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Whirlpool Recognized by U.S. Design Group

Whirlpool Corporation has been recognized by the Industrial Designers Society of America for its array of concept microwaves created in 2000 by a team of Whirlpool and independent product designers under the so-called Microwave project. The record 1,260 entries for this year's Industrial Design Excellence Awards (IDEA), coming from the United States and 12 other countries, were judged by an 18-member panel from the designers society. This year marked the 22nd annual IDEA competition.

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All decked out and plenty of places to go. San Diego architect Jim Gabriel filled a missing-tooth lot with a bite-sized custom home. Photo by David Hewitt/Anne Garrison. **On the cover:** Architect Dennis Wedlick in New York's Grand Central Station, site of his "Modern Country" demonstration houses. Photographed by Steven Freeman.

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call for entries



Turn to page 33 for information on how to enter *residential architect's* third annual design awards.



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S. Claire Conroy / Editor / 202.736.3312 / cconroy@hanley-wood.com Judy H. Neighbor / Art Director / 202.736.3331 / jneighbo@hanley-wood.com Amy Doherty / Managing Editor / 202.736.3442 / adoherty@hanley-wood.com Meghan Drueding / Senior Editor / 202.736.3444 / mdruedin@hanley-wood.com Nigel F. Maynard / Associate Editor / 202.736.3448 / nmaynard@hanley-wood.com Shelley Hutchins / Assistant Editor / 202.736.3407 / shutchins@hanley-wood.com Kay Engman / Assistant Art Director

Maria Bishirjian / Graphic Designer

Ebony Qualls / Graphic Designer

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Johanna Daproza / Production Manager

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Peter M. Goldstone / President / Magazine Division

Ron Kraft / Director of Magazine Operations

Suzanne Jones / Executive Assistant

Contributors

Susan Bradford Barror / Vernon Mays / Rick Vitullo / Cheryl Weber

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Peter Pennoyer, Residential Architect

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textures that make beautiful complements to traditional materials such as wood, tile and stone."

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from the editor

identity crisis

could you live and work without labels?

by s. claire conroy

s there any other country that loves labels more than the United States? Cole Haan, Doc Marten, Ralph Lauren, Banana Republic, BMW, Subaru. They're a shorthand for a variety of life-styles and tastes. Like it or not, we are what we wear, what we drive, where we live—at least, in others' eyes. This is how Americans make sense of our democratic land of plenty.

New-home buyers shop by label, too. If they're purchasing a production house, they're choosing a Pulte, Toll Brothers, or Taylor Woodrow. If they're building a custom home, they'll hire an architect by reputation as well. Maybe they're interested in collecting a house by you as they would a painting by Kandinsky. More likely, they've heard you work in an architectural style they admire. Most likely, they saw a house you designed and want something along those same lines. And voilà, you're labeled. You're stereotyped by the last beautiful house you did. You're a Modernist, traditionalist, deconstructivist, or some other "ist" of your own invention.

For architects, typecasting is an especially thorny problem. You do want some sort of professional identity -you don't want to languish in anonymity, with no one coming to you asking for anything. But which identity do you strive for? Do you aim to satisfy the prevailing public taste? Do you go for what the shelter magazines think is chic? Or do you cleave to what was cool in architecture school and in professional journals? Each has advantages. But it's all very limiting. Why can't you and your client just start with a piece of paper and discover together what that house will look like?

As long as clients and residential architects believe a custom home is a product and not a process, nobody's going to drop the labels. A number of things have to be in place before you and your client can go where no one has gone before. The most important is trust. The best way to gain that trust is to listen to your clients. Says our cover architect, Dennis Wedlick, "It's about words. There are some that make them defensive and others that show you're listening. You don't want to communicate that you're pursuing some personal agenda. Be careful not to use the 'I' word. Don't even use 'I think.' Say, 'Do you think?' Then offer the sug-



gestion. Avoid anything that implies you're going to lead rather than serve. It's the best opportunity to be creative because it leaves the most doors open."

Wedlick used this approach with some custom clients in upstate New York. The design responded to what the family of five asked for out loud (a screened porch, crown molding, and other classical touches) and what they communicated tacitly (a need for lots of private space and room to unite). Together they designed a true, one-of-a-kind custom home-a shingle-clad house in the shape of a six-pointed star.

Although I call his style "easygoing Modern" on the cover, Wedlick really defies

Photo: Katherine Lambert

classification. And that's largely because his work is so specific to client and site. But, as a magazine editor charged with showing, explaining, and defining-sometimes in very tight spaces-I went ahead and stuck on a somewhat ill-fitting label. If you take the time to read the story on Wedlick, beginning on page 48, you'll see I let him describe his architectural identity. Such is the danger of rejecting labels: It makes us all work harder. ra

Questions or comments? Call me: 202.736.3312; write me: S. Claire Conroy, *residential architect*, One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005; or e-mail me: cconroy@hanley-wood.com.

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keep those cards, letters, and e-mails coming, folks.

media-challenged y compliments on your editorial in the June issue ("Today Show Ignores an Architect," page 13). Your insight points to the profound problem architects are having in our communities. We're still marketing to a select few, reaching a few of those few, and ensuring that architecture is beyond the reach of most of us.

Our profession has serious difficulty making the transition to a media-friendly culture. We're unable to put our best representatives in front of a television camera. In fact, we can't agree on who best represents us.

It's unfortunate that a profession that prides itself on the effective communication of ideas fails so badly when confronted with the changing attitudes (and increasing affluence) of our society.

Doug Brinley, AIA Callison Architecture Seattle

time to hit the mainstream

i saw the same series on the "Today" show and agree with your editorial comments. I am an associate in a traditional landscape architecture firm in Bonita Springs, Fla., specializing in one-of-a-kind, original residential garden design. If you think architects and architecture are sometimes invisible to the public, landscape architects and landscape architecture are at least as invisible if not more so.

I think the reasons for my profession's publicrelations problem are similar to architects' in that landscape architects tend to have an "uppity" and expensive reputation. To compound the problem, the general public is not at all sure what we do.

In addition, the members of my profession, like yours, tend to be terrible marketers. I think the very qualities that make us good designers—introspection, careful thinking, and sensitivity; a formal and demanding education; a rigorous licensing process —hinder us.

We take ourselves too seriously. We concentrate on the importance of getting our work recognized by professional magazines and our professional society. Actually, it is much more important to get out in the community and talk about ourselves and our work, submit work to less prestigious but well-read local magazines for editorial use, and tell the "Today" show and HGTV that we would like to be included.

We must commit ourselves to educating the public about the value of our allied design professions. We need to make our services seem less intimidating, more understandable, and eminently more embraceable. In short, we need to hit the mainstream.

Kristen Petry via e-mail

credit risks he reason architects and L building designers are routinely left uncredited in builder literature and builder awards programs is simple: Builders do not wish to bid on a set of drawings against other peers. They do not want anyone to know who is designing their product because the consumers may bypass them to get the good stuff and then have it built elsewhere at lower cost. This is understandable.

Consequently, there is a group of unsung great designers doing up a super product that will never be known because of special hiring clauses. The biggest scam of all in the construction industry today is this: eliminating competitiveness by refusing to follow the traditional process of bidding on a set of documents. It is now a marketing process, not a design process.

But residential designers cannot afford to pack their offices with all the product and material samples that builders have. Once again, we have lost control. And that will continue unless we somehow regain the lead position. If that means becoming design/build, then that must be the course of action to follow. Otherwise, we get involved in bones only, not skin—and lose a tremendous part of our fee.

Out-of-house designers should include contractual clauses that make it mandatory to credit the design professional when a project is featured in any media.

> John Henry, AIA John Henry Design International Orlando, Fla.

> Walt F. Coponen, AIA Coponen Architects, P.C. Northville, Mich.

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tips and trends from the world of residential design

my house, the car

unk car parts don't often hang out around architect-designed homes. But there they are, playfully serving one purpose or another on a renovated house and studio in Berkeley, Calif. The entryway awnings are discarded hatchbacks. Railings are truck tailgates and Volvo station-wagon rear doors. And car windows have been pressed into service as shelves. Designed by Leger Wanaselja Architecture, the project was among the Annual Top 10 Green Projects chosen by the AIA's Committee on the Environment.

Cate Leger and Karl Wanaselja, a husbandand-wife architectural team, bought the 100year-old house and adjacent shop as a spec project. Acting as developers, designers, and builders, they jacked up the two-and-a-halfstory house, building two new commercial spaces below and creating two residential units above. The pair's environmental approach ran the gamut from purchasing sustainably harvested woods and using recycled newspaper for insulation, to selling the old nails for scrap metal. "We took the building apart so materials could be reused or sold to salvage yards, rather than taking them to the dump," Wanaselja says.

The couple also searched for alternative sources of new materials. Why the wacky car parts? "The material has a lot of energy embodied in it, and the parts are beautiful," he says. "We integrated them in such a way that they're functional, but also treated as sculpture."

After the couple completed the project, they moved into the top-floor unit and used the detached building as an office. "Our work has a playful element to it," Wanaselja says. "Recycling and salvaging should be fun."—*cheryl weber*









20





get a second life as a railing. Left to right: On the architects' detached studio, formerly a cinderblock antique shop, a

Above: Two Volvo tailgates

Mazda hatchback protects the entryway. The house's rear deck incorporates a hatchback awning and a truck tailgate railing. The architects raised the house and inserted commercial space below.



Courtesy Kohler

jet set

ohler's new Sōk overflowing bath is no ordinary tub. The 75-inch-long, 24½-inch-deep basin contains eleven special air jets that transform the water into a whirlpool of effervescent bubbles. Once the tub is full, the water cascades over the unit's inner rim to be heated, filtered, and recirculated back inside for conservation. "Consumers told us that they wanted a warm, deep bath that was more soothing than a traditional whirlpool," explains Sōk product manager Paula Forseth Dick. "They didn't like having to crunch down and stuff a washcloth in the overflow drain to be completely submerged."

Camouflaged controls adjust water circulation and jet action. The bath's outside walls can be finished in any material; the interior tub is available in white, almond, or biscuit. List price starts at \$5,790. For more information, visit www.kohler.com or call 800.4KOHLER.—*shelley d. hutchins*

can-do attitude

ndy Warhol would have been proud. Of the 9,187 cans used to construct Nadaskay/ Kopelson Architects' grand-prize-winning entry in the 2000 CANstruction competition, 5,660 of them were Campbell's soup cans. The Newark, N.J., firm liked them because they interlock securely when stacked. At 6,000 pounds and 8 feet tall, the teahouse was completely self-supporting, as stipulated by official rules, with tape (packing, strapping, and foam) as the only adhesive. "The largest obstacle was creating sturdy enough beams to securely support the roof, which weighed over 1,000 pounds," says project architect Christopher Stone.

CANstruction, a national community-service project for the design and construction industry, was launched six



Courtesy Nadaskay/Kopelson

years ago by the Society of Design Administration in tandem with the AIA. Last year, 37 participating SDA and AIA chapters collected 900,000 pounds of food for Second Harvest food banks. "We have 55 cities that intend to hold a competition this year," says national chair Cheri Melillo, "and we expect to raise more than one-million pounds of food."—*s.d.h.*

home front

calendar

residential architect design awards: call for entries

deadline for requesting a binder: december 3, 2001 entry deadline: january 7, 2002



Our annual *residential architect* Design Awards program honors outstanding architecture in the following categories: custom, renovation, multifamily, affordable, production, and on the boards. A

J.K. Lawrence duct

project of the year is selected from the winning built entries and all of the winning projects will be published in the May 2002 issue of *residential architect*. Shown: a 2001 custom-home grand-prize winner by A&E Architects. See page 33 for more information.

sign of a great design contest

deadline: december 31

Jenn-Air's new design competition targets remodeled kitchens that incorporate Jenn-Air appliances. The grand prize is \$10,000 and a four-day trip to Milan, Italy. For entry form, call 612.375.8541.

perfect acts of architecture

september 15-january 6 carnegie museum of art, pittsburgh



A sluggish economy that curtailed new building in the 1970s and '80s triggered an eruption of "paper architecture." This exhibition features drawings of unbuilt projects by prominent architects Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman (whose House 6 Transformation Drawing, 1972, is shown at left) Daniel Libeskind, Thom Mayne, and Bernard Tschumi. Call 412.622.3131 or visit www.cmoa.org for exhibit hours.

classical cities: 19th-century photographs of greece and rome

september 20–november 11 lowe art museum, coral gables, fla.

Fifty-six 19th-century albumen and silver gelatin prints depict the architecture of such Classical civilizations as Pompeii and Herculaneum. Visit www.lowemuseum. org or call 305.284.3535 for museum hours.

the chicago bungalow

october 18-january 15 chicago architecture foundation



historic Chicago bungalow with photographs, models, blueprints, videotaped interviews with current owners, maps of bungalow belts, and a full-size footprint depicting an interior layout. Shown: a row of historic bungalows built between 1910 and 1940. For hours and information, call 312.922.3432.

restoring wright: past perspectives/future directions november 1-4

lakeland, fla.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy's annual conference examines the challenges of preserving and maintaining Wright's houses and buildings. Specific topics include original design intent, restoration philosophy, building modification, and adaptive re-use. Call 773.324.5600 or visit www.savewright.org to register.

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history lessons

architect russell versaci rebels and revels in the ways of old.

by a. russell versaci, aia

ay back in architecture schoolmany years ago now-I was a renegade. At least the Harvard Graduate School of Design thought so in 1972. In an atmosphere that was biologically Bauhaus, I was designing Classical facades with columns, entablatures, and plinth bases. The faculty politely but firmly suggested that I might look elsewhere to study architecture if I wanted to do "that sort of thing." After a year of conflict, I took their advice and transferred to the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Fine Arts. There I discovered the possibility of life beyond Modernism.

At Penn I fell in with an adventurous group of likeminded renegades who spent most of their architectural lives roaming the stacks of the Frank Furness Library in search of everything old. Penn was one of the last schools to yield its tradition of Beaux Artsstyle teaching to the ground swell of Modernism. It also had one of the best collections of historical architecture books outside of the Avery Library at Columbia University.

The great irony of this



Versaci takes cues from older houses when designing new ones. For this new fieldstone residence in McLean, Va., he looked to the traditional stone cottages in England's Cotswold region.

collection of rare books was its curator, an elderly professor of architecture who had come of age as a Modernist. Thirty years earlier, convinced that "history was no longer relevant," he had tossed out many of the Beaux Arts monographs and impeccable portfolios of watercolor renderings in the library. Once history had righted itself again, he proceeded to restock the shelves with replacement volumes acquired at great cost from antiquarian book dealers. Fortunately, his architectural epiphany made life very exciting for us stack rats.

For three years I had the pleasure of working and learning alongside fellow students who yearned to understand and practice architecture in the old way —by studying the history of building, by learning the Classical Orders, by decorating facades with ornament, and by drawing in ink and watercolor wash. Through trial and error, we learned to acquire the lost skills of traditional practice from one another.

It was an autodidactic, peer-based learning technique that made every bit of acquired skill seem precious.

the reactionary

School over and my credentials earned, I had no clue how to translate a passion for traditional architecture into the real world of work. Fortunately, my colleague and fellow Harvard dropout, the sculptor John Dreyfuss, invited me to Washington, D.C., to help him restore the 1789 Halcyon House in Georgetown. Washington proved to be fertile ground for traditional architecture, because it was a culturally Southern town with a conservative mindset in matters of style and taste. After wandering in continued on page 28

when something this starting arrives... It gets everyone's attention.



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Smooth-Star: exquisite depth and detail that rival fine painted wood.

perspective

the city's architectural offices for several years, I decided this was the place to start my own journey in traditional architecture. I had met a fellow traveler and future partner in David Neumann, and we set out to create a tradition-based firm. We have found a receptive and well-heeled audience here for our brand of work.

For fifteen years we have been in the business of recreating tradition, of selling history. Much like Ralph Lauren has done in the fashion world, we rummage through the antique shops of architecture to find ideas that resonate. We find, we study, and we measure old buildings to understand the secrets to their composition and craftsmanship. Then we synthesize a design using antique ideas and crafts to create something new out of something very old.

Our most potent discovery has been that it takes inspired clients to make inspired architecture. Our clients bring a vision of

"traditional architecture permits us to build without leaving an egocentric footprint on the work."

their dream; that vision becomes our fountainhead. Their dream stimulates our creative juices to search for traditional forms and precedents for a new design. The process and the final work are a collaborative effort that works something like an extended swap meet. The clients bring to the table their thick file of magazine clippings. We bring our collection of photographs and dog-eared architectural monographs from the library. Together we cut and paste and ultimately cobble together a primitive picture of what will become their dream house. In the end, we all feel a deep sense of communal authorship of their new home.

One of the reasons we enjoy traditional architecture is that it permits us to build without leaving an egocentric footprint on the work. Our profession suffers from the popular misconception that all architects are arrogant, imperious characters bent on using their clients to fund their artistic expression.

My partner and I prefer to work within traditions that require us to be good students rather than creative geniuses. Our most successful projects are those where

Versaci Neumann & Partners we leave no distinct architect's mark, the house that "looks like it's always been there." The highest compliment we can hope for is being asked, "When did you restore that great

old house?"



Ron Blunt Photography

A stained inlay floor pattern and Neo-Classical detailing grace the entry in this Potomac, Md., home by Versaci Neumann & Partners.

traditional technophile

In this age of digital technology, we have often thought that we should offer a boutique architectural service in which we prepared old-fashioned hand-drawn and handlettered designs. In the early years of our practice we did just that, creating hand drawings with meticulously rendered plans, elevations, and details. These drawings were important architectural works for us, being as wellcrafted as our buildings.

Because of the computer's power to streamline the design process, we now do all of our drawing digitally, with the exception of some initial sketching. Our portfolio is an electronic image bank housed on a Web site in cyberspace. We e-mail drawings between our two offices in Washington, D.C., and Middleburg, Va. But we've made painstaking efforts to adapt these new tools to our culture and to our way of producing architecture. We've developed computer drafting techniques to simulate the hand rendering that we admire so much. Our digital portfolio has the consistent, classical simplicity that has been the hallmark of all of our printed materials.

In short, we use digital media as yet another tool in the production of our brand of architecture. We simply work with more efficiency, flexibility, and precision than in the past. The journey in architecture from renegade to reactionary to technophile has flowed on a course I never would have imagined. ra

A. Russell Versaci, AIA, is a principal of Versaci Neumann & Partners in Washington, D.C., and Middleburg, Va., and a founding member of the Institute for Traditional Architecture.





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call for entries

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what's eligible?

Any home or project completed after January 1, 1999. For On the Boards submissions, any design completed after January 1, 1999.

when's the deadline?

Entry forms and fees are due no later than December 3, 2001. Completed binders are due January 7, 2002.

where will winning projects appear?

Winning projects will be published in the May 2002 issue of *residential architect* magazine.

how will projects be judged?

A panel of respected architects and design professionals will independently select winners based on design excellence. They may withhold awards in any category at their discretion.

entry form

To register, you may do any of the following: **Call** Shelley Hutchins at *residential architect*, 202.736.3407 **mail** this form to Shelley Hutchins, *residential architect* Design Awards 2002, One Thomas Circle, N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20005 **fax** this form to Shelley Hutchins at 202.785.1974

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number of entries categories

- Custom Home, 3,500 square feet or less
 Custom Home, more than 3,500 square feet
- 3. Renovation (residential remodeling and additions)
- 4. Multifamily Housing
 - 5. Single-Family Production Housing, detached
 - 6. Single-Family Production Housing, attached
 - 7. Affordable Housing (At least 20 percent of the

units must be affordable to families earning 80 percent to 120 percent of the local Median Family Income. Consult your area HUD office or local government office for the MFI.)

8. On the Boards (any unbuilt project from the categories above)

deadlines entry form and fee: december 3, 2001 completed binders: january 7, 2002

practice

going for the gold

cultivating high-end clients takes a little ingenuity and, sometimes, a ski-lift ticket.

by cheryl weber

ne evening in Rome, seated at a restaurant at the foot of the Spanish Steps, architect Charles Cunniffe struck up a conversation with the couple at the next table. After dinner, business cards were exchanged, and several months later they hired him to do a small project in England.

Cunniffe designed another house for a client he met on a heli-skiing excursion in the Canadian Monashees. Then there was the trip to the Nagano Winter Olympics in 1998, organized by a Norwegian client, during which he picked up work for a house outside Vail, Colo.

Such chance meetings resulting in high-end commissions aren't that uncommon for Cunniffe, AIA, an Aspen, Colo., architect. His passion for skiing and golf-and piloting his own plane-has put him side by side with people who lure him to exotic places, and then ask him to design their houses. As a result, his portfolio includes projects in Thailand, Mexico, South America, Japan, and half-a-dozen European countries. Through his welldeveloped recreational life, Cunniffe has tapped into a



rich source of architectural work. His business niche evolved from the activities he enjoys, he says, not the other way around. But now they're intertwined.

Indeed, not all architects set their cap for the famous or fabulously wealthy. Money (still) doesn't guarantee taste. And the front line of architecture isn't just about being published in a prestigious taste-making magazine. "You don't need to throw endless money at a project to do excellent architecture," points out Jim Morter, FAIA, of Morter, Aker, Cole Architects, Vail, Colo., which specializes in ultrahigh-end custom homes. Yet many architects relish the artistic freedom—and David Plunkert

responsibility—that comes with being handed a healthy budget. "I find this kind of architecture absolutely intriguing," Morter says. "It involves an awful lot of work and tedium, and for some architects it's brain damage. But I also love the personal aspects and getting to know the clients."

continued on page 36
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practice

traveling in circles

Like Cunniffe, San Francisco architect Dan Phipps, AIA, markets to upscale clients in an oblique waythe only way that really works, said every architect interviewed for this story. Twenty years ago, he renovated a condo he intended to live in himself, but then sold before going to graduate school. Between classes he took on more fixeruppers, including an apartment complex that went condo. "People started thinking, 'Here's a guy who knows how to develop

with the client. So at the end of the day, I've found every job yields us three new jobs."

Reputations travel farther in upscale circles than they otherwise might, simply because of the constellation of specialists that orbit around high-end households. "It's not just the clients we're taking care of but the people who are a buffer for them-their attorneys, business managers, interior designers, real estate agents, and architects," says Thomas Bortolazzo, a Santa Barbara, Calif., contractor. "As a

ships with builders, particularly when he's working in far-flung locations. "Contractors are spokespersons," he says. "They're the ones clients typically come across first, and who recommend the architect. In general, clients are more trusting of contractors than they are of architects. We gain contractors' respect by knowing how to build and preparing the proper construction documents, and by working with them as opposed to lording over them."

In this high-stakes game, Spencer also regularly

"a principal or senior person on the team needs to be available at all times—for good and bad and not quite right."

-donald rattner

things and create value in a property," Phipps says. Later, his own home in the posh Pacific Heights community began to turn heads. "I entertained in the house; people could see what was there," he says. "They want to be able to see, touch, and smell what you've done."

Of course, Phipps takes his clients as seriously as he does their design. "Every time I get a job, whether high or low end, I do the best I can, not just to have the best architecture, but also the best relationship consequence, we're essentially marketing to all those people. We find that sometimes even more valuable than the referral we get from a client is the referral we get from their business manager, who might manage eight to 10 other highend clients."

As a contractor, Bortolazzo is a fixture in that picture, too. Charlottesville, Va., architect Madison Spencer, AIA, says some of his greatest marketing comes from his relationphotographs his work and submits it to magazines. To clients who are parting with a lot of capital, seeing an architect's work in print represents a much-needed stamp of approval. "Even in the most mundane circumstances, people look for a label they can recognize," he says. "Like in the fashion industry, it carries a sense of respectability and repute."

In the last few years, Ferguson Shamamian & Rattner, New York City, has begun to bolster its pricey residential niche with resort work such as golf clubhouses and other facility buildings. It's a logical way of expanding, Donald Rattner says, because people have second or third homes on these properties.

The architects also attract the attention of potential clients by designing table decorations for high-profile charity events. In fact, during the first decade of practice, the firm's most powerful tool for gaining entree into high-society homes was its collaboration with interior designers-a natural link, since two of the founding partners came from Parish Hadley, an interiors firm in Manhattan.

That relationship continues to be an important one in the high-end world. "Interior decoration plays a big role in these housespaint, wallpaper, lighting, even things as basic as understanding how these people live and entertain," says Rattner. "There's a dynamic to these houses that is unique to them. It's not knowledge people graduate with from architecture school. Because we spoke the interior designers' language, they knew the issues they were interested in would be resolved in a satisfactory way."

chef and tailor

Architects in this market must be fluent in the clients' language, too. *continued on page 38*



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practice

Typically, the owners are movers and shakers who expect you to deliver an exquisite product while using their time and money efficiently. From design concept through construction, veteran architects market a process more than an architectural idiom.

"When you step in the door at Paul Stewart, you want that haberdasher to size you up and give you the style that fits you, not show you 50 different suits," Spencer says. "That's what these people hire architects for. They're looking for the architect to take responsibility." John Saladino, a star interior designer based in Manhattan, uses a similar analogy. "I always tell clients that working with me is like going to a very good restaurant. You're given a menu, but you don't need to know what all the ingredients are." In other words, people of means hire him because he knows certain things: that windows in rooms housing a collection of paintings or photography need ultraviolet glass. That people of a certain age need better reading light and more comfort than younger people do. That a large household may need two laundries-one private, and one for the staff. And that

the staff laundry room needs a television set, good air-conditioning, and a door opening into the garden so those working there don't feel trapped.

Jim Morter sizes up clients' needs by involving them in an on-site design charrette that can last three days. It's good for marketing as well as design. "It appeals to people," he says, "so they give us a try. These people are investing a lot of themselves in a home-not just money." Starting with clean sheets of paper, he gets them to divulge their dreams and basic ideas about home. "It's amazing what comes out of these

sessions," Morter says. "And the clients feel a pride of authorship."

On the other hand, a touchy-feely approach is torture for some. Once, Morter literally spent 25 minutes with a client before sitting down and designing a \$2.5-million home. "It scared the hell out of me, shooting in the dark," he says. "But I ended up doing two other homes for him, including his primary residence in another country."

precision drill

A lot of high-octane clients are successful business people, such as bankers and *continued on page 40*



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practice

venture capitalists, who possess a well-developed sense of self-confidence. So an architect's confidence level is one thing they pick up on. Says Phipps: "People have commented to me that other architects don't know what they're doing. Don't say, 'I'm not sure.' Let them know there's an order to this; it won't be a soft, gushy process. It's black and white, like a business. They like that more than anything."

Recently, for example, Phipps was able to speed a \$6 million project through a restrictive review process because of his relationship with a planning-department "let clients know it won't be a soft, gushy process. it's black and white, like a business. they like that more than anything."

-dan phipps, aia

official. "It's a can-do thing," he says. "So many people get stalled in the process because they don't have good people or organizational skills. Know a guy who can solve your problems. You want a builder who will show up and get the job done. Over time you build up a relationship with people by providing information in the format people want."

Contractor Bortolazzo stresses to clients a project delivery system that's heavily weighted toward construction management, as opposed to just budget or quality. The firm uses Prolog Manager, by Meridian, to log new job data and constantly apply it to the original scope of work. The information is part of a report that shows clients and their business managers how many change orders are pending and how they'll affect the schedule and the budget. "We like to think the clients and professional team are always aware of changes to the job status," Bortolazzo says.

Indeed, wealthy clients view their architect as the impresario of a large group of people who are brought together for the project, Rattner says. His firm also employs sophisticated systems to channel information and create a clear paper trail. And it generates extensive construction *continued on page 42*

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practice

drawings that leave little to the contractor's imagination. "If mistakes are made, we're there promptly to address those things," Rattner says. "A principal or senior person on the team needs to be available at all times—for good and bad and not quite right. We're not a 9-to-5 service; the client can find us anytime if they wish to."

practicing your principles

For that reason—and because designing a substantial residence is a long, labor-intensive process architects should turn a discriminating eye on potential clients. When Spencer visits out-of-town clients, he often stays with them as guests for the weekend. "Over a one- or two-year period, that's a lot of face time," he says. "If you don't like the way they act or find them finicky, you can drive each other crazy."

Washington, D.C., architect Hugh Jacobsen, FAIA, agrees. After 43 years of practice, he judges potential clients by the same criteria as he did starting out—are they seeking an innovative design, or simply a seduction chamber? "Louis Kahn once said, 'How do you do a beautiful building for a rat?' You don't," he says. "When architects are being interviewed, the client thinks he's interviewing the architect, but the architect is interviewing them, too, judging them in terms of design appropriateness and personality. All of my clients have been my friends; that's how you do a good building."

Adds Saladino: "A lot of designers working on the high end cater to new money with a lot of gold plumbing fittings. If they come to us looking for that, we say, 'We don't think we can handle you for a year.' What I'm known for is this luxurious and sensual mix of old with new, but never over-the-top. I always like to mix humble with rare to take the thunder out of the palace."

Above all, Santa Fe architect Elisabeth Wagner, AIA, sees to it that her high-end clients have fun. Building or renovating a house is as stressful for them as for anyone else. "I keep it light with humor and sympathize with them about the lack of privacy and how much it costs," Wagner says. "You're there to help them have a good time." ra

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

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dennis wedlick has many talents,

but what's propelled him

from grade school to grand central station

is his ability to



Steven Freeman

listen and learn

by s. claire conroy

ennis Wedlick lugs around a Bible-size day planner stuffed full of dog-eared scraps of paper. It's no Palm Pilot, but the low-tech device does everything he needs it to do. It juggles projects in Colorado, New York, Virginia; the class he teaches at U. Penn; a visit from a magazine writer; a trip to Italy for a former client's milestone birthday; events for his new book, *The Good Home;* and the thousands of details surrounding this month's opening of two demonstration houses inside Grand Central Station. It's a schedule that would daunt Stephen Covey, but Wedlick has it all under control.

In his early 40s, Wedlick has already accomplished so much. He put himself through architecture school, graduating from Syracuse University; he worked for Glass House guru Philip Johnson for 12 years; he's run his own practice for nearly 10 years; he's designed a *Life* Dream House; and, in June, he published (with writer Philip Langdon) his manifesto on residential design. Obviously, he's enormously talented. Yet, as most of us finally realize by age 40, talent alone doesn't guarantee success. Wedlick has come so far because he learned that lesson early on. "In grade school we had to write what we



Thomas W. Schalle

Dennis Wedlick's two "Modern Country" demonstration houses (shown in model, top, and rendering, above) debut in Grand Central Station this month. The storybook charm of his tiny Kinderhook house in Columbia County, N.Y., (opposite) launched his private practice 10 years ago. Later, he juxtaposed a large barnlike structure for summer entertaining.

listen and learn



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The Noho Building MANTER IN





Wedlick's aesthetic—a blend of Modern, romantic, classical, and quirky—is as much at home in the city as it is in the country. He designed this Manhattan penthouse (opposite and above) with his interiors associate Gideon Gelber and landscape expert Margie Ruddick. Mahogany partitions, kept below ceiling height, subdivide the loft while preserving its spacious appeal.

wanted to be when we grew up," he recalls. "I wrote about being on the cover of *Life* as an architect."

His ambitions clear to him, he worked diligently and strategically to make them happen. His job with Philip Johnson was pivotal. It began as a summer internship, lost in the crowd at Johnson/ Burgee. He could have languished in fresh-faced anonymity, but he was determined to make the most of his foot in the door. "I had been there a couple of weeks, folding shop drawings," he says. "Philip Johnson had a party for the firm out at the Glass House. He asked who I was and what I was working on. I said I was folding shop drawings, but that's not what I should be doing. I told him his archives were a mess, that all his drawings were stuffed in tubes and being destroyed. So, I went to work archiving all of his drawings."

The assignment gave him close access to Johnson, who began to rely on him for other tasks. "I would just get everything done," Wedlick says. "I was fast. When you work your way through school, you have to do things quickly." He parlayed the summer internship into school-break stints at Christmas and Easter, and finally into a full-time job when he graduated in the spring.

He worked on skyscrapers with the rest of the crew, but continued doing odd jobs with Johnson, including a renovation of the bathrooms in the Glass House. "It was a great way to learn. Even when he did a bathroom, everything had to be perfect—lined up, thought out—how it would be installed, how it would hold up," he says.

He learned something even more important from Johnson. Despite his status as a star architect, Johnson never forgot he was there to please his customers. "He got into trouble when he said, 'I'm a whore,'" Wedlick says. "But what's true is that you're at your clients' service."

cottage industry

Wedlick has multimillion-dollar projects in his portfolio now, but he began his practice designing

listen and learn

sweet, romantic cottages in Columbia County, N.Y., a mix of small-town dwellers and big-city weekenders just outside of Albany. It's where he built a 1,000-square-foot country house for himself and his partner, Curtis DeVito. With its precipitously pitched roof, punctuated by a quirky dormer window, the little house had an irresistible storybook charm. It melded all of the architect's loves—vernacular historicism, Postmodernism, Modernism, and the odd, highly personal flourishes that distinguish a house as one-of-a-kind.

He and DeVito maxed out their credit cards to build the house, convinced it was absolutely necessary to launch Wedlick's solo career. A shrewd decision. It lead to media coverage and a continuing stream of commissions in Columbia County. "It was a challenge to work with a palette of mundane materials and make something unique," he says. "Eventually, that became my whole career."

Making custom homes accessible is still a goal, and it's informed the idea houses he's done for *Country Home* and *Life* magazines. Even as his practice has grown and attracted better-heeled clients, he won't turn down a budget-driven project like his own. In some ways, a constrained budget is most simpatico with his taste for restrained detail. "We can do a lot with a little, with clean lines," he says. "But we're not shy to introduce things that have character.

"I'm definitely a romanticist," he explains. "I'm a modernist in the way I like to reduce things, but I'm very interested in drama—in things that are witty and playful. The buildings that age well are the ones that have something odd about them—a romantic twist."

star turn

It's a rare architect who can convince clients to indulge their romantic side, especially if it means the biggest investment of their lives will look a little "odd." But that's exactly what he manages to do, with the strongest case in point—or maybe I should say points—the star-shaped house he designed in upstate New York for the Shah family.

What makes people reach for the stars with him? He says it's because the houses he designs come directly from his clients' program needs; he doesn't impose an architectural statement on them. "Architectural statement. Ooh, you don't want to go there. No one lives in a statement," he says. His idea for the six-pointed Shah house originated with his sense of the family—a doctor, his artist wife,





The Malden Bridge House balances a family of five's need for privacy and togetherness with a sixpointed star plan (above). Inside, the points aren't acutely obvious, but the double views are (left).

well are the ones that have something odd about them."



and their three grown children—as a group of very independent but close-knit people. They all get their own sanctum and room to come together.

This intuitive sense about people, coupled with a self-effacing but self-assured manner, is essential to Wedlick's success. It's natural and it's cultivated. He's very careful how he talks to his clients, taking great pains not to impose his opinions or ego. "I want clients to have faith that I'm after what they're after," he explains. "It's about words. There are some that make them defensive and others that show you're listening. Be careful not to use the 'I' word. Don't even use 'I think.' Say, 'Do you think?' Then offer the suggestion. It's the best opportunity to be creative because it leaves the most doors open."

It may also be easier for clients to take risks within a framework that's familiar to them. The



Thomas W. Schaller

Wedlick's 1995 *Life* Dream House combines stock materials and a roofline borrowed from a Frank Lloyd Wright house in Oak Park, III., for maximum impact on a meager budget. Like Wedlick's own house in Kinderhook, N.Y., it manages to look both rooted in the past and completely in touch with the present.



When the owners of Oneta House, an important work by Philip Johnson, approached the master for a renovation and expansion, he sent them to protégé Dennis Wedlick. The young architect's additions, blessed by Johnson, preserve the original while responding to it in the whimsical tradition of garden follies.

"i want clients to have faith that i'm after what they're after."

n and learn



materials Wedlick uses and the forms he plays with have precedents clients can recognize. He doesn't cow them with Bauhaus. And he doesn't overwhelm them with sheaves of drawings and detailed models during conceptualization. When he presented the Shahs with his design, he traveled light: "I just showed them the floor plans; I didn't mention that the house looks like a star. I said, 'Here's the screened porch you asked for.' It had the shingles, crown moldings—all the classical touches they wanted."

He says he learned that from Philip Johnson. "He taught me you shouldn't waste time on fancy presentations. If the idea is good, simple plans can explain it."

deus ex media

Wedlick is no less savvy in his dealings with the media. It's another skill he picked up in Johnson's office, where he fielded requests for press materials and project information. In fact, he claims if he weren't an architect, he'd choose a career in journalism—and he's made several forays into the profession. He's written a column for *This Old House* magazine and for the local paper in Columbia County, among others. "I like communicating," he says. "If writers weren't writing about my houses, I would be."

But we are writing about his houses—so much so that he believes nearly 75 percent of his commissions come from people who've read about his work in newspapers and magazines. No doubt this month's debut of two demonstration houses he designed for *Country Home* magazine will attract even more press coverage and client commissions. Opening September 10 in Grand Central Station's Vanderbilt Hall and on display until September 30, the houses explore the theme "Modern Country," with ideas for country and city living. "Half-a-million people go through Grand Central each day," he says. "That's a wide audience for residential architecture."

His recent book, *The Good Home*, published in June by HBI and climbing rapidly in Amazon's sales ranks, should help expand the audience even further. He designed all of the projects in it, but he doesn't tout the houses. Instead, he uses them to illustrate universal points about residential design. Very smart.

Talent, energy, people skills, and media savvy —Dennis Wedlick has it all and, better still, he's learned how to use it. ra





Inspired by the clients' love of potato barns, Wedlick designed a wishbone-shaped structure artfully poised between grand and modest, formal and informal. It's a clever solution to Sagaponack, N.Y.'s hybrid identity as a rural community and upscale weekend destination.



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balsam fores,



western customs

on the left side of the continent, three custom houses practice three very different good-neighbor policies.

by cheryl weber and nigel f. maynard

imple standout

Sah Diego's Mission Beach community is often compared to Venice Beach, its free-for-all cousin farthet up the California coast. It's an easygoing place awash in brilliant light, sea breezes, and strollers carrying surfboards. In fact, travel by foot is encouraged in this little utopia, which occupies a spit of land between the Pacific Ocean and Mission Bay. The town is crisscrossed with alternating strips of auto alleys and pedestrian walkways. Its design ecology is equally low-tech, consisting mainly of beach shacks dating back to the 1950s. As in other coastal towns, however, land prices have risen sharply, leaving modern-day property owners pondering how to get the most value from their tiny lots.

That was the question on Craig Wutsch's mind when he asked architect Jim Gabriel to design a year-round home on his 25-by-50-foot lot. Wutsch's simple threestory house is a polished variation on classic beach themes. Living spaces take to the heights for wafting breezes and watery views, and porches open the house to street culture and salt air. But absent are the clashing building forms and Caribbean colors. "Everything is so out-of-control busy here," says Gabriel, AIA. "We thought the most powerful thing we could do was to be quiet and simple so the house would stand out."

vertical layers

The house's hard rectangular form started with the idea of taking the traditional components of front yard, front stoop, public and private spaces, and rear service porch, and compressing them and building vertically. Gabriel developed the design in vertical layers, with a two-car garage and guest room/study on the street level, main living areas on the second floor, and a master bedroom above.

Visitors enter the house in stages. The front door, made in Tijuana, Mexico, is an aluminum art piece depicting fish swimming in a kelp seabed. It's reached via a small courtyard and bubbling wall fountain, which conveniently doubles as a water bowl for Wutsch's two gigantic chocolate Labrador retrievers. Inside the front door is a three-story stairwell that's open to the sky. Gabriel used steel grating for the treads. They sift sand from visitors' feet on the trek upstairs and allow sunlight to filter down through. A lighted koi pond at the bottom of the stairs creates the opposite effect at night, when the light glows upward.

Giving the beach tradition a new twist, Gabriel encouraged the exchange between inside and out with a three-story "porch" that runs up through the house alongside the entrance stairwell. "The old

Quiet colors and subtle textures make this house a calm spot in a chaotic beach town. Concrete block, board-formed concrete, and stucco form the walls, while white canvas flutters in the breeze above.

Photos: David Hewitt/Anne Garrison

western customs

one-story beach houses had wonderful front porches and little yards," Gabriel explains. "But in the new ones, everything moves up and there's no connection anymore with anything down below. I still wanted to capture life that happens as the neighbors walk by and talk to each other. But I also wanted to capture the wonderful views, and not have the owner sitting there with all the cars and foot traffic."

high entertainment

In the main living area, Gabriel enclosed the porch with operable windows fitted with exterior aluminum Venetian blinds. With the touch of a button, they can be lowered or tilted to trim the heat before it hits the glass. Wutsch and his guests tend to gravitate to the roof deck directly above, which Gabriel designed for entertaining. It's roomy enough for a refrigerator and gas grill, and even a dumbwaiter that ferries food and supplies up from the garage or kitchen. Over-



In contrast to the rest of the house's openness, the kitchen is like a cave where the owner can cook in private. A wall incorporating a 150-gallon saltwater aquarium separates it from the living room and its bank of windows (top).



head, billowy strips of canvas on stainless-steel cables mitigate the harsh sun. When the weather is windy, they can be pulled back against the building.

Open to the outdoors and comfortable on its site, the small house seems more ample than it is. The roof deck's outer wall comes up high, but the view knows no bounds. "We brought the built elements upward so that when you're outdoors it still feels like a room," Gabriel says, "not like you're sitting next to the house."

subtle security

Layering occurs horizontally here, too, with public spaces and transparent walls out front giving way to more solid walls as you move deeper into the house. At the very back is a semi-enclosed service stairway that runs between the garage and main living area and on up to the master bedroom. Crime is a problem in this town where everyone wanders freely, so Gabriel covered the stairwell's outer wall with a neat row of redwood slats—an artistic interpretation of a security fence. "We try to figure out ways of designing things so people can't get in, without it looking like security bars on a building," Gabriel says. Plant pockets below will supply climbing vines to help obscure the stairs.

Those slats reappear on a landing on the entrance stairwell, letting visitors look out and daylight shine in. They add fresh texture and pattern to the house's monochromatic exterior. Naturally, its materials were chosen for their ability to age gracefully. For the base, Gabriel used concrete block softened by sandblasting. At the entrance gate, board-formed white concrete creates a tactile surface. "The palette we looked at was all white and silver-gray," he says. "The texture on the entrance wall seemed to go well with the aluminum gate." Above, the building is covered in white plaster. Low-maintenance materials predominate inside, too. Sand is easily swept from the concrete floors. The ones downstairs are stained, well, chocolate-Lab-hair brown; the top floor is a sea-colored blue-green.

The house is a calm spot in its helter-skelter surroundings. "We were trying to take this complicated area and get something somewhat elegant out of it," Gabriel says. "This is a real livable house with the quiet, simple character that we were hoping to achieve."—c.w.





project: Mission Beach residence, San Diego architect: Architects Hannah Gabriel Wells, San Diego general contractor: Armstrong Construction, San Diego project size: 1,400 square feet, plus 1,000 square feet of built outdoor spaces construction cost: \$140 per square foot

western customs

g tting it right

Most empty nesters agonize with their architect over the design of their dream house. Not Brian and Candy Brand. Brian Brand, AIA, a principal with Baylis Architects, had designed their previous home in 1974. As the family expanded, so did the house, and it became a laboratory for testing ideas. So when their son left home in 1999, they had already planned the definitive dwelling to see them through the next 25 years.

This house is a collection of ideas from the couple's extensive European travels. "Our general consensus over the years was that a big house with a big lawn was not something we were interested in at all," Brand says. What they wanted instead was a courtyard house, cradled by patios and low-maintenance plants. Another European tradition appealed to them, too—a house with built-in flexibility to expand for extended family, a caregiver, or use as a live/work space.

The new house, finished last year, embodies the best aspects of their old one. It's compact, open in plan, and has a lake view. But its hardedged design and the deft integration of important planning issues assure its place in both the present and the future.

level best

One of the requirements for a courtyard house is a flat lot. Brand found this one—a former tennis court—by happenstance when a client hired him to process the subdivision of an estate into three smaller lots. Brand chose the prime spot—on a high point with views west toward Lake Washington, Seattle, and the Olympic Mountains. Serendipitously, as both a developer and an owner, Brand got the rare chance to influence roof heights and setback regulations to preserve those views for everyone.

"I'm a Modernist," Brand says. "There's a way to do very simple buildings and through interesting geometry create something that looks fairly complex." His starting point was a series of split-face CMU retaining walls. They create level courtyards on the north, south, and west, extending the interior beyond the confines of the doors. The house is organized on a 14-foot grid, with walls that move in and out to shape interior space or direct the eye. The living-room wall, for example, is canted toward a distant view of the Space Needle. On the west, synthetic-stucco-clad panels continue inside as exposed steel beams. "The Northwest is known for its post-and-beam construction," Brand says. "This is an interpretation of that aesthetic, using metal." The panels, in turn, create a rhythm on the patio and frame vistas from the living room, kitchen, and dining room.

Brand has long admired German architecture for its use of metal and glass as design elements. Not only are these materials clean and uncompromising, but they require little in the way of upkeep. "We're getting to the point in our lives where we don't want to spend our time maintaining a home," Brand says. He cov-

ered the upper portion of the house in galvanized corrugatedmetal siding, choosing a pattern with tight shadow lines to mimic the beveled wood siding found on older homes in the neighborhood. And to straddle the line between inside and out, Brand carried the siding into the entryway, where it wraps the stairwell.

simple and sleek

The two-story entrance hall is the house's one concession to high drama. Lesson learned: The soaring spaces in their first house weren't really comfortable to live in. "They're nice to pass through, though," Brand says. He used 9-foot ceilings in the rest of the house, relying on an open plan and Shoji screens, high windows, glass block, and walls









Laid out on a 14-foot grid, the house's rhythm of stucco panels (far left) continues inside as steel beams (above), a reinterpretation of the Northwest's post-andbeam construction. On the exterior, each type of metal—including galvanized corrugatedmetal siding, clear anodized-aluminum window frames, and aluminum and steel railings-will weather a little differently. In the bath, a glass bowl and metal finishes emphasize simple geometric lines (left).

Photos: Ed Sozhino

western customs



of sliding glass to share light and borrowed views from room to room. Balmy breezes are also whisked right along, thanks to a passive cooling system. Operable clerestory windows on the east, where the house's curve is the highest, create a ventilation path. A 4-foot overhang on the second floor keeps the western sun from penetrating the master suite. And on the ground level, a stainless-steel and sandblasted-glass trellis shields the west side of the house from the harsh elements. Brand had seen a similar treatment on a historic building during a 1995 trip to Austria. "It's a great way to design a cover without creating a big, light-blocking structure," he says.

Designing a smaller home—just 2,000 square feet of primary living space—allowed the Brands to spend more of their budget on durable materials and details. Granite countertops and 16-by-16-inch slate flooring keep the look simple and sleek, as do the natural metal finishes on the floating staircase, cabinetry supports, and shelves. The kitchen cabinets, which also float free of ceiling and walls, divide the living areas. Their burnished anigre wood brings out the warm shades in the flooring.

And the couple got their accessory space—a 700-square-foot unit on top of the two-car garage. Linked to the upper level of the main house by an enclosed bridge, it incorporates a small kitchen, a bath, living and sleeping areas, and a private observation deck.

Whatever its eventual use, it's part of a house that's deeply loved by the owners, most of all for its harmony between inside and out. "It's easy to walk from one area to another," Brand says. "And we can enjoy the garden throughout the day.

"A home is something that's very functional," he adds. "Because we had modified our first house so many times, we had a strong focus to accomplish everything we wanted." If only his own clients were so decisive.—*c.w.*







second floor



project:

Brand residence, Kirkland, Wash.

architect:

Brian Brand, AIA, Baylis Architects, Bellevue, Wash. general contractor: Montgomery Homes, Mill Creek, Wash. project size: 2,700 square feet construction cost:

\$210 per square foot

western customs

native nuances

Few design schools fully prepare architects for the tremendous complexities of custom home design. Where are the classes that explain how to spin a client's laundry list of desires into something harmonious, functional, affordable, and contextual?

Husband-and-wife architects Glade Sperry and Cindy Terry faced the dreaded laundry list and more when they took on a project in the high desert of Albuquerque, N.M. The major challenge, however, was to the firm's core aesthetic. Albuquerque-based Westwork Architects prefers to practice a kind of "edgy Modernism" with regional overtones, but, says Sperry, "this house is more overt in its regional references than the work we usually do.

"The clients had seen a house we did that was heavily regional," he explains. It was a project they'd done for a contractor who'd pleaded for years for something ultra-traditional. Fortunately, the prospective clients didn't want a carbon copy. "They wanted their house to reflect a more up-to-date approach to regional architecture," he says. Their willingness to experiment within the parameters of familiar forms and materials convinced Westwork to take on the job.

Then came the laundry lists. Adapting features from houses they had lived in previously, clients Everett Rogers and his wife, Corinne Shefner-Rogers,

outlined their priorities in several memos. Most important, says Rogers, a Regents' professor of communication and journalism at the University of New Mexico, was that the house have varying shapes and angles. "We wanted unusual architecture—not just the standard box or basic rectangle," he says. The program called for a light-filled house, an overhead bridge, and studies overlooking the kitchen and the dining room. They also wanted a house that reflected the various cultures in New Mexico history. Local covenants dictated another list of requirements, including a restriction on strongly contemporary exteriors.

regional influences

The architects put all of this in the spin cycle and came up with a solution that fuses 20th century Modernism and Southwestern regionalism. Regional influences turn up in the stone walls of the entry courtyard, which hint at ancient Anasazi ruins, and the stucco and adobe-style walls on the main house's lower level, which echo Spanish colonial traditions. The circular living room, cubic second-floor study, bridge, and trellis-topped observation tower bow to Modern tastes.

"The way the forms rest on the site gives the sense that something was built there before," says Sperry. "Around New Mexico ruins, the only marks left are the bottoms of the foundations. The pieces that are adjacent to the house's circular forms are classic Anasazi-type shapes."

The Anasazi stonework weaves through the entry into the circular living room, which the architects consider the heart of the house, and continues through to the tower. Says Terry, "Part of what we try to achieve in our architecture is an interlocking of forms. It breaks down the mass so rooms seem smaller and more intimate, yet you can tell the living room is a grand space." The living room has two interlocking forms, one to the entry courtyard and another to the tower that connects the bridge.

Courtyards are another Spanish influence and this house has several. An interior courtyard on the south side and an adjacent shaded portal help control the

In keeping with local strictures, Albuquerque, N.M.–based Westwork Architects took a hands-off approach to the desert home's landscaping.

The house's stonework pays homage to Anasazi building traditions, while its circular forms hint at Modern influences.

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Photos: Kirk Gittings Photography

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western customs



In opting for large windows, the architects deliberately bypassed Southwestern convention in favor of maximizing views. strong western light as it comes into the house, reducing glare. Deep-set windows, undulating walls, and the juxtaposition of right angles complete the exterior. Landscaping is minimal, in keeping with local rules requiring that any vegetation outside the yard wall remain native and rustic.

contemporary sensibilities

Though the architects embraced regional conventions in some areas, they rejected them in others. One departure is the large window openings in the circular living space. Classic Southwest houses have thick walls and small openings, but "because the house is on this incredible site with incredible views, we wanted to open it up," Sperry says.

The architects speced historically appropriate stone floors, white plaster walls, and wood ceilings, but applied them with contemporary sensibilities. Modern requirements dictated skylights and tall windows, to filter in natural light and create a bright and airy space. The open kitchen is up-to-the-minute, with sleek stainless-steel appliances, stainless-steel and Corian countertops, and red oak cabinetry. And overlooking the living room is a steel walkway leading from the study to the observation deck. "If you go into the space it's a totally different feel than the exterior," says Sperry. "It comes across as an insertion of hightech into a regional feel, and it does have more light than an old style Pueblo home."

The architects admit the house is a sidebar to their current work, but they're pleased with the result and so are their clients. Says Sperry, "It's hard to talk about the project being lighthearted without sounding frivolous, but there is an undercurrent of Route 66 eccentricities and New Mexico architecture that runs through it."—n.f.m.









project:

Rogers residence, Albuquerque, N.M. **architect:** Westwork Architects, Albuquerque **general contractor:** George Lewton, Lewton Construction, Albuquerque **project size:** 3,342 square feet **construction cost:** Withheld

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continued on page 74



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doctor spec

into the closet

semi-custom systems are no longer just hangers-on.

by nigel f. maynard

ustom-home clients care about the little things; that's why they hire you instead of opting for a "custom" tract home. A production house won't suffice, and neither will the rudimentary wire-rack-and-pole closet system that's typical builder spec. For these clients, the ultimate home needs an ultimate closet.

Depending on your client's wants (and wallet), you could spec an exquisite custom system, but it could take a year and cost upwards of \$150,000. Or, you could spec a semi-custom product that will spare some headaches and save some time not to mention a few bills.

showpiece systems

The installed closet category used to be made up of lowend outfits peddling coated wire, until European companies upped the ante with high-end systems incorporating solid wood, high-density particleboard, wood veneers, melamine, aluminum, and glass. Pieces can be freestanding or built-in, and feature accessories aplenty.

"They've been engineered to work and save time on installation," says New York City architect Christine Restaino. "The factory can





Courtesy California Closets

produce standard products and the finishes are great."

When Machado/Blake Design in Somerville, Mass., has a project that calls for a typical walk-in, Christopher Blake, AIA, and partner Madalena Machado design the system and have it custom built. "But if we're doing a showpiece walk-in and we want glass doors

Poliform's Senzafine collection (above) offers hanging closets, shelves, and matte-glass doors. California Closets' Ritmo (left) is a freestanding system finished in cherry-wood veneers and white lacquer.

and nice materials, we deal with Poliform or companies that provide semicustom systems," Blake says.

Those companies include Studio Becker in

Alameda, Calif.; California Closets in San Rafael, Calif.; Los Angeles–based Doma, which carries products by Move; and the aforementioned Poliform USA in New York City.

high-end players Based in Italy, Poliform offers various species of solid wood, wood veneer, melamine, and 20 different door styles. The company's freestanding products come in various heights and widths in configurations to fit any space. Doors have matte, reflecting, or painted glass, and edges can be clad in walnut, cherry, pearwood, canaletto walnut, or aluminum.

"You can use a carpenter to design anything that comes to mind," says Daniel Yarom, Poliform's vice president of operations. "But the carpenter is generally using less sophisticated machinery that isn't consistent in quality. It's also very difficult for the end user to *continued on page 78*





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doctor spec

see what the results will look like." With Poliform, Yarom says, clients can walk into a showroom and see a product that is mass-produced yet maintains a high level of craftsmanship.

The Italian-made Move line is also a versatile modular system. Sliding or folding doors come in aluminum, walnut, or cherry with frosted glass. Storage units can hang from the wall or rest on casters, and accessories include chests of drawers, tie trains, shoe racks, and ironing boards.

Studio Becker's Ultimate Wardrobe system blends German manufacturing with Italian style. The built-in system is made of natural maple in a combination of veneer and solid wood, but it is also available in natural beech and mahogany-stained beech. Accessories include valet rods, carousels, pullout shoe shelves, and drawers with glass panels and leather handles. The line also includes swinging or sliding glass doors in wood or aluminum frames.

Available in built-ins and freestanding units, closet systems by California Closets range from simple reachins to elaborate walk-ins. Panels can be cherry-wood veneer or white lacquer, but aluminum shelves, glassfront drawers, cherry dividers, slide-out belt racks, and pullout hampers are options. Six door styles are available in various materials.

hefty price tags But all this style does not come cheap. Less expensive than completely custom systems, the high-end products can still be, well, high. Budget systems from California Closets and Poliform are available for about \$7,000. However, Move costs about \$800 per linear foot; Studio Becker products can easily reach \$70,000; and Atmosfera from Poliform costs \$1,100 to \$1,600 per linear foot, with total systems hitting a hearty \$100,000.

"Cost is difficult to assess," says Dan Danenberg, owner of a Studio Becker showroom in San Francisco. "The system has many different components and accessories, so it depends on the features you choose." One thing is certain—Studio Becker's least expensive walk-in starts at \$20,000.

While this may all sound steep, it really isn't, says Danenberg. "You can have a carpenter build a system similar to ours, perhaps even beyond ours," he explains. "But if he fabricates it so that you can compare apples to apples, our product would be much less expensive."

Architect Christopher Blake says prices are high because the quality is good. The bells and whistles, he says, are refined. "They are not just cleanly made; they work really well," he says. "They stand up to the kind of abuse that closets can take."



Courtesy Doma, Closet Systems by Move



Move's Espace (above) boasts cherry or sycamore fittings. Luxurious materials—leather, glass, and maple —enhance Studio Becker's ultimate wardrobe (left).

Courtesy Studio Becker

meticulous plans

Costs aside, these companies have their own design departments, so choosing a system is easy. Planning is still important. "Architects must remember that specing these products is a process," says architect Christine Restaino. "Make sure drawings are as clear as possible. Measurements must be extremely accurate."

Danenberg also says that some features require certain clearances, so dimensions must be properly analyzed. "We design closets that might not be as efficient as they could be because the room is a foot too small," he says. "Attic space, light switches, and other things must also be positioned in the best location, so planning should be done early."

Finally, give manufacturers ample time to meet your deadline. Lead time varies but can take anywhere from eight to 12 weeks. And though it is always best to walk into a showroom, most manufacturers say floor plans can be faxed. If so, the person relaying the information has to be meticulous, Poliform's Yarom says.

As with everything else, you and your client must decide if a semi-custom closet is the right decision. The time and money savings make this category an attractive alternative, and with a little legwork and planning, the systems can provide the finish and quality that a custom-home client will truly appreciate. **ra**

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by rick vitullo, aia

f all the wildfires that ravaged California in the early 1990s, one of the worst was in Oakland, where more than 3,000 homes were destroyed. Among them was a neo-Tudor house owned by a couple who, despite the dangers, loved the area and decided to stay and build again. They hired architect William Dutcher of Berkeley, Calif., to design a new house one with aesthetic connections to their previous home.

In particular, they wanted Dutcher to incorporate into his design one of the features they had loved most in their old place: a spiral stair. However, Dutcher discovered that, in California, a spiral stair defined as a cylindrical stair that wraps around a central structural column—cannot be used if it serves more than 400 square feet of habitable space. The stair Dutcher's clients envisioned would be one of the main stairways of the house, visually linking the building's two perpendicular wings.

Fortunately, Dutcher also discovered that no such restrictions limit a circular stair—one that wraps around a central cylindrical opening and is by definition bigger and more usable than the spiral version. (Codes did require, though, that the *continued on page 86* The circular stair is 13 feet in diameter with a 5-foot-diameter opening in the center. Each tread is held off the wall by a 1-inch gap, which allows light to pass between the stair structure and the outer wall.

Illustrations: Rick Vitullo



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inside diameter of the circular stair's central opening be at least 5 feet.) Thus, everyone agreed that a circular stair satisfied both the code-compliancy and the aesthetic issues.

For detailing, Dutcher designed the stair as a series of "beams" cantilevering from the circular wall structure towards the center, with each beam, or riser, consisting of a ¹/₂-inch-thick steel plate bolted to a pair of 2x4 studs, spiraling upward. At the ends of each riser, project manager Dan Cohen, of Creative Spaces, Oakland, Calif., attached two 1/2-inch-thick by 2-inch-wide vertical steel plates, which act as structural balusters at each step. Next, he and his crew fastened 1-inch-thick mahogany planks to these uprights and added a segmental wood cap for the handrail; that completed the inside stair railing.

Once all of the steel plates were bolted in place, they were chemically treated to give the steel a "rusty" patina, and then were flat-lacquered. The final finish was applied after installation to reduce the likelihood of harm coming to its delicate surface.

For the treads, which are supported at their ends by the steel risers, Dutcher specified 1¹/₂-inchthick planks of sustainably harvested Honduras mahogany.

After the stair was designed and installed, Dutcher found an article in a structural engineering journal that claimed a stair designed in the same manner would actually be self-supporting—that it would need connections only at the top and bottom of the structure and need not be attached at the side wall. Such may be the case, but the solidity of Dutcher's stair will never be in doubt, particularly during that other typical Californian natural event, the earthquake. **ra**

Rick Vitullo, AIA, is principal of Vitullo Architecture Studio, Washington, D.C. Originally, the steel plates were to be sandwiched between the two studs and through-bolted in place, but the contractor had difficulty installing them because the studs were not in sufficient alignment. Instead, he welded a plate to the ends of each riser plate, with holes drilled in it to accept four ¹/₂-inch lag bolts. This approach allowed more adjustability for each riser as it was being attached.



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ra / q + a peter pfau

s a custom home the ultimateluxury for Americans?

I have a different attitude about that. I believe the opposite is true—that having a cracker-box production home with no soul is the epitome.

Do you see things changing in the future?

I don't know. I think the landscape of America is being soiled by acres and acres of production homes, which is bad for the environment because they rely on the automobile. They waste space and are not, to me, aesthetically pleasing. So I hope in the future we'll develop more sustainable models for how people live in the environment.

How many custom homes have you designed?

I've probably done about 12.

Do you design larger custom homes or smaller ones?

We've designed both large and small. My preference would be smaller, because I think there are a lot of people whose homes are much bigger than they need.

What is the largest you have done?

42,000 square feet. That was an exercise in excessiveness. It was almost immoral.

What do you strive for in your custom homes?

I strive for a unity of things—a very strong fit with the people who live there and a fit with the building site and place.

Did you design your own house?

I am in the process of designing my own, but I'm not sure if I'm design-



ing it or it's designing me. My problem is that I can't afford myself.

Are you building it right now?

I am, shall we say, pecking away at it. At the same time, I am pecking away at my wife's patience.

Why did you become an architect?

I was originally an artist and a carpenter. There was an inevitability to becoming an architect—as a way to keep the two endeavors.

If you weren't an architect, what would you be?

A filmmaker, a carpenter, or a contractor.

What is your favorite pastime? Putting on my carpentry belt and

working on my house.

What do you hate spending money on?

Foundations. A disproportionate part of the budget for any building goes into the foundation, so we have less money to spend on the architecture.

What kind of car do you drive?

BMW 3 series wagon. It's beautifully designed and practical. ra

Peter Pfau is founding principal of Pfau Architecture in San Francisco. He also teaches architectural design at the California College of Arts and Crafts.

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