who have enjoyed the greenery of an empty lot, but what happens when a modern house is built in a traditional community? "You like to be able to live with your neighbors and with yourself as a designer," Hallet says. In a gesture of goodwill, every other Sunday he taped off the dangerous areas and opened the construction site to the community, serving up coffee, juice, and desserts. During the visits, Hallet would move through the site and explain what he was trying to do. Some of the children considered it a second summer camp, building miniature versions of the house on and off site and even acting out little plays on its imaginary stages.

The children, of course, intuitively understood something Hallet has long believed—that implementation, and how a building weathers during construction and must be cared for."

chess game

For his part, Hallet relished the opportunity to play and build. He says he realized architecture cannot be thought of as an immaculate, precise art but requires a more fluid give-and-take.

"You understand the limits and the potential of craftsmen you're working with and acknowledge that architecture is highly dependent on many people's input," Hallet says. "What I loved was being in the middle of that dialogue, being able to recognize opportunities as we were working on things and to make adjustments. Those things are more difficult to do when you have a client with a fixed budget where everything has to be signed in triplicate and you need elaborate change orders."

For example, during framing Hallet took the opportunity to

design and materials age, he's become more sensitive to them. "Does the house grow older gracefully or with trepidation? Do materials rusticate with a certain character you can live with, or do they decay and fall apart?" asks the architect. "You can read about light, space, volume, and materials. But it's another thing to live with them and understand intimately the outcomes of the decisions you've made. I've learned a lot about the limitations of materials, regardless of the claims manufacturers make."

Right after the Hallets moved in, members of the community association called to ask if they could have their annual meeting at the house. Although he planned for 20 people, 100 came. And after the meeting, Hallet gave a multimedia presentation that explained the house's design and construction. "They loved it," he says.

Perhaps most satisfying for Hallet, however, is the realization that this venture represents not

"most of us are devouring each other, and that's good. in making it your own, it will become different."

ered to observe the drama of design and construction. During Hallet's tenure as dean of the architecture school, he introduced an award-winning design/build program, so it was appropriate that he served as the general contractor on his own project. "This house was my design/build," he says. "It was an extraordinary experience because it got me out from behind my desk, out of bed extremely early every morning, and brought me closer to the elements of rain, sleet, freezing weather, and lots of snow."

Early on, Hallet became aware that his neighbors in the predom-

buildings are more interesting before they're completed. "The expression of all the pieces, the interplay of light and shadow, does have an aesthetic and texture to it," he says. "With my students I tried to keep up the discussion of how to regain the poetic at different stages."

Hallet's students explored the building at many stages during construction. Twice a month they helped with cleaning, sanding, painting, and landscape work. "It was gratifying for both them and me," the architect says. "They began to understand the relationship of design decisions to actual shift a window to frame the limb of a tree—a view he couldn't have noticed until the shell was built and he was sitting high up off the ground.

The process also gave him a chance to become far more intimate with materials and their assembly—say, how a piece of metal is attached to wood to protect the end grain from weather. "It might seem mechanical, but I can get deeply excited about that range of decision-making and its impact on the character and poetry of the building," he says.

And as he's lived with his decisions, observing how the

just his own background of ideas and experiences but also the interaction he has with the students and faculty in his own institution, where "I am as affected by what they're doing as they are by my discourse," Hallet says. "It's like a chess game where we keep getting better.

"We aren't always original; we're borrowing," he adds. "That's how we grow. Most of us are devouring each other, and that's good. In making it your own, it will become different." **ra**

Cheryl Weber is a freelance writer in Severna Park, Md.

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The seemingly discrete masses of this Long Island residence contain a surprisingly well-integrated living environment.

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shape scape

tuart Narofsky loves a clean sheet of paper. Like most architects, he relishes the freedom to solve problems entirely as he sees fit. But he's been around long enough to know that without the friction of client needs and wants, a clean sheet of paper can become awfully slippery. In designing this Long Island, N.Y., residence, he enjoyed perhaps the ideal balance: clients with a clear program who were completely open to the archi-



A narrow pool (at left above) and an earth berm with retaining wall (at right) define an outdoor space on an otherwise rather featureless site.

tect's direction. The result is a building that strikes the eye like sculpture yet lives like a home.

"They didn't show me magazines, they didn't show me books," Narofsky says of his clients. "They really sort of threw it out to me." The owners needed a family house that would accommodate frequent large parties, but they were remarkably unprejudiced about how to approach their goal. What traction the architect found came from the clients' taste for materials from their native India and the need to build interest on a flat, relatively featureless suburban lot.

building interest

"The house needed to create an environment on the site," says Narofsky, who defined outdoor spaces with projecting wings and walls that splay like fingers from the core of the house. He varied the contours of the site by digging a sunken garden off the family room and using the excavated material to berm a 90degree section of the drum-shaped mass that contains the living room and master bedroom.

The drum exemplifies Narofsky's rather schematic approach to this house. In his more formal projects, he plots major plan elements in rough shapes directly on the site plan, grad-



Photos: © Phillip H. Ennis Photography





Bold, sculptural forms and a lighted walk direct visitors to the main entry (top). A fireplace wall of cast aluminum panels (above) echoes the canted wall above the entry door.

ually working loose gestures into more orthogonal forms. Here, however, he was free to project plan elements into three dimensions while they were still in a somewhat abstract state.

That sounds like fun, but, as Narofsky is quick to point out, "It made my job harder, because in reality you have to find a way to connect all these things." The drum shape evolved from an arc he drew to screen the master bedroom from the south. After making the gesture on paper, he decided to keep it and, later, to expand it. Instead of an arc, he thought, "make it a pure circle, then erode and dissect the circle." The stair tower that flanks the drum like a miniature skyscraper reflects the owners' preference for a modest, enclosed main stair, a taste the architect has come to share. "There is something magical about leaving the space and then coming back to it," he says. Rather than simply hide the stair, however, Narofsky heightened the magic by cladding the tower inside and out with Kalwall, giving it the translucence of a paper lantern.

a new vocabulary

Such local solutions triggered global effects. Narofsky's decision to cant the stucco wall over the entry door—creating visual distance from the stair tower—yielded a motif that, like the drum, would show up elsewhere in the house. The emerging design was now generating its own raw materials. "It kept giving me new forms," Narofsky says.

The house echoes forms from this new vocabulary, wrapped in materials that echo the owners' personal history. The master bedroom and a secondary stair repeat the shape of the main stair and mirror its rotation from the orthogonal grid. The curve of the drum shows up again at the son's suite. The canted wall inspired the wedge of the fireplace wall. Clad in 72 hand-cast aluminum panels, the fireplace wall was itself inspired by a set of stamped silver temple doors the owners saw in India. The wall that separates the drive and parking area from the entrance is clad in red Indian sand-stone (its four enigmatic pillars house garbage and recycling containers).

The theme of concealing function within sculptural forms comes to a point at the center of the first floor plan. Here a maple box, another rotated square in plan, stands like a roomsize cabinet at the intersection of the entrance hall and kitchen wing. Canting one wall, Narofsky says, "made it a three-dimensional object, not just a plan object." Into this box Narofsky packed all the utility of a Swiss army knife. At its core is the powder room; its four outside walls offer up a kitchen counter, a pantry, a coat closet, and a fold-down serving counter.

Narofsky has collected design awards for the house from local and state AIA chapters and the Society of American Registered Architects and enjoys touring it with prospective clients. He relishes in particular the double response the house elicits. Struck first by the energetic composition of forms, visitors are surprised to find warm, livable spaces inside. Going in, "They say, 'I love the house, but I could never live in it," Narofsky says.

Coming out, many have begun to see the beauty of a clean sheet of paper.

Bruce D. Snider writes for residential architect's sister publication CUSTOM HOME.



Photos: © Phillip H. Ennis Photography

In addition to providing visual interest, the pool acts as a deterrent to the stair, obviating the need for a guard rail.

project: Private residence, Long Island, N.Y. architect: Stuart Narofsky, AIA, New York contractor: Robert Praver (construction manager), Locust Valley, N.Y. size: 5,500 square feet cost per square foot: \$218

66



MBR

Designed to accommodate large parties, the house overcomes inclement weather with a retractable canopy over the patio.



the result is a building that strikes the eye like sculpture yet lives like a home.

good form

friendly territory

hen Sharon and Don Greco were planning their new home in Manhattan Beach, Calif., they hesitantly thought of their childhood friend-turnedarchitect Jerry Horn, FAIA. "We did wonder if working with a friend would be such a good idea," says Sharon. "Plus, he was in Chicago and we were here." But Horn, who specializes in designing offices, museums, and university buildings at Chicago's Holabird & Root, was eager to take on the project. "I hadn't done a house in 30 years, except for my own," he says. "It's such a fun scale." The taste for Modernism the empty-nester couple shared with Horn, plus the allure of working with an architect they knew and trusted, convinced the Grecos that Horn was the man for the job.

winged adventure

Compared with many clients, the Grecos were hands off about their home's design. "We gave Jerry input on basic spaces, but more than anything we trusted his judgment on the design issues," says Sharon. The couple's few requirements included an ocean view (the tear-down that previously occupied the site had none), outdoor living spaces, and plenty of privacy.

Horn designed a two-pronged, 3,400-squarefoot floor plan to fit the irregular corner lot. He placed most of the main living spaces—kitchen, living and dining rooms, and master suite—on the second floor. Assigning these rooms to the upstairs satisfied both the view and the privacy stipulations; the second floor's height and liberal use of glass afford the Grecos views of the Pacific Ocean from both wings of the home. The upper-level location also lifts the couple up and away from the eyes of neighbors and passersby. "It's like being in a tree house," says Sharon. To further ensure his clients' privacy, Horn surrounded the first floor with a concrete wall.

A deck just off the kitchen and a first-floor courtyard give the Grecos an ample amount of easily accessible outside space. And the steel-supported pedestrian bridge connecting the house's two wings is enclosed in frameless glass, adding to the sense of proximity to



Photos: Tim Street-Porter

Teak- and mahogany-framed windows bring in sunlight and views of the picturesque beach community.

the outdoors. But the most striking means of interior-exterior integration lies in the visual connection between the two wings: Standing in the south wing, one can see through the courtyard and the north wing to the picturesque beach community beyond.

Aside from its obvious aesthetic benefits, the setup has practical advantages. "It's great for entertaining," says Sharon, a frequent hostess to visiting family members and friends. "I never feel like I've gone off into some room —I can see everything that's going on in the courtyard and in both wings of the house."

light brigade

The floor-to-ceiling windows that line nearly the entire second floor also lend the house a sense of lightness—an important factor for Horn, a confirmed Mies van der Rohe fan. (In addition to his duties as a partner at Holabird & Root, Horn is a professor of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, a veritable shrine to the German Modernist's philosophies.) "I try to base my work in structure, per Mies," says



Ocean breezes provide cross-ventilation in both wings; curved mahogany ceiling beams inside add to the house's nautical feel.

the most striking means of interior-exterior integration

lies in the visual connection between the two wings.



A glass-enclosed walkway connects the home's two upper wings and overlooks a lush first-floor courtyard.





Γ



Residents standing at the kitchen's island cooktop can see right out onto the second-floor sun deck.

project:

Greco residence, Manhattan Beach, Calif. **architect:** Gerald Horn, FAIA, Holabird & Root, Chicago **contractor:** John Katnik, Diversified Development, Manhattan Beach **size:** 3,400 square feet **cost per square foot:** Withheld Horn. "I used steel framing to express the structure of the Grecos' house and concrete to add a natural aspect, but I didn't want it to get too heavy. All that glass helps balance it out."

Glass, steel, and concrete make an ideal materials list for the commercial and institutional projects Horn usually designs. But he knew he'd have to mix in another strong element to attain the higher level of warmth and livability a house requires. The windows' wood frames-low-maintenance teak on the outside, silky mahogany on the inside-help considerably. So do curved mahogany ceiling beams, spaced 3 feet 4 inches apart on center. Held in place by steel brackets and trusses, the beams substantially balance out the interior's other, more industrial materials. Mahogany also appears underfoot, as floor beams. But it stops there. "We didn't want too much wood," Horn explains. "We were careful to fill in the spaces between the ceiling trusses with white-painted drywall to maintain that weightless feeling."

california dream

Designing a Modern house in Southern California represents a homecoming of sorts for Horn, who grew up in Inglewood, Calif. He began his career at Los Angeles' Craig Ellwood Associates and spent four years during the late 1950s working with Ellwood on the ground-breaking Case Study houses. He seems to have caught the bug for designing homes on the West Coast—he's also completed a vacation home for his own family in the San Francisco Bay area, and is working on preliminary drawings for another residential client in Pasadena, Calif.

Happily for Horn and the Grecos, any misgivings they may have had about a long-distance relationship quickly vanished. "Working at a distance actually had some advantages," the architect says. "During the times that I was able to visit the site, we got a lot done in a short time simply because we had to." He and his clients worked closely with their contractor, John Katnik, also of Manhattan Beach, to modify and refine the design as it was built. "Jerry and I talked daily," says Sharon, who visited the site every day. "And we faxed a lot. It was a wonderful collaboration."—m.d.

good form

point of departure

he owners of this brick-clad ode to simplicity in Midland, Texas, presented Mark Wellen, AIA, with a fairly standard list of floor plan requirements. They wanted a secluded master suite, with bedrooms for their two young children to be located in a separate wing. They asked for a family room that adjoined an open kitchen and breakfast room. And they requested a home that would be easy to expand or modify as their needs changed. So far, nothing too out of the ordinary for an affluent young couple.

But when it came to choosing their home's style and character, the couple proved themselves risk takers after all. "The husband said he wouldn't be happy unless his house made half the people in the neighborhood mad," remembers Wellen. "So we departed a bit from the area's mostly traditional elevations."

layered look

Depart they did—and with a result that may arouse jealousy rather than anger among the neighbors. Wellen used classic vernacular structures—the sheds, barns, and industrial buildings that dot the flatlands of central Texas—as his design inspiration. "We prefer our work to be more reductive of classic Texas forms," he says. So he distilled a few of these forms down to their most basic incarnations, then shuffled them together to create a layered effect. As a result, the 5,600-square-foot house doesn't crowd to the front of its lot as area residences are apt to do; instead, it gracefully cascades back on its half-acre site.

In addition to using the forms typical of Texas regionalism, Wellen also stayed true to the genre's weather-responsive nature albeit in an unorthodox fashion. The home's U-shaped floor plan protectively wraps around a central courtyard from which the residents can look out to the swimming pool and pool house beyond. While a wraparound floor plan is unusual for Texas, the ideas behind it melding outdoors with indoors and bringing natural light and ventilation inside—aren't.





Photos: © 1999 Hester+Hardaway

Interior shutters on the kitchen windows (top) allow the owners to customize the amount of light and privacy in the room. The wheel that guides the sliding door (above) was part of an old cotton gin.

And though the project lacks the long roof overhangs that help cool so many of the region's native structures, its artfully assembled, shade-creating massing serves an identical purpose.

The architect wanted the home's exterior as uniform in texture and color as possible, to increase the visual impact of its orderly repetition of forms. The client had specified brick as the dominant cladding material, so Wellen selected bricks from St. Joe Brickworks, in Slidell, La., one of the country's few remaining wood-mold brickmakers. "St. Joe bricks have a more handmade feel than average bricks," he says. "Also, their color variation is minimal."

He even had the mortar tinted to match the

72



Covered front and side entrances help shade the home's residents from the hot Texas sun.

bricks and made sure all mortar joints were flush, for an even look and feel. Clean-lined, standing-seam metal roofs and galvanized steel lintels contribute to the house's uncluttered aesthetic. As a bonus, brick and metal's ability to resist tough weather makes the home's exterior virtually maintenance free.

variations on a theme

In planning the home's interiors and landscaping, Wellen and his staff were given free rein by the client. "Of course, that's the way we like to design," the architect says. "But we don't always get the chance to. We were lucky in this case."

With the help of staff interior designer

"we prefer our work to be more

reductive of classic texas forms."

-mark wellen, aia

goodform

Shawn Higgins, Wellen devised a scheme that subtly reinforces the exterior themes without seeming contrived or superficial. Square bookshelves and display cases organize the home's inside much as square, shutterless windows do its outside. In addition, a sliding wood-framed pocket door divides the living and dining rooms. Paned with translucent squares of laminated glass, the door partners with two other exteriorlike elements: an exposed St. Joe brick wall and an unpainted steel beam. Waxed black concrete floors and inconspicuous custom light fixtures also maintain the spare, polished tone set outside.

In accordance with the owners' wishes (and with regional design tradition), Wellen maximized the house's capacity for outdoor living. A front terrace on the northeast side of the house, a central terrace built around an old oak tree and bordered on three sides by indoor rooms, and the pool and pool house provide plenty of sheltered outdoor space. "Entwining the terraces and pool with the house means the children and their friends can play in a safe, secure environment," Wellen points out. "Their parents can keep an eye on them from most of the inside rooms." The various exterior spaces work nearly year-round for outdoor entertaining. Hardy native plants fill the landscaped areas, ensuring that the residents don't spend all their time watering and mulching.

It's probably safe to say there's no house quite like this one in the entire king-sized state of Texas. But, just to make sure, Wellen designed a unique touch—small, house-shaped lanterns that appear in several places on the home's exterior. The lanterns were fabricated 280 miles away, by Austin's Two Hills Studio. "We have the studio create fixtures like this for every house we do—no two are alike," says Wellen. "I guess you could say it's our trademark."

It's an original idea, and a well-executed one. Much like the house itself.—*m.d.*



Metal lanterns by Austin's Two Hills Studio appear by the house's side doors and on the back and side patios.

project: Leach residence, Midland, Texas architect: Mark Wellen, AIA, Rhotenberry Wellen Architects, Midland contractor: Steve Ekstrom, Ekstrom Construction, Midland size: 5,600 square feet cost per square foot: Withheld

74


Steel lattices lend shade to the pool area; stained concrete and brick coping outline the pool itself.



second floor

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strategic alliances

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builders makes

sense in good times

—and bad.

it probably started

when some medieval master builder was just too busy to both design and build that next cathedral. Architects and builders began to specialize and diverge, becoming opposite sides of the construction coin—and they've been flipping each other to see who wins ever since.

The rules of that game, as it's currently played, are based on some widely held assumptions.

Here's what many architects assume: The builder will lowball the bid and try to make it up on change orders; the builder will cut corners on the job site; the builder will compromise the design in the interests of efficiency and profit; the architect's job is to protect the client from evil builders.

Here's what many builders assume: Architects design what they like, disregarding the client's needs—and bud-

relationship

trust . cooperation . respect . commitment . shared vision . synergy .

80



get; architects consider builders to be a lower life form or, at best, not smart enough to be architects; architects don't know construction costs, but still dispute every number on the bid; the builder's job is to build what works, not something unusual, complex, and costly that will need to be rethought after the first version fails.

And you can add your own favorite stereotypes to those lists.

Over the last couple of decades, though, increasing numbers of architects and builders are downplaying the old adversarial stances and looking for ways to work together. Maybe it's that "throw-out-the-old-rules" approach that baby boomers learned in the '60s, or perhaps it's an outgrowth of civil rights movements that call prejudices into question. Or maybe it's simply a way of doing business that works better than the old way, improving the odds of having a trouble-free job and a happy client.

For whatever reason, it's no longer unusual to find residential architects and custom builders who've figured out that the coin they've been flipping has two heads, and that they'd both be better off if they stopped posturing and started cooperating. The form such cooperation takes varies widely. If you think of a project as a town, some of these architect/builder teams would live on the same side of Main Street. Others would be neighbors. Some would share a group house, or even own the house jointly.

All the variations of this new cooperative order arise from the same basic premises: First, that a harmonious architect/builder relationship is good for the client. Second, that there are skilled, professional builders you can work well with and come to trust, and who respect good architecture. Finally, that maintaining a successful working relationship with a builder means making a commitment to protecting it. Here's a look at what works.

a good fit

Dan Phipps Architects, in San Francisco, first worked with Sausalito, Calif., builder Steve Stroub about 12 years ago. "The first or second time you work with someone," says Phipps, "you can tell whether or not the fit is good." It worked right out of the box for him and Stroub.

Stroub finds Phipps' plans "professional and detailed. Some other architects don't tell you how they want you to build something, but they're happy to explain how it's wrong after it's built."

Phipps saves time, too. He uses a shorthand approach when sending plans to Stroub for bid or preconstruction review. "We can send Steve's people a preliminary plan—very sketchy, no elevations—and they'll

building

by ann marie moriarty

Illustrations: Dave Klug

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relationship building

"contractors add

value to the

process, and

the sooner they're

involved, the better

the experience will

be for the clients."

-tom french, architect

know what my lines mean. We cite a few previous jobs to give them an idea of the level of quality, detailing, and materials, and they can come up with an estimate that's remarkably accurate." And Stroub knows the detailed working drawings that make his life easier will follow.

Their history of success opened the door to a different approach to pricing. "Dan used to insist on bids," says Stroub. "We still bid some jobs, but we introduced him to cost-plus. The clients like it—they get a fairly detailed budget, and our fixed fee is based on that. But instead of guessing at the risk, we leave that end flexible. It saves Dan time. He doesn't have to spend hours analyzing bids." It's an approach that wouldn't fly if Phipps didn't know he could trust Stroub's estimates.

matchmaker

Charleston, S.C., architect Chris Schmitt takes the notion of working relationships with builders a step further. "We don't bid *any* projects," he says. His firm, Schmitt Sampson Walker Architects, does high-end residential work, but "because of my development background," he says, "I'm very comfortable bringing the contractor in at the very beginning of the project." And, he says, in this economy, the best contractors in Charleston are too busy to prepare competitive bids anyway.

For Schmitt, those "best" builders are those who will do a top-quality job and are committed to a troublefree construction process. That led him to local builder Kevin Kalman, of Kalman Construction. Many Charleston architects, including Schmitt, have worked with Kalman on their own homes.

Schmitt starts his projects by matchmaking, selecting a few contractors who he thinks would do well with both the project and the client. Those builders, plus contractors the client suggests, each meet with Schmitt and the client to discuss the project and what their firm might bring to it. "Certainly not a sales pitch, and not exactly an audition," says Schmitt.

"It's definitely an audition," says Kalman. "But that's OK. It's 45 minutes or so—a lot less time than preparing a bid—and Chris keeps things focused." If the client starts sounding unreasonable, Schmitt steps in, says Kalman. "He flat out told one client, 'You don't have enough money in your budget to do what you're talking about.' He doesn't let his clients waste our time."

And Kalman returns the favor. "We learn the strong and weak points of the architects we work with, and make sure nothing slips by," says Kalman. "Some of our guys can look at a framing detail and realize, 'I don't think Chris is going to like the way this is turning out,' even if it's what the plan calls for. They call him so he can check it before it's too far along. Every job has problems, but we can work out about 95 percent of them without the client ever having to be aware of them."

shared office

When builder Andrew Flake has a question about Mark Hutker's plans, he doesn't have to look far for an

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answer. Although Flake and Hutker have separate businesses, they share an office in Vineyard Haven, Mass. It's an arrangement that began when Flake and architect Sam Dunn renovated an old commercial building in 1976, and continued when Hutker, Dunn's lead architect, bought the practice 11 years ago.

Hutker and Flake don't do every job together. "Andrew does three or four projects at a time, and generally we're the architect for one of them," says Hutker. "I explain to clients that it's not necessary to hire both of us. But if it's a project I know would be perfect for Andrew, I might work harder to make sure the client understands the benefits of having both of us working on it."

Communication is the biggest plus. "I don't think Andrew's ever had to stop work or even slow down to wait for us to respond," says Hutker. "He gets almost instant answers from us. And seeing the difference that makes to him has motivated us to do that with all our contractors."

There are other benefits. "It's a stimulating environment," says Flake. "I like good design, and this gives me an opportunity to participate in the process by adding in what I'm good at. Being here has let us see the architects working, and we realize the effort they're making, and gain respect for all they're doing."

It works both ways. "We have to remain humble," says Hutker, "to the amazing skills and crafts brought to our projects by talented contractors."

Are there ever problems? Sure, says Flake. "People who work together

closely have to be mature about it." If other architects do something that bothers Flake, he can simply decide not to deal with them any more. With Hutker, he says, "we put the time in and work things through."

design/build

About eight years ago, Josh Baker and his partner Larry Weinberg, of BOWA Builders, Arlington, Va., went looking for a local architect to help them offer design/build services by meeting clients, generating ideas, and producing sketches to help clients visualize possibilities. If a project went forward, the architect would produce drawings and continue to be involved as a subcontractor.

They found they worked well with Tom French, an ambitious young architect who left a design firm to launch a solo practice while working with BOWA. "I'm a common-sense architect," says French. "I enjoy the challenge of designing right there on the client's kitchen table." Clients have responded, producing a one-outof-four sales rate for BOWA.

"Teaming with a design/build contractor gave me steady work, and a variety of work that I would have been unable to get on my own at the outset," says French.

"We do high-quality projects with substantial budgets," says Baker. "As the design/builder, we absorb the liability. Architects working with us don't have to over-design to cover themselves in case something unexpected comes up."

Now seven years into running his own busy practice, Thomas French Architect, in McLean, Va., French still partners with BOWA as one of a handful of architects the company works with. There is a downside, though.

"In this relationship, I do cede some design control. I work for Josh, not the clients. I make design changes to make the project buildable within the budget—a budget that protects BOWA's profits. But in return I get profitable work, built to an extremely high level of quality. It's a synergy that works for us."

French's BOWA experience led him to encourage his own clients to interview builders at the sketch stage. "Contractors add value to the process," he says, "and the sooner they're involved, the better the experience will be for the clients."

partners

Back in the late '80s, when architect Rob Adler decided to launch his own West Long Branch, N.J., design firm, he also started a construction company. Times were tight, and "once I found a client," he says, "I thought it made sense to make them a client twice and build what I designed." Even more important to Adler was the idea that, as the contractor, he could build exactly what he envisioned.

A good theory. But builder Mark Socha says that when he met up with Adler, the architect's

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residential architect / march 2000

relationship building

"when it works,

both parties can

develop a style of

doing business they

can maintain ...

having the right

partner is key."

-mark socha, builder



fledgling contracting firm was just shy of being a total disaster. "I found I didn't know nearly as much as I thought I did," says Adler.

Socha, a former spec builder who'd branched into high-end remodeling, "started by helping Rob out with some framing, as a favor," he said. "When I saw the problems he was having with other trades, I'd give him advice, try to help." Adler and Socha soon realized they worked well together and "decided to make it official," says Adler. Each now owns half of Socha Builders, in West Long Branch.

"Everything I've learned about the construction process has significantly improved my architecture," says Adler, "especially when it comes to materials and detailing. Having suffered the consequences of being on the field side of my own blueprints, I've learned to do better working drawings."

Of the 45 very large custom projects Adler designed last year, Socha built about six. "I disclose that I own half a construction firm, and tell my clients they're under no obligation to use Socha. Because we can build so few of my designs, I don't push our construction services, but the projects we do as a team *do* work better," says Adler. "And I probably put a bit more effort into making sure those projects go smoothly, because I know that I'm getting paid for that effort on the construction end as well."

Having a close relationship with a builder can be tough, and having a legal relationship can be tougher. "Trust is vital," says Adler. "When it works," says Socha, "both parties can develop a style of doing business they can maintain. My management and production style matches what Rob and the clients expect. And Rob knows what we can do, so he can develop a consistent style."

Socha likens it to being married. "Having the right partner is key."

different strokes

Not only is each of these architect/ builder relationships different, but they work for different reasons.

Stroub and Phipps found they both value a predictably high level of detail and accurate cost figures. Both Schmitt and Kalman focus on doing complex work with a minimum of problems. Hutker and Flake value the interchange and close communication that improve their joint projects. BOWA and French each adds value to the other's business. And the consistency Adler and Socha have come to depend on lets them keep raising the bar for both production and design.

Most of these teams came together when work was hard to come by. But spending time cultivating consistent relationships now can be an investment that will pay off during the next downturn ... and on through the next boom.

Consider this: In the superheated construction economy of the San Francisco Bay area, Steve Stroub has all the work he wants. But when Phipps calls him, he responds. "Clients come and go," he says, "but we'll be working with Dan Phipps for a long time." ra

Ann Marie Moriarty is a freelance writer in Silver Spring, Md.

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hands on two sided

contrasting exterior treatments reflect a toronto home's dual roles.

by rick vitullo, aia

📕 n Toronto, Canada, two markedly different kinds of homes predominate: the Victorian cottage, with its small-scale, clapboard wood siding; and the industrial loft, with its large-scale exterior elements and commercial-grade materials. Rarely do these two contrasting building types coexist, even in the same neighborhood-but they do on the exterior of this two-story, 1,100-square-foot house, which was designed by the Toronto firm Shim-Sutcliffe Architects and built by local contractor Ptarmigan Construction.

When their client asked for a home that would serve as both residence and workplace, architects Brigitte Shim and Howard Sutcliffe decided to clad the house in such a way as to reflect its dual roles. For inspiration, they turned to the city's two distinct housing styles.

The architects covered the building's bottom half, which contains the living quarters, with horizontal-patterned 1x4 wood siding nailed over 1x6 vertical boards; ³/₈-inch gaps separate the 1x4s. This treatment evokes—without duplicating—the scale and pattern of the cladding on the area's *continued on page 94*



Illustrations: Rick Vitullo

The cottage-type material on the lower section of the house, wood 1x4s, contrasts with the industriallooking plywood cladding on the upper section. The wood siding floats over the sheathing, with reveals at the ends. Steel corner angles protect the exposed corners.





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iconic Victorian cottages.

For the upper half of the house—the "commercial" area, which contains a wide-open work space—the architects opted for the industrial-loft look. They wrapped the second floor with exterior-grade plywood, also nailed over 1x6 boards. One-by-two battens cover the joints.

In both applications, the exterior cladding materials are the primary weather covering for the building, but they float over the exterior plywood wall sheathing, separated from it by the 1x6s. The architects call this outside skin a "rain screen." It allows the inner skin—the exterior sheathing and moisture barrier—to breathe better in the moist Toronto climate.

Both cladding materials were stained, the 1x4s with an opaque stain that covers the grain, and the plywood with a penetrating stain that exposes the grain. The plywood was covered with a UV topcoat, as well, for further climate protection. **Fa**

Rick Vitullo, AIA, is founder and principal of Vitullo Architecture Studio, Washington, D.C.

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great houses



a 1,600-square-foot family retreat introduced duo dickinson to the alchemy of architecture.



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hat makes us want to be architects? When I was 16, I thought I would be an English professor or a historian. My best friend in high school had a retreat in upstate New York and I found myself

invited to plant a vegetable garden with her in 1972. I stayed in her family's 1,600-square-foot house, which was designed by Arthur A. Carrara, a disciple of Frank Lloyd Wright. Built in the early 1960s as part of a large family compound overlooking a lake, the house projected a crisp, clean identity amid the pines. More than an architectural statement, it provided a physical harbor for a truly loving family, one that embraced me with the sort of unconditional positive regard usually reserved for people who share the same chromosomal imprint.

That house and its magnificent screen porch showed me

how buildings can be manipulated in ways I had never thought possible. Seeing the simple expression of wood, stone, and glass in so many dynamic and subtle ways displayed the mind's ability to actually control a small physical part of the universe.

To a 16-year-old, that was a magical revelation. In the nearly 30 years since I first encountered this house, countless birthday parties, planting-weekend celebrations, and holiday fests have instilled it at the core of my memory.

Houses are indeed buildings, but when they embody the spiritual essence of a family, they are a gift from God. This house is such a gift. **ra**

Duo Dickinson is an architect in Madison, Conn., and the author of several books on residential design.