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VOL. 2, 2024

The Familiar House



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Welcome to Volume 2, 2024, of *Residential Design* magazine. We are the only national professional publication devoted to residential architects and custom builders. We're dedicated to providing you with expert insight and substantive information on high-end residential design and construction.

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

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

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

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Publisher
Paul DeGrandis
Paul@SOLAbRANDS.com

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

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

Art Director
Bill Murphy
Bill@SOLAbRANDS.com

Art Director
Cory Ottenwess
Cory@SOLAbRANDS.com

West Sales Manager
Paul DeGrandis
Paul@SOLAbRANDS.com

Midwest Sales Manager
Zach Stenberg
Zach@SOLAbRANDS.com

East Sales Manager
Dan Miklosz
DanM@SOLAbRANDS.com

Southeast Sales Manager
Dan Agostinacchio
Dan@SOLAbRANDS.com

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

Audience Development
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbRANDS.com

Projects Manager
Heidi Riedl
Heidi@SOLAbRANDS.com

Digital Programs Manager
Tim Steingraber
Tim@SOLAbRANDS.com

List Rental
Mike Serino
Mike@SOLAbRANDS.com

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The Conversation



I've lived in quite a few houses at this point in my life, and the ones I remember with the most affection were not great examples of any particular architectural style. In fact, they were each a hodge-podge of styles, updates, and customizations (not tailored to me) made over the years. And yet their motley character was part of the charm.

I understand the joy that pure-play period pieces bring to architects. A building that's traditional or modern with nary a misstep in design or execution is a wondrous thing. It's even better when furnished from the appropriate catalog, of course.

But I grew up in a pseudo-Tudor house that my mother, Sarah Booth Conroy—a longtime home design editor at The Washington Post and an honorary member of the AIA—had altered and decorated with whimsy and eclecticism. Nothing was sacrosanct under her roof.

She swapped the wrought iron double front doors for a glass slider. She painted the dining room black and hung gilded chandeliers and mirrors. She scoured the classified ads for deals on used Midcentury Modern furniture to go with the Art Nouveau antiques she had bought at auctions in Vienna, Austria, when my father worked at the American Embassy.

With an eagle eye, she nabbed good examples of great design for pennies on the dollar—and then mixed them all together with my father's hobbyist art and sculpture. It was wacky and warm and, yes, utterly charming.

It was also interesting. These different styles coexisted in noisy, happy dialogue with each other. Each was made more compelling by juxtaposition with something very different. Good design of any period never looks out of place when curated and commingled with discernment.

In this issue, we survey a collection of houses that create a conversation between old and new, between the past and the present. They are each a touch eclectic, especially if you appreciate where they deviate from the gospel. We call them vernacular because they aim to continue the narrative of their historic neighborhoods and regions. But they are also modern in the way they accommodate how people want to live today—more casually and expansively. The theme of this issue is The Familiar House, because that's where most of us want to reside—a place with the warmth of the past and the facility of the present.

My current house, a middling 1960s ranch “updated” with Post Modern elements, is certainly more functional than the original. Replete with my parents' furniture, augmented by choices of my own, there's quite the lively and familiar conversation going on here, too.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Claire Conroy".

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



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An Enduring Melody

BY MARK ASHER, AIA

Once in a while, an ideal client and project comes along. It is the perfect storm inverted. I don't know how many of these you can expect in a career—maybe none—but I hope you can have at least one project and one client like this.

Sadly, I have torn down historic homes. Some cannot be repurposed, and some absolutely defy renovation. It is often a costly fight through bad foundations, wonky framing, and the minefield of asbestos and knob-and-tube wiring. Still, as a lover of old houses, it hurts to demolish a century-old building with all its character and memory. Once that building is gone, it is gone forever. But we have saved quite a few, and this was one.

This home was constructed in the mid-1880s and had been in the same family for a century. It was one of the first in a coastal town as the town began evolving from a fishing village to a resort community. Unlike most homes of the age, this was originally built for year-round use. It was in immaculate condition for a building of this age. Most are summer cottages, unheralded and unheated—and often unsalvageable.

As was fashionable then, the house was an oak forest of interior trim. Every door, nook, wainscot, and mantel was a celebration in oak. The main stairway overflowed the center hall and curved, wound, and danced its way up three stories. And it would all come out piece by piece. For as rich and romantic as these Victorian-era homes are, you might not want to live there.

The rooms do not remotely match how we live today—the kitchen was about the size of a Volkswagen minibus.

After a feasibility study in which we weighed the options of new construction versus renovation, the clients decided to save the house. But it would be no ordinary renovation. The home, three stories over a basement and parking level, would be lifted off its foundation and temporarily moved to



As part of the renovation, original wraparound porches were temporarily removed and the house lifted and stabilized on a new foundation. The front hews to its historic past; the rear turns to the future.



Photos: Don Pearse Photographers

another part of the property. Subsequently, the home would be dropped back down on a new foundation in the same approximate location. We removed the wraparound Victorian porches for ease of the house lift. After the home was stabilized on the new foundation, the building was completely gutted.

The client had requested a new, more modern plan. Indeed, they wanted a new home, which made the renovation all the more interesting. A steel structure was laced through the building as the framers removed the bearing walls. The exterior walls, originally balloon framed, were replaced one stud at a time, and a new house was constructed from the inside out.

The project also included a modern addition hidden behind the body of the traditional house. There are two basic strategies for adding to a historic home. The addition can be blended seamlessly with the existing home as if it had always been there, or it can be made intentionally dissimilar so as not to compete. Here, we chose the latter.

Added to this mix was a builder who is an artist. It is no easy feat to take on a project like this. It is not a project built with the latest scheduling software and some off-the-shelf parts. Every inch is finesse and a meticulous labor of love. He made it look easy, but it wasn't. However, the key ingredient was the extraordinary patience of even more extraordinary clients.

To have all the elements fall into place is a validation of why we do this. This home is made not to be torn down in 20 or 30 years. I'm not sure it rises to the distinction of frozen music, but it is a pretty good and enduring melody.

Mark Asher is principal of Asher Slaunwhite + Partners in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, and chair of the Philadelphia chapter of AIA CRAN.



Photo: Courtesy Asher Slaunwhite + Partners

Built in the 1880s, the home was in remarkable condition for its age. But the interiors were burdened by heavy oak elements and an outdated floor plan.

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Tribeca Penthouse

NEW YORK, NEW YORK
MIN DESIGN

The penthouse apartment in the converted 1874 warehouse in New York had soaring ceiling heights, an abundance of daylight, and a serviceable layout, but something was missing for its owners. “They didn’t like the finishes and the look of the apartment,” says E.B. Min, AIA, principal and founder of San Francisco-based architecture firm Min Design, which had worked previously with the family with two young children.

Originally renovated on spec, the residence had a generic quality. “Our job was making it a custom project that was appropriate for them,” E.B. says. She and her team set out to refinish the two-story, 5,000-square-foot space into a serene refuge from the bustle of the city and a functional home for a growing family.





Two side-by-side desks tuck under a soffit, supplying a study area while smoothing out surfaces and wall planes in the apartment.



A Study of Contrasts

To create a calming atmosphere that embraces its natural light, the apartment follows a restrained palette of colors and materials that were not “particularly precious,” E.B. says. “The design is more about creating a holistic container for light and function.”

White, warm browns, and black predominate the space. White gypsum board wall and ceiling

planes act as both a light reflector and a backdrop for Douglas fir millwork, rift-sawn white oak flooring, and black furniture and accents, as well as the owners’ extensive art collection.

Despite the largely monochromatic scheme, E.B. says, “you can still have a lot of variety and detail.” For example, a subtle debossed pattern on the black tile kitchen backsplash adds visual interest to the surrounding black Lapitec sintered stone countertops and sleek white FENIX laminate cabinetry.

The juxtaposition of the new materials with the original, rough-hewn timber structural beams and columns becomes another study of contrasts, this one in time periods. “We let things that are actually original be original, and then things that are new be new,” E.B. says.

Ironing Out Idiosyncrasies

One of the apartment’s disquieting elements was its “lumpy and bumpy” walls, E.B. says. In many multifamily buildings, she explains, contractors tend to indiscriminately wrap ductwork, columns, and beams in gypsum wallboard without questioning whether they can straighten the wall and ceiling surfaces. To soothe those anomalies, the design team incorporated those odd corners,



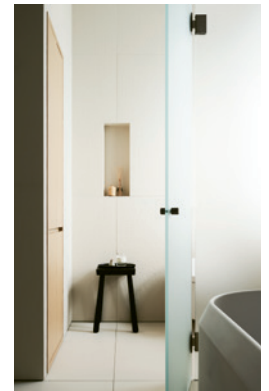
The scheme of white, browns, and black includes subtle contrasts in texture, among them sleek Lapitec counters and debossed backsplash tiles.



bends, and soffits into purposeful work, storage, and play areas.

In bedrooms and corridors, they hid the faceted walls behind closet doors, creating much-needed storage. In the living room, they thickened the fireplace wall and recessed it between flanking shelves, carefully dimensioned to display items curated by the owners. The millwork integrates a slender ledge that runs the full wall length and also becomes the fireplace hearth.

A large soffit in the dining room became an ideal place under which to build compact workstations for the children, smoothing out another surface and fulfilling the clients' specific request



Custom Douglas fir millwork turns formerly distracting wall recesses and nooks into useful storage areas for the family, while the simple material palette creates a serene living environment.

Tribeca Penthouse

New York, New York

ARCHITECT: E.B. Min, AIA, principal in charge; Melinda Turner, project architect, Min Design, San Francisco

BUILDER: Dowbuilt, New York, N.Y.

INTERIOR DESIGN: Min Design with owner

PROJECT SIZE: 5,000 square feet

PHOTOGRAPHY: Brooke Holm

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETS: FENIX laminate over plywood; white stained Douglas fir (primary

suite); Douglas fir (various open shelving); steel shelving (kitchen)

COOKTOP/RANGE: Wolf

COOKING VENTILATION: Rangeproof

COUNTERTOPS: Lapitec (kitchen); Ibani Cerclo

DISHWASHER/OVENS/SPECIALTY: Miele

DOOR HARDWARE: FSB

FAUCETS: KWC; Fantini; Boffi; Waterworks; Dornbracht

FINISH MATERIALS: Corian glacier white windowsills

INTERIOR LIGHTING: Marset; David Weeks (dining); Ladies & Gentlemen

Studio; BDDW

LANDSCAPE PRODUCTS: Planterworx

PAINTS: Benjamin Moore Simply White

REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER: Thermador

TILE: Mutina; Clé (laundry room)

TOILETS: TOTO

TUBS: Agape (primary); Zuma Collection (secondary)

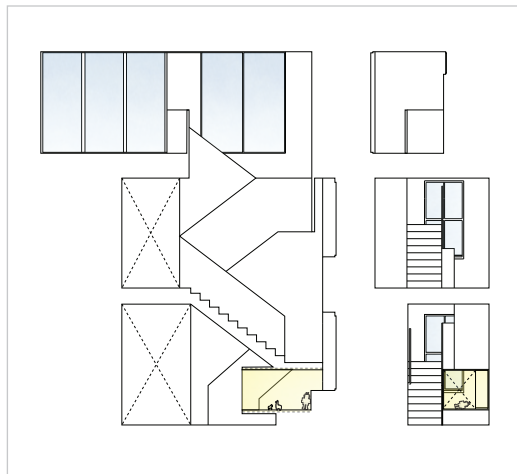
WASHER/DRYER: Electrolux

WINDOW SHADING SYSTEMS: J Geiger roller shades

WINE REFRIGERATOR: Thermador



A plywood-constructed portal leads to a sitting area behind the staircase, made sculptural with white-painted steel plates welded together.



for a study area. “Everybody knows that even if you give a kid a desk in a bedroom, they end up doing their homework at the dining table,” E.B. says. The desks can hide behind white laminate paneling, which cleverly folds and tucks under the soffit to become quasi-partitions.

A window creates a visual break between the dining and kitchen areas, as well as between the two expanses of white floor-to-ceiling casework. The separation is helped by a custom, low-standing piece of Douglas fir cabinetry, which nests below the window and provides storage for organizing everyday items, like chargers. “We wanted it to look like furniture,” E.B. says, “and not like a piece of built-in casework.”

Adjusting the Staircase

Perhaps the most jarring element in the existing space was the apartment’s centrally located internal staircase. Its exposed steel stringer, open risers, glass railing, and revealed hardware felt strangely technical and modern for the historical, handcrafted interior.

Rebuilding or relocating the staircase were not feasible options. Like the rest of the interior update, Min Design deployed its less-invasive strategy of reskinning. The individual steel plate treads were clad in white oak to match the flooring and connected with white oak risers. Out went the glass railing and in came steel sheets (carried individually via the building elevator) that were welded in place and painted white. The result reads like a sculpture of folded origami.

To make use of the now-covered space underneath and behind the stair, which receives ample daylight from a window directly behind it, Min saw another opportunity for contrast and fun. She envisioned the crawl space leading into the back area as “a portal into another world for the kids to hang out and hide away.” Distinguished by its simple plywood construction, the entrance indeed welcomes anyone to squirrel away into a seating area basked in natural light.

A significant portion of the apartment refresh was completed before the pandemic, but the final elements came together in early fall 2022. E.B. is pleased with the quality of light, feeling of intimacy, and functionality of the apartment. Even in the double-height living room, she says, “it still feels like a place you can have friends over and not feel it was over-scaled.”—*Wanda Lau*



The penthouse apartment’s rooftop deck provides expansive views of New York City, while its refined interiors offer a quiet sanctuary from the bustling activity beyond.

The Vision: Mix modern living with a vintage vibe.



This renovation of a small 1950s ranch style home more than doubled the size with an impressive addition. A corridor of bright, airy windows embraces backyard views, while clerestory windows layer light into the home. Streetside, a smart glass door conveniently offers transparency and privacy on demand. These Kolbe® window and door options provide contemporary scale and innovative style while staying true to the mid-century architecture of the original home.

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CASE STUDY





This New House

An expansive house for a multigenerational family honors New England traditions while forging a fresh path forward.

BY S. CLAIRE CONROY

ARCHITECT: ALBERT, RIGHTER & TITTMANN ARCHITECTS

BUILDER: SAVELBERG CONSTRUCTION

LOCATION: WINDSOR COUNTY, VERMONT

If anyone knows how to design the quintessential New England farmhouse, it's the Boston-based firm of Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, or, more succinctly, ART. In fact, there's probably no assignment in the traditional vernacular you can throw at them that they could not handle with rigor and, yes, art.



That said, the named partners all went to architecture school at Yale, so they are well-trained in post-World War II design thinking. They understand how to titrate elements of past and present to build a cohesive and satisfying whole—one that is livable and lovable anywhere along the design timeline. This was precisely the assignment for Vermont Farmhouse, designed as a second home for an empty-nester couple from Boston.

The clients wanted the house to fit into the vernacular of local houses and farms, but they did not want a literal translation of what has come before. This is especially true of their goals for the interiors, where they wanted



Although the overall impression is of a vernacular Vermont farmhouse, this home is replete with subtle departures from the playbook, chief among them the edgy fireplace wall devoid of trim.





expansive spaces for informal living à deux and for visiting generations of adult children and future grandchildren.

The plan called for a great room, primary suite, office, and den on the first level and a smaller second level containing three guest bedrooms, three bathrooms, and an office that could flex as an extra bedroom.

“The client was very specific about flavors in the way the interiors would present themselves. They wanted them all whitewashed,” says architect John Tittmann, AIA. “The interiors are nothing like Vermont.”

The large, rectangular great room especially skews more Manhattan than Montpelier in aesthetic. It’s the principal showcase for the marriage of old and new sought after by the clients. John explains, “For instance, the moldings are proportioned in a classical way, but kept taut and thin. And then the reclaimed flooring is very raw and rough—something the clients wanted. They also wanted beamed ceilings, and we pushed them to fill in the beams with wood. The effect is a contrast of rough wood and crisp painted trim work.” The coup de grâce is a raised asymmetrical steel fireplace with no molding at the top.

Warm, flexible, refined, and a little rugged to boot, the house balances all these qualities in a way that, as John puts it, “creates a conversation.” It’s the dialogue between traditional and modern, formal and casual, that gives the space a discernible dynamism but also a surprising sense of calm.

Keeping It Light

In this part of the country, where winters are long and snow is plentiful, it’s desirable to minimize windows on the north—or cold—side of the house. However here, the best

“We wanted the house to have a little zippiness that is not traditional. But it’s still supposed to feel like a Vermont house.”

— John Tittmann, AIA



The contrast of rustic and refined appears throughout the interiors, with crisp painted trim juxtaposing salvaged wood floors and ceiling details.



Part of the charm of old farmhouses derives from the irregular roof forms that inside create interesting angles, nooks, and opportunities for crafted built-ins.

views of the mountains are to the north, so a north-south orientation was inescapable.

An existing 1970s house the clients bought with the property and lived in for a time was also oriented north-south. But it provided a lesson in what not to do. It captured those northern views imperfectly and suffered from a paucity of natural light.

“It was poorly built and at the end of its lifespan,” says John. “It quickly became apparent that we needed to start over. We pulled out the old foundation which was not well constructed and shifted the new foundation toward the light.”

The new house, which telescopes along a north-south axis, stretches to provide all key spaces with those important mountain views. And all rooms now benefit from at least two exposures of light; some enjoy as many as three.

The great room accesses a commodious patio and mountain views through a trio of double doors. The kitchen area bumps out to the south and grabs a bit of western light at the same time. A kitchen island turns back toward those mountain views across the breadth of the great room. Near full immersion in light and views are found in the first-floor sun porch and an upstairs study the husband has claimed for himself.

Even small spaces are blessed with an extra window and vista: A reading nook next to the fireplace has a long southern view and a west-facing window protected by the covered side entrance. Similarly, the entry hall’s built-in boot bench tucks into a windowed niche.

Elsewhere, an exterior wall in the primary bathroom cants just enough to provide the adjacent library with an east-facing window to join its bank of north-facing ones. And clerestory windows at the top of the staircase usher light down its full length to the first floor.

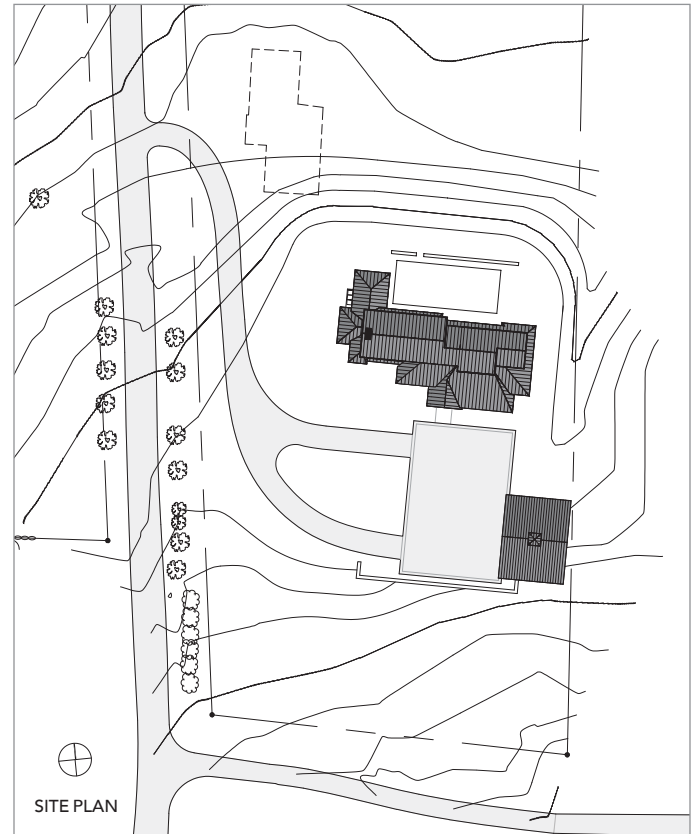
These big and small moves—all executed with talent and precision by Savelberg Construction—add up to a master class in daylighting interior spaces and capturing the best exterior views. They make all the difference in the quality of life within—especially during those endless New England winters.

Muntin Mix-up

Interior daylighting is, of course, only half the battle in design. Window arrangement must make sense on the exteriors, too. And in this climate, all openings require protection by building elements from snow melts and other problematic weather.

However, more subtly, window arrangement, sizing, and detailing tell a story about a house's character and design intent—to those who understand the cues. “We wanted to use the vocabulary of the classic farmhouse—for the house to have an aspect of traditional New England architecture—and that includes muntins and clapboards,” says John. “But we chose a muntin pattern that is not the six-over-six old school—the windows are not typical double hungs. We wanted the house to have a little zippiness that is not traditional. But it's still supposed to feel like a Vermont house.”

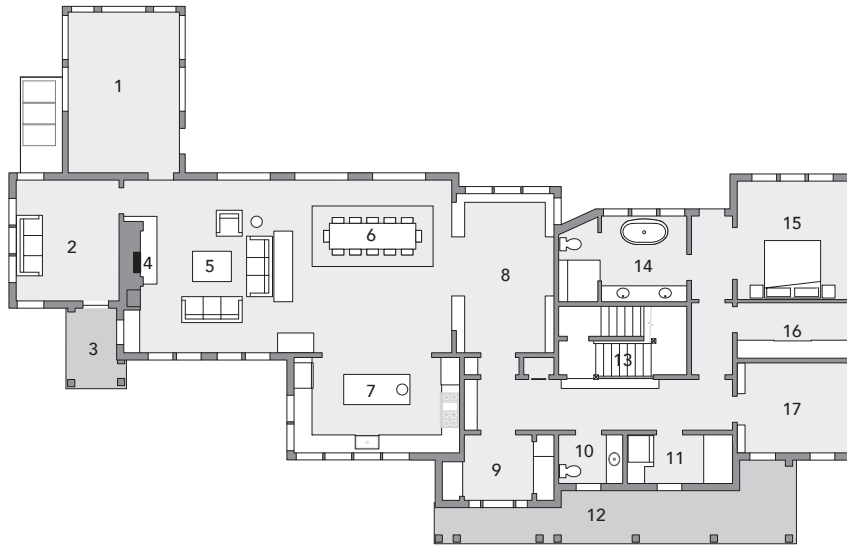
Adding to the zip is the building's stretched out form and the roof that steps down as it moves to the east. Where first-floor rooms project from the main volume, other roofs cover them “like a skirt around the building,” says John.



Rest assured that, in the hands of the architects of ART, every departure from the traditional playbook is conscious and deliberate. “When do you manipulate a traditional form?” John muses. “It’s when you want to add to the conversation.”

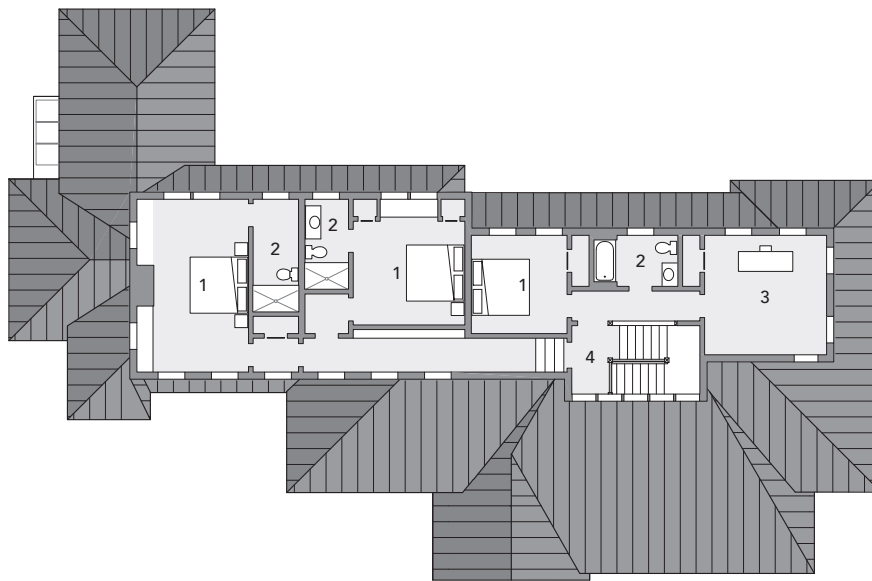


Minor site grading leveled the ground for a north patio off the great room that overlooks the mountain views.



FIRST FLOOR

- 1. Sun Porch
- 2. Den
- 3. Side Entry
- 4. Fireplace
- 5. Living
- 6. Dining
- 7. Kitchen
- 8. Library
- 9. Entry
- 10. Powder
- 11. Laundry
- 12. Porch
- 13. Stairs
- 14. Main Bathroom
- 15. Main Bedroom
- 16. Main Dressing
- 17. Office




SECOND FLOOR

- 1. Bedroom
- 2. Bathroom
- 3. Office
- 4. Stairs



You do it because you're trying to express some thought. By stretching the house, we get the sense of a building that's expanding. Even the columns are spaced more than usual, giving the impression that the building is elastic. You could take this building and squeeze it between bookends, and it would probably look more traditional."

Additional structures on the property, including a new barn-like garage and some existing outbuildings, are more straight takes on the local vernacular. That's possibly another conversation to be had, but the overall effect is of buildings that belong right where they are. Says John, "When visitors come, they often tell the owners, 'It's so nice you preserved this old house.'" 



Vermont Farmhouse

Windsor County, Vermont

ARCHITECT: John Tittmann, AIA, principal in charge; D.J. Arthur, AIA, project architect, Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, Inc., Boston

BUILDER: Savelberg Construction, Woodstock, Vermont

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Robert Hanss, Inc., Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Webb Structural Services, Inc., Reading, Massachusetts

PROJECT SIZE: 4,310 square feet

SITE SIZE: 5 acres

PHOTOGRAPHY: Greg Premru Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETS: Custom

COOKTOP/RANGE: Viking

CLADDING: Cedar clapboards

COUNTERTOPS: LX Hausys Cirrus

DISHWASHER/OVENS: Bosch

ENTRY DOORS/HARDWARE: Marvin and TruStile French doors, Marvin lever traditional, Emtek knob Winchester

FAUCETS: Kohler, Hansgrohe

FIREPLACE: Wittus

LIGHTING: Hubbardton Forge, Holtkoetter, Quoizel, Belfer Lighting, Tech Lighting

PAINT: Benjamin Moore

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero

ROOFING: Standing-seam metal

SINKS: Rohl, Kohler

TOILETS: Kohler

TUBS: BainUltra

WARMING DRAWER: Thermador

WASHER/DRYER: Maytag

WINDOWS: Marvin Double Hung, Marvin Casement



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“There are views for days. I think that connection to the out-of-doors... to have the light come in, gives the connection that feeds our soul and makes us feel whole.”

— *Linda Engler, Founder, Engler Studio Interior Design*



The Familiar House

A trio of bespoke houses marries traditional forms with modern moves.

BY CHERYL WEBER

The Narrows

THE NARROWS
DOWNEAST MAINE
WHITTEN ARCHITECTS

Like many retirees, Whitten Architects' clients came to Downeast Maine looking for an escape from their full-time life near Boston, where they inhabit a traditional brick house with white trim. The couple had been coming here for years and are deeply involved in conserving coastal land. This site, adjoining family land on the banks of a tidal river near Acadia National Park, was originally purchased by someone who planned to build a "statement house" near the water but, as luck would have it, didn't proceed. The couple seized the opportunity to buy the parcel with help from the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, which





This page: The cabin pods' cedar shingles and the center volume's nickel-gap boards will eventually blend into the trees. *Opposite:* In the common room, a local fieldstone fireplace, salvaged mantel, and white oak ceilings and casework create a cabin feel typical of the Maine woods. *Bottom left:* A half-flight down from the entryway, large windows and cabinetry help to mask the sunken condition along the north façade.



put in place an open-space easement that limited the setback to 600 feet and created site-appropriate covenants for any future building. The setback forever preserves a field they loved, which became the starting point for the design. What they wanted was a low-carbon-footprint house with minimal impact on the land—essentially a background building that benefits from the wonderful view.

Its remoteness makes it a getaway in the best sense of the word. “It was quite a long road to get in, and quite the topography,” says builder Michael Hewes, who lives nearby. “There was a lot of clay, so we had to skirt along the edge of big drainage ditches, but that’s not unusual along



the shores of the river. Otherwise, the construction was pretty straightforward.” Indeed, the multilevel house navigates a downslope from the approach side to the water side. Conceived as three parts—two gabled “pods” connected by a lower-pitched main volume—the two end volumes recall the small cabins or utility buildings one sees everywhere in these parts.



The pods are clad in eastern white cedar shingles (as is a detached, 520-square-foot gabled garage), while the more modern-looking connector is wrapped in nickel-gap tongue-in-groove vertical eastern

white cedar boards that will blend into the landscape as they age. “From the approach, we wanted it to feel like an all-natural material you’d find on site, like aging tree bark,” says principal Rob Whitten, AIA.



Above and top: The primary bedroom rotates toward the water view. Right: An interior window shares light between a guest room and bath.

The Narrows

Downeast Maine

ARCHITECT: Rob Whitten, AIA, principal in charge; Will Fellis, AIA, project architect, Whitten Architects, Portland, Maine

BUILDER: Hewes & Company, Blue Hill, Maine

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Kelly Healy, Belhaakon, Ipswich, Massachusetts

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Emma Kelly Landscape, North Yarmouth, Maine

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Albert Putnam Associates, Brunswick, Maine

CABINETWORK: Hewes & Company, Blue Hill, Maine

LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION: Atlantic Landscape Construction, Ellsworth, Maine

PROJECT SIZE: 2,850 square feet

SITE SIZE: 23 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Trent Bell Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

ACOUSTIC: Rockwool Safe 'n' Sound throughout interior

CLADDING: Eastern white cedar

COUNTERTOPS: Vermont soapstone, white oak

FINISH MATERIALS: White oak, drywall

FLOORING: Concrete tile, exposed concrete, engineered white oak

FOUNDATION: Slab on grade

GARAGE DOORS: Custom western red cedar (barn)

HVAC: 3-zone hydronic radiant heating and cooling, air source heat pumps Lifebreath HRV

INSULATION: Rockwool Comfort Batt

MILLWORK, MOLDING, TRIM: Western red cedar

ROOFING: Standing-seam metal

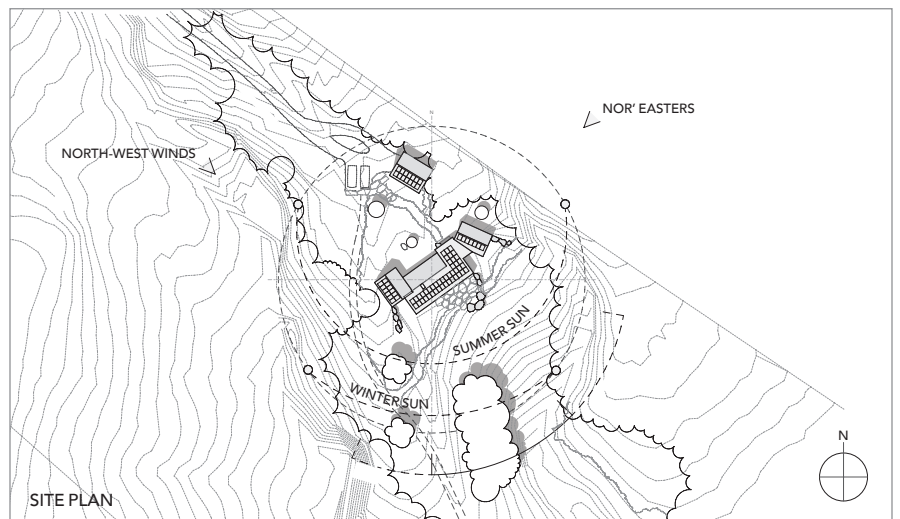
SHEATHING: Huber AdvanTech

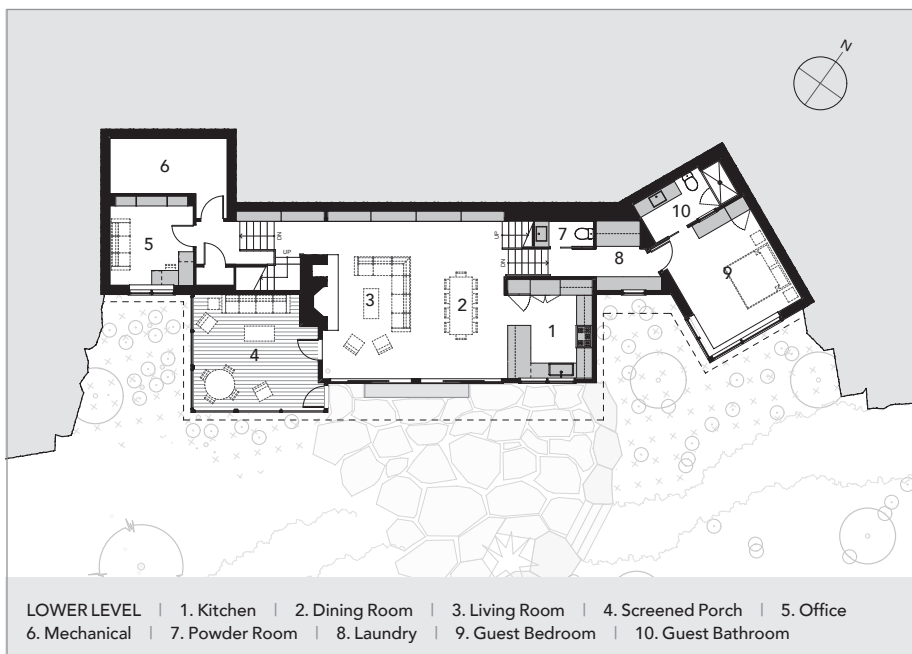
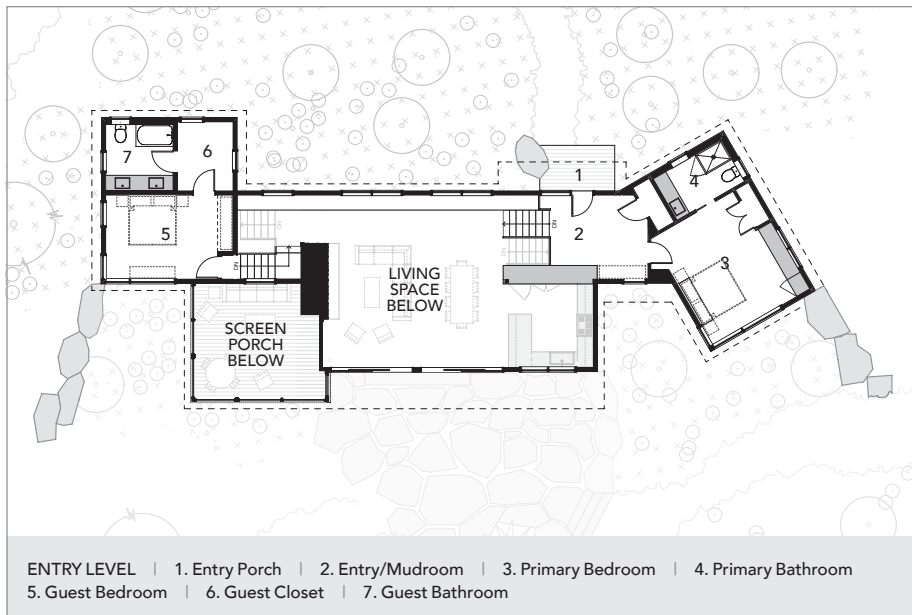
WINDOWS: Marvin

WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Marvin



Above: Louvers filter southern light on the screened porch, where a low horizontal rail frames rather than blocks the view. Left: Staggered floor plates help to negotiate the terrain. This gabled volume houses a guest room above and office below.





Settled In

Pushed to the edge of a woods on the northwest, the house turns its glassier rear façade and screened porch southeast to the light and views. The pods help to negotiate the grade changes and create small private rooms off the larger common area. The entryway is a half flight above the main living space, on the same level as the rotated primary

bedroom volume. From the main living area, another half flight leads down to a guest suite under the primary bedroom. On the opposite side of the house, half-level stairs lead up to a second guest suite and down to an office with a couch. This settled-in arrangement preserves the river view over the house from the driveway approach. “The house was meant to not look as

big as it is,” says project architect Will Fellis, AIA. “There’s a bit of compression and extension, and the roofs are standing-seam metal, a great fit for all the solar collectors.”

At 2,850 square feet, the house is generous but not oversized, and a deck, stone patio, and the screened porch add usable space economically. “Their kids are local so it’s not like everyone comes to stay, but they wanted to host their kids,” Rob says. “Primarily they wanted spaces that could interact with the landscape and have a connection to grade without being overpowering. Outdoor rooms were equally as important as the big main living space.”

The common area’s sliding glass walls are protected by an overhang of 4½ feet. “Even in bad weather it gives you some protection,” Will says. “You can crack the windows open and not get wet.” The framing rail on the adjacent screened porch was kept at tabletop height so as not to obstruct the view, and louvers near the ceiling soften the sunlight.

“These sorts of spaces are really important to our clients,” Will says. “They want to be a part of the landscape but also feel sheltered and protected.”

Local Craft

One of the pleasures of a vacation getaway is its ability to transport the occupants not just to a different environment but to a house whose details express the unique sense of place. Metaphorically speaking, the clients were “looking to go somewhere they hadn’t before,” Rob says, with spaces that felt usable and casual but well crafted.

Materials are local, natural, and resilient. “White oak is some of the hardest wood we can get in the Northeast,” Will says. The common area’s fieldstone fireplace and hearth slab were quarried nearby, and its mantel is a beam from a barn in Vermont. A Downeast



artist painted the kitchen backsplash, and all the house's painted and white oak cabinetry was made in the builder's shop. The kitchen has Vermont soapstone countertops; wall shelving and open drawers in the lower cabinets lend an easy, everything-within-reach vibe, as do white oak built-ins in the living room and throughout the house.

"The row of cabinets holding a TV and books along the north wall of the main space is working hard to alleviate some of the buried-in-the-ground feeling; the windows come right down on top of it," Will says.

Cool light from the higher windows on the north washes into the warmer light from the large southern windows, creating a balanced ambience in the


common room. When they are open, the stack effect draws sea air through the house. Ceilings here and in the primary suite are clad in the same conservation-grade white oak as the casework, their knots lending a lightly rustic look. The one-panel interior doors are spare and Shaker-esque, as are the stair rails.


"We didn't want a look-at-me handrail," Rob says. "It had to feel light and transparent because you're looking down at it as you enter the house. At the stair turn, we worked hard to make it look easy on a complex corner. The stair builder was crucial in working with us on that."

The radiant heated floors are a mix of durable materials. While the lower-level

floors expose the concrete slab, the living area has concrete tiles that add another layer of texture, and engineered white oak floors bring a sense of warmth to the upper-level bedrooms.

The views from every room are just what the clients and project team imagined: of the river, foregrounded by rolling fields that are cut for hay twice a year. The getaway has become a uniquely Maine experience for the owners, whose daughter was married there right after the house was completed last year.

"It will continue to weather and take on the color values of the tree trunks," Rob says. "The building will become more and more like a stealth house or bird blind, recessed into the landscape." 



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Concord Blend

CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS
ECK MACNEELY ARCHITECTS

Before they lived in their current residence—whose design was meticulously orchestrated by Eck MacNeely Architects—the owners had lived in a series of modernist houses they didn't much like. If they needed a reason to try something more traditional, this location certainly offered it. The road on which the 2-acre lot sits runs along the Concord River and leads to Concord's historic landmarks. It provided the impetus to design a dwelling that felt homier and more comfortable for the couple and their three children on the cusp of adulthood.



Jeremiah Eck, FAIA, is well known for this kind of work. His Boston firm’s custom houses are modern in concept but imbued with a vernacular New England familiarity that is sometimes hard for passersby to pinpoint. With its gabled volumes, clapboard siding, and glass-filled walls, this house too is a dexterous mix of aesthetic genealogies.

Other than indicating their programmatic requests, the clients gave the

architects a virtual blank slate to design “something of interest,” Jeremiah says.

It wasn’t the first house on the property. The couple, who had lived nearby for some time, bought the original small split-level for their parents. When their parents moved to a retirement community, the couple decided to take it down and build something new for themselves. Despite the relatively large lot, however, there wasn’t much room to maneuver the

5,300-square-foot house, partly because half the parcel is a wetland that required a 50-foot setback. The program was another factor: the clients wanted generous living spaces, a separate wing for three bedrooms, and an exercise/multipurpose room, plus a screened porch, Pilates studio, and detached garage. Another non-negotiable condition was the preservation of a large specimen tree on the property. “The tree makes a big difference in how the scale of the house feels,” Jeremiah says.

To minimize the massing and maximize sunlight, the design team pulled the program apart to create three pavilion-like structures built into a small hill that slopes down from the street. The main volume bends away from the roughly perpendicular kids’ bedroom wing, creating an elbow that shelters a central terrace at the rear of the house. Below the kids’ rooms is the requested exercise room, while the primary suite sits above part of the public space and connects to a family room (formerly earmarked for Pilates) and deck over the detached garage.



Point, Counterpoint

“A single structure might have been easier, but it would have felt massive; it’s more fun this way,” says Jeremiah. “The plan separates the public areas from the private bedrooms by placing the primary bedroom on the second floor and the kids’ rooms in a separate wing on the opposite side of the house. It allowed us

to free up the living space with lots of glass and a view of the meadow, which is lovely year-round.”

The divide-and-conquer approach also invites a dialogue between modern and vernacular. “The gable roof goes back hundreds of years in this country; it’s really about shedding snow and rain,” Jeremiah says. “I wanted to start

there with a 45-degree roof pitch on the three pavilions. The steep roof slope gives you, with some judicious planning of dormers, usable room upstairs. Then I broke it down by providing shed dormers in the bedrooms and a bath. Those are the elements that give the house a traditional shape.”

Flat roofs on the glassy connectors and living volume tie the theme together in a modern way. The garage elevation’s glass gable end is another forward-thinking touch, countered with smaller double-hung windows on most of the house. “The owners tell me that people stop by on the street and take pictures,” Jeremiah says. “I think they are interested in that type of blend in ways that are deep-seated. Especially when they’re lit at night, the garage pavilion’s gable end and two-story foyer are spectacular, which is unusual for a house.”

Its skin reinforces the blend of 20th- and 21st-century sensibilities. The upper level is clad in smooth composite panels with a nickel gap, while the base is cedar shingles, further reducing the house’s scale. Its standing-seam metal roof recalls local barns.



Two galleries converge at the foyer, leading to the secondary bedroom wing straight ahead, or right to the main living space. Upstairs, a catwalk connects the primary bedroom to the family room.



Light Boxes

Interiors are limned in light—the big payoff in designing rooms with four exposures. Coming in from the driveway, visitors encounter the double-height foyer. At right a main staircase ascends to the primary suite and family room. Straight ahead are art-filled glassy corridors leading in two directions, one to the public spaces, the other to the kids’ bedrooms. Because of the lot’s gentle downward slope, this second corridor meets the bedroom wing just below the second-level floor plate: a few steps up are the bedrooms; a few steps down is the exercise room.

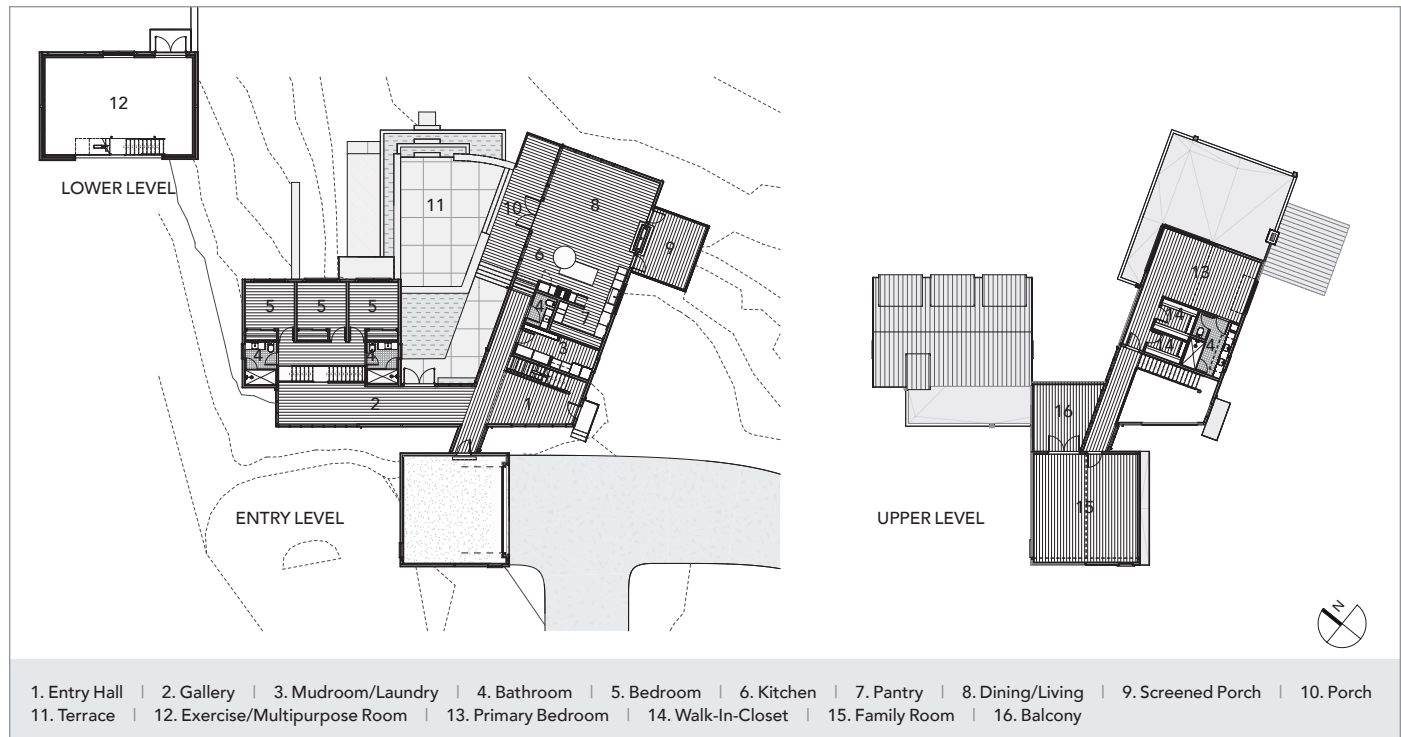
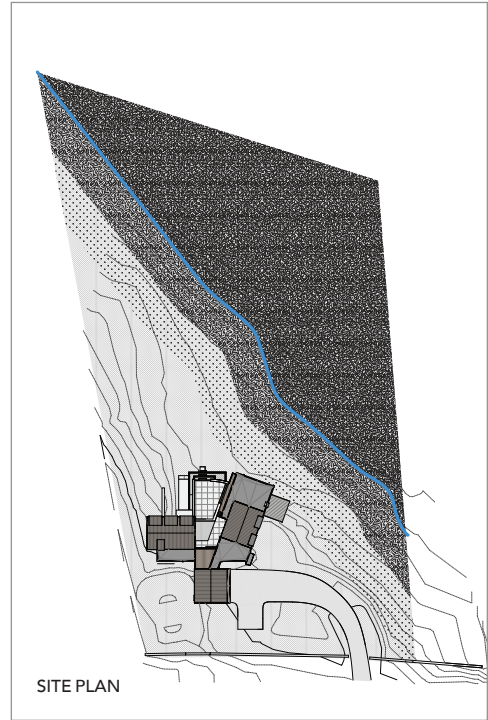
“They wanted a contemporary living area and more traditional



Large windows in the open kitchen, living, and dining room keep the wetlands on display, while a two-sided fireplace visually connects the living area and screened porch. The home’s mix of double-hung windows and window walls marry traditional with modern.



This page: In the primary bathroom, boldly patterned quartz walls enliven quiet interiors.
Opposite: The second-floor family room's unexpected glass gable end spills light to the street at night. Downstairs on the opposite side of the house, the screened porch overlooks the wetlands.





bedrooms in terms of shape and size,” Jeremiah says. The terrace, held within the two volumes, opens out from the public space, whose southeast corner is 50 feet from the wetland. The sun enters in the morning and moves across it. In summer the terrace receives both morning and late afternoon sun.

Wrapped in metal casing, a two-sided fireplace creates a visual connection between the living room and screened porch and warms the porch during the shoulder seasons. “The fireplace makes the screened porch a nice experience,” Jeremiah says. “Concord can be buggy, especially along the wetlands.”



Boldly veined quartz composite accents in the SieMatic kitchen and baths add pops of pattern to the understated interiors. The rift-cut walnut kitchen incorporates an island with a round table where the owners have their morning coffee. White oak floor planks, which are radiant heated, are repeated as thick treads on the main staircase. Floating on a tubular steel stringer, the treads are fitted with LEDs for nuanced nighttime lighting. “The stair rails are thin, 4

Concord Blend

Concord, Massachusetts
Eck MacNeely Architects

ARCHITECT: Jeremiah Eck, FAIA, principal in charge; Rachel Hanson, project architect, Eck MacNeely Architects, Boston

BUILDER: Brian Johnson, BOJ Construction, Plymouth, Massachusetts

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Polly Lewis, Lewis Interiors, Boston

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Stephen Stimson, FASLA, Stephen Stimson Associates, Cambridge, Massachusetts

PROJECT SIZE: 5,300 square feet

SITE SIZE: 2 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Anton Grassl Architectural Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETS: Kitchen and bath by SieMatic

Boston

COOKING VENTILATION: Thermador

COOKTOP/OVENS: Gaggenau

CUSTOM BUILT-INS: CWC Millwork

DISHWASHER: Gaggenau

ENTRY DOORS: Marvin

EXTERIOR CLADDING: TruExterior Nickle Gap Shiplap, Maibec cedar shingles

EXTERIOR TRIM: TruExterior Trim

FAUCETS: Dornbracht, Waterworks

FINISH MATERIALS: White oak walls and beams

FIREPLACE: Ortol Tunnel fireplace with Neolith interior face

FLOORING: 8-inch quartersawn white oak by Carlisle Wide Plank Floors

GARAGE DOORS: Haas

HOME THEATER COMPONENTS: Samsung Art Frame TVs

HUMIDITY CONTROL: AprilAire

HVAC: Carrier heat pumps

LANDSCAPE PAVERS, STEPS, WALL CAPS: Blue Mist granite

LIGHTING: BEGA, RAB, Tech Lighting, Element, KKDC, Moooi

PAINT: Benjamin Moore

PASSAGE DOORS: Emtek Helios

RADIANT HEATING: Hydro Radiant, Nuheat

REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER: Gaggenau

SECURITY SYSTEM: Ring

SINKS: TOTO, Kohler

SOUND SYSTEM: Sonos

SPECIALTY APPLIANCES: Thermador

ROOFING: Englert standing-seam metal

THERMAL AND MOISTURE BARRIERS: Henry Blueskin

TUBS: BainUltra Origami collection

UNDERLAYMENT, SHEATHING: AdvanTech

WINDOWS: Marvin



inches on center with an oak cap that blends with the treads,” Jeremiah says. “I try to simmer it down to the simplest solution.” Likewise, the stairwell walls are oak paneled with reveals that line up with the treads, a gesture to the nickel gap siding outside.


The architects worked with local landscape architect Stephen Stimson to finesse the landscape’s subtle grade changes and revegetate it with native plants. The home’s proximity to the wetland also required special drainage systems to manage the high groundwater table. “We did some pretty extensive

“A single structure might have been easier, but it would have felt massive; it’s more fun this way.”

—Jeremiah Eck, FAIA

draining and waterproofing to make sure the house stays dry,” says builder Brian Johnson. “There are two different basements, both just about in the groundwater, and three systems to keep

water away from house, plus an interior drainage system and sump pump with alarms.” Detention systems, designed by the engineer, contain the water until it can percolate back into the ground.

Building on New England’s recognizable architectural traditions, the house feels entirely of its place but without being a replica of anything. Instead, it is a singular expression that results from fashioning form and light in a distinctive way. Rendered in cedar-and-composite siding, gabled metal roofs, and simple shed dormers, it bows to the legacy of its forebearers. 



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Slide-By House

WESTPORT, MASSACHUSETTS
ESTES TWOMBLY + TITRINGTON



Situated on the edge of Massachusetts near the border with Rhode Island, the eponymously named Westport was the westernmost port of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It's blessed with a rich history of agriculture and fishing, and a forked river offers miles and miles of nautical views. All these conditions still surround the Slide-By House, which Estes Twombly + Titirington Architects carefully configured in appreciation of the land's natural splendors.

Nevertheless, the project conjured mixed feelings for Jim Estes, FAIA. Like many conservation-minded architects, he isn't keen on

the development occurring here. "This is a rare place with farms, some of them going down to the ocean, that are being subdivided," he says. "This lot was in the crosshairs of a field that had been there for more than 200 years, with old walls around it. I didn't want to say no to building but tried to find a way to preserve a sense of the old fields that are still being hayed."

Designed as a getaway for Boston empty-nesters who plan to eventually live here full time, it is the first house to be built in a field separated into four equal-sized lots measuring 1.4 acres. The design team hoped to set a precedent by placing the house on one side of the lot rather than plopping it in the middle, as is common in the surrounding subdivisions. Jim and his clients even approached the owners of the other lots to suggest the same treatment and that lawns be limited to preserve the field areas between the houses.

The big siting consideration, of course, was the water view east to the West Fork River. Jim placed the house parallel to the street, canting it slightly toward the view and to avoid direct northern and southern exposure. The major glass areas face east, eliminating extreme solar gain in summer and heat loss in the winter.

While the firm is known for its innovative takeoffs on local building traditions and materials,





Clad in locally grown white pine that was dried and stained on site, the sectionally identical living and bedroom volumes slide by each other to maintain a pure, low profile that makes the most of privacy, light, and views.

resulting in taut shingled houses that open themselves to the land, this one distills that idea further. The driveway ends at a flat-roofed carport and porch. Behind them, two 18-foot-wide rectilinear, low-pitched volumes

“slide by” each other, giving the project its name.

Identical in section, the longer volume contains the entry/mudroom; open kitchen, dining, and living space; and office. It lightly touches the parallel



3-bedroom volume at the end of a corridor, where full-height glass lets in light. “In plan, the slide-by arrangement creates the classic ‘go through the building toward the light at the end of a long passageway,’” Jim says.

Long and Low

The home’s low profile is a refreshing departure from surrounding new builds featuring “half in, half out” houses that sever the relationship



Above: A glass wall panel draws you through the living volume and offers a glimpse of the long parallel façade. Left: Maple cabinets, a glass-tiled backsplash, and cathedral ceilings create a luminous interior.



with the land. “Because of the high water table, it’s cheaper to dig down 4 feet and have the foundation stick up 3 or 4 feet if they want a basement, and then take dirt from the hole and pile it against the foundation,” Jim explains.

The 5V Crimp Galvalume roof is externally fastened, like the utilitarian treatment one sees on nearby barns. “We try to keep the pitch low; it’s a combination of what works visually when we’re freehanding the drawing and avoiding creating a lot of space on the interior for heat buildup,” Jim says. A more distant consideration is that the roof is “a walker,” he adds. Low-pitched roofs save money on labor because installation is easier and quicker. “You don’t have to set up scaffolding or use roof jacks; you can just walk on it.”

Strategically grouped, off-the-shelf windows also help to simplify the form, in keeping with local farm architecture. “Rather than punching out windows here and there, we tried to group them, which lets the forms read better,” Jim



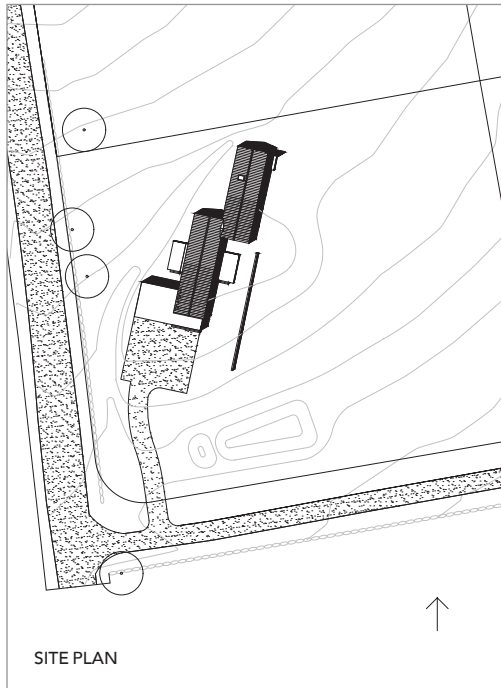
Top and above: At the end of the bedroom wing, the primary suite has a private deck and views of the hayfields and river. Left: Two smaller guest rooms have ship’s ladders to a loft, befitting the maritime setting.

says. “That also makes it stronger on the interior.” The building is clad in scrappy white pine boards cut 1 inch thick by 12 inches wide.

“We’ve been using the white pine a lot lately here in New England,” Jim says. “The trees are in their second or third growth and cut selectively. It is a native softwood tree, often very knotty. The

mills we buy it from are pretty rugged outfits that use big old rotary blades. If you go less than 1 inch thick, the thickness of boards can vary by ¼ inch, which is a nice thing to take advantage of.”

The boards were air-dried on site for about eight months to increase their stability. For builder Dan Kinsella, it was a cost-efficient move that required



some early planning. “We made spacers out of PVC from the lumberyard; PVC doesn’t cause moisture to be trapped between stacks,” he says. “We covered the stacks with tarps to keep them dry while allowing a lot of airflow, and then primed the boards in place on both sides with a solid-body acrylic stain.”

Plain Modern

That unfussy sense of ease is felt inside, too. Cathedral ceilings in the main volume and bedrooms express the roof pitch and the owners’ wish for spaces that are sunlit, open, and informal. Every room is used every day except for the two smaller bedrooms, each of which has a prefabricated metal ship’s ladder to

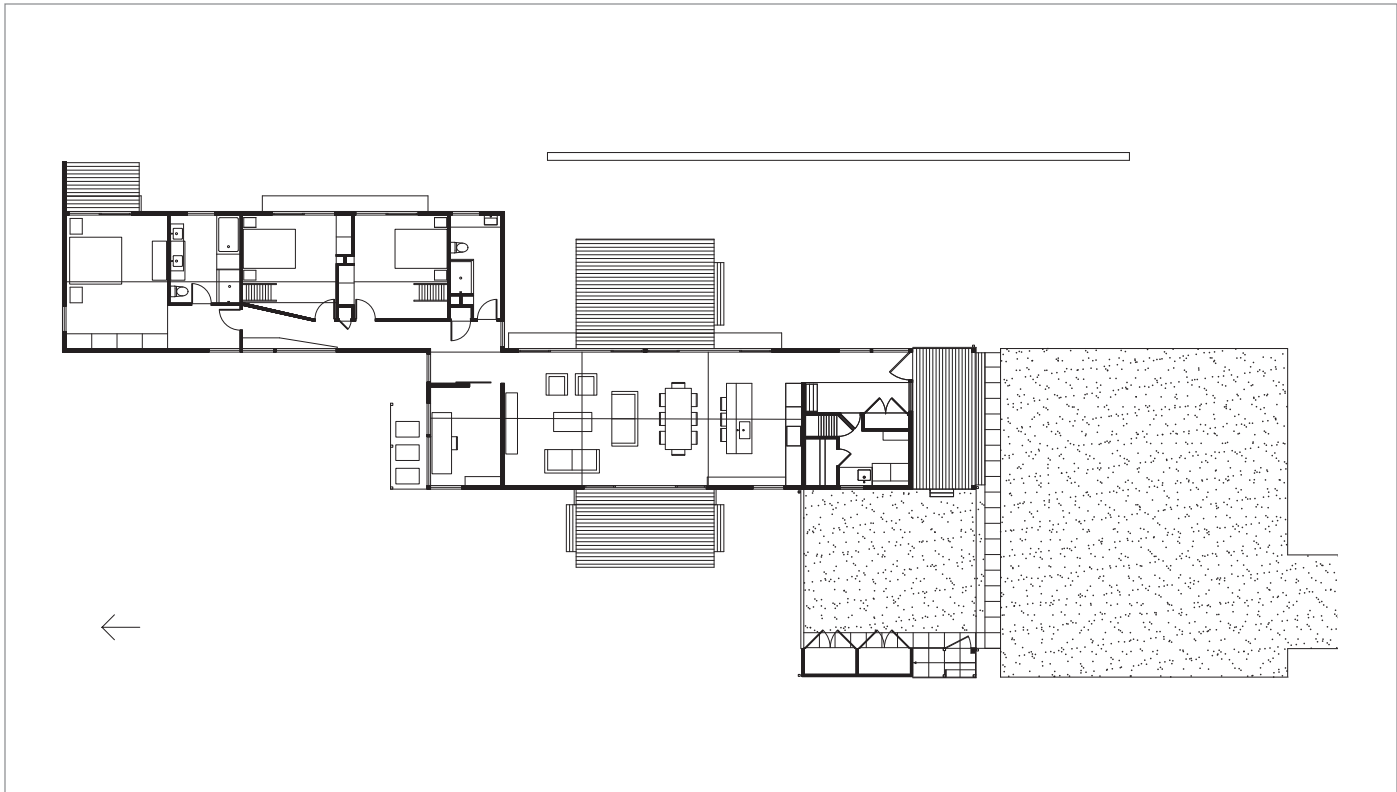
“In plan, the slide-by arrangement creates the classic ‘go through the building toward the light at the end of a long passageway.’”

—Jim Estes, FAIA

a loft, no doubt to the delight of visiting grandchildren. Outdoor terraces bracket the living and dining area—one for sitting, the other for outdoor meals.

As well as an understated response to the setting, Slide-By House is awash in finishes that lend an airy sense of space. Flooring is constructed of 2¼-wide maple planks. The kitchen and baths are fitted with IKEA cabinets with custom fronts. In the kitchen they’re combined with open shelving, engineered stone countertops, and glass backsplash tiles.

In the year the owners have lived there, the house has been operating



Slide-By House

Westport, Massachusetts

ARCHITECT: Jim Estes, FAIA, Estes Twombly + Titrington Architects, Newport, Rhode Island

BUILDER: Dan Kinsella, Kinsella Building Company, Portsmouth, Rhode Island

PROJECT SIZE: 2,150 square feet

SITE SIZE: 1.4 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: Warren Jagger Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

CABINETS: IKEA with Kokeena fronts

CLADDING: Locally cut white pine

COUNTERTOPS: Caesarstone

DECKING: Accoya

ENTRY DOORS: Weather Shield

FAUCETS: Blanco, Kohler, Grohe

FINISH MATERIALS: Radiata pine trim

FLOORING: Maple

HVAC: Fujitsu, Lifebreath HRV system

INSULATION: Icynene closed and open cell foam

LANDSCAPE PAVERS: Cast concrete

LIGHTING: Dals, Poulsen

LIGHTING CONTROL SYSTEMS: Lutron

OUTDOOR SHOWER: Central Brass

PAINTS/STAINS: Benjamin Moore

PASSAGE DOORS/HARDWARE: Flush maple S.C. doors, Kwikset levers

MILLWORK, MOLDING, TRIM: Locally cut white pine

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero

ROOFING: 5V Crimp Galvalume

SAUNA: Finlandia

SINKS: Create Good Sinks, Grohe, IKEA

SKYLIGHTS: VELUX

SURFACING (OTHER THAN COUNTERS): Laminate

TOILETS: TOTO

TUB: Americh

WEATHERIZATION/UNDERLAYMENT: ZIP System, ¾-inch AdvanTech subfloor

WINDOWS/WINDOW WALL SYSTEMS: Weather Shield

at Net-Zero. Jim attributes that not just to the 37 solar roof panels but to careful, commonsense construction. “One of the satisfying things is that it achieves Net-Zero even though it isn’t super-insulated,” such as with exterior foam, Jim says. “Normally when we work to create a Net-Zero house, there’s a 20-to-30 percent premium on construction.” This was not a high-budget house, he adds, and its strong energy performance was achieved by following industry best practices such as meticulous framing, sheathing, and taping, and filling the stud bays with foam.


Few embellishments were needed, or indeed desired, outside the house either. The immediate landscape was intentionally kept spare as befits the pastoral setting. Only a board-formed concrete site wall defines the small, freeform lawn that pushes up against the terrace, with the meadow grass as a billowy backdrop. 



Image Courtesy of PDET Photography

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Publisher
Paul DeGrandis
(847) 440-3000 ext. 100
Paul@SOLAbands.com

West Sales Manager
Paul DeGrandis
(847) 440-3000 ext. 100
Paul@SOLAbands.com

Midwest Sales Manager
Zach Stenberg
(847) 440-3000 ext. 115
Zach@SOLAbands.com

East Sales Manager
Dan Miklosz
(847) 440-3000 ext. 118
DanM@SOLAbands.com

Southeast Sales Manager
Dan Agostinacchio
(847) 440-3000 ext. 101
Dan@SOLAbands.com

**Product Resource Section/
Classifieds**
Mike Serino
(847) 440-3000 ext. 102
Mike@SOLAbands.com

Digital Programs Manager
Tim Steingraber
(847) 440-3000 ext. 106
Tim@SOLAbands.com

Ad Services/Materials
Heidi Riedl
(847) 440-3000 ext. 111
Heidi@SOLAbands.com

List Rental
Mike Serino
(847) 440-3000 ext. 102
Mike@SOLAbands.com

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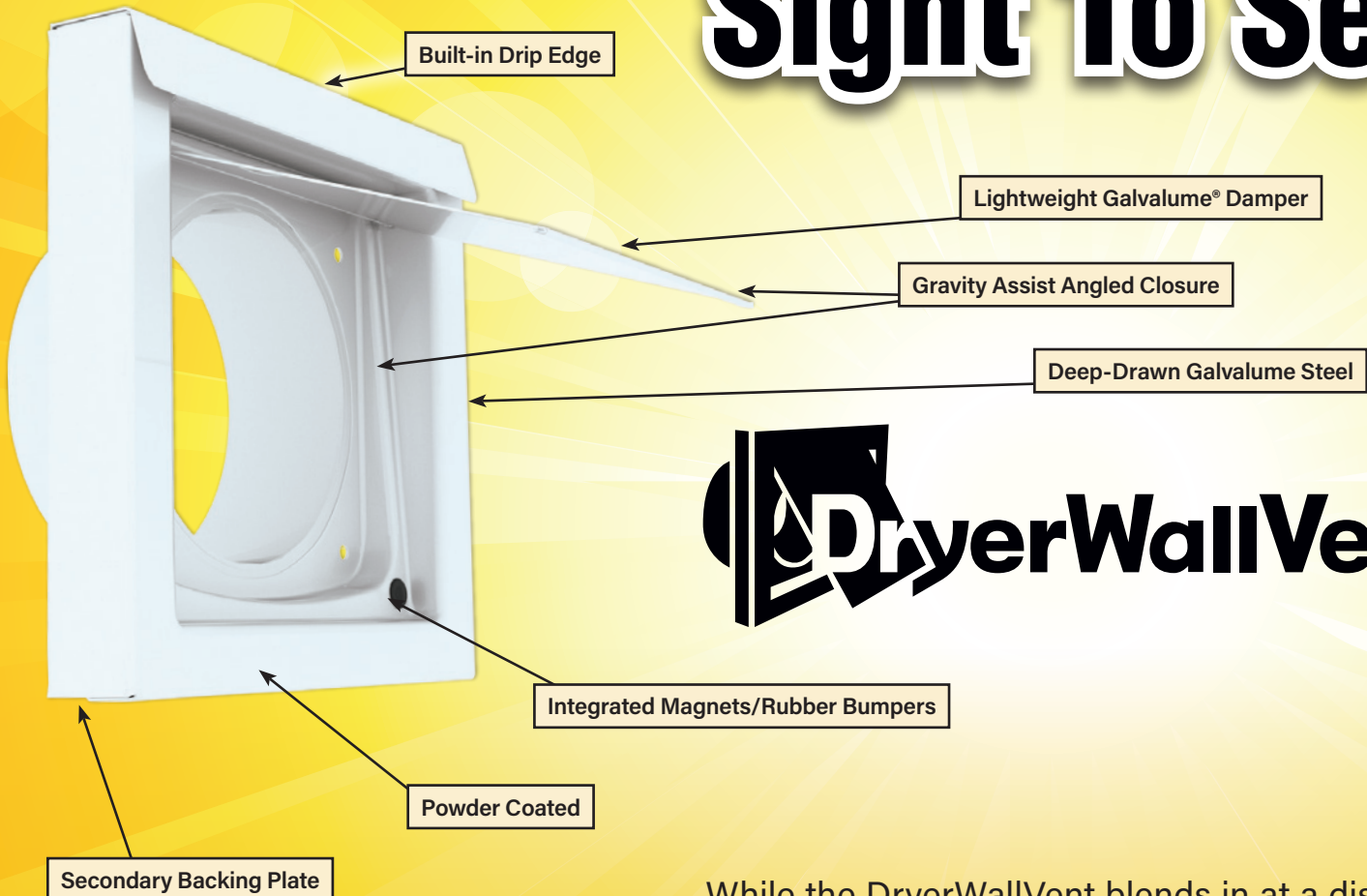
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RICHARD BEARD ARCHITECTS

Richard Beard Architects has designed many wonderful houses on extraordinary sites, but this 47-acre parcel in California's 20,000-acre Santa Lucia Preserve is one of the best yet, says principal Brett Moyer, AIA.

"This property is off the charts. It's at the top of a knoll, and on a site visit, we stood there and turned north, south, east, west, and we loved every exposure," he explains. "We knew the house had to engage with every orientation. So it's designed around four different views—one in each cardinal direction."

Initially the clients envisioned a home with a huge screened porch. But Brett, who had designed their previous house, talked them out of it. "My experience is they get very dirty very quickly. Instead, we presented the idea of a living and dining room that would function like a screened porch—with glass sliding doors to open up the space to the outdoors."

The full-time home also needed to feel cozy for two, while accommodating visiting children and grandchildren. Pulling



apart the plan into separate volumes trimmed the apparent size of the house while providing more views in those cardinal directions. The volumes open to a multitude of outdoor spaces that tap the best times of day for each. Says Brett, "The west faces a big sweep of Monterey Bay; the east faces the rising sun; the north is out of the wind; the south overlooks a pond."—*S. Claire Conroy*

Project: High Meadow Ranch, Carmel, California; architect: Brett Moyer, AIA, and Daniel Widlowski, AIA, Richard Beard Architects, San Francisco; builder: Stocker & Allaire, Monterey Bay, California; interior designer: Studio Collins Weir; landscape architects: Arterra Landscape Architects; project size: 4,750 square feet (main house/garage); 1,200 square feet (ADU); 968 square feet; rendering: Richard Beard Architects.

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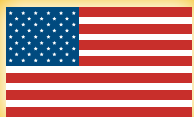
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