



Hillside Revisited

Oakland

Original: 1991

Renovated: 2007

Architect: Malcolm Davis Architecture, Malcolm Davis, AIA

Abstract:

A house built shortly after the Oakland Hills fire of 1991 was showing signs of premature aging when its current owners purchased it. During a major renovation, the architect revised the four-story home from front to back and top to bottom. The house was connected to its sloping rear yard with new doors and a bridge from the bedroom. At the front, it was connected to the panoramic views with floor to ceiling windows, balconies and a multi-story glass entry.

Story:

Anticipating their return to the Bay Area from the East Coast, the owners bought a house built hastily after the Oakland Fire of 1991 that was showing signs of premature aging. To guide them through a whole house renovation, they engaged Malcolm Davis, AIA of Malcolm Davis Architecture. In addition to reconfiguring the floor plans for the home's four complicated levels, the architect captured the panoramic views with walls of glass, removed an elevator and moved the main entry up one and half floors. He then wrapped the prominent entry staircase with IPE wood at the base and walls of glass at the top.

Continuing to work with the verticality of the building and the site, the architect projected a bridge from the back of the house to the hillside garden. The bridge aligns with an interior hallway spine that is now lined with painted wood siding reminiscent of a coastal beach house, lending warmth to this decidedly modern remodel. On the main living level, the kitchen was moved to the center of the house in order to make room for a children's play area and enhanced indoor-outdoor spaces at the rear of the home.

The project utilized many sustainable building strategies like radiant heating, photovoltaic solar panels and certified forest products, but the largest element is the re-use of the existing house. A talented architect helped this family turn a complicated, deteriorating house into a bright, delightful modern home that works beautifully for their family and lifestyle.



Historic Hillcrest

Berkeley

Original: 1912

Renovated: 2008

Architect: WA Design, David Stark Wilson, AIA and Chris Parlette, AIA

Abstract:

Faced with the challenge of updating a historically significant home in Berkeley, an architect known for dramatically modern design expanded this house with sensitivity and deference to its traditional style and materials. The resulting addition and remodel accommodate contemporary lifestyles and renew the home's street presence, while responding appropriately to the neighborhood. Masterful design gestures connect the new work to the old, seamlessly blurring the line between the two and resulting in an integrated whole, ready for a new century.

Story:

When it was time for an East Coast couple to return to the Bay Area, they looked long and hard for a large home to accommodate their growing family. They found a historic John Hudson Thomas designed house in Berkeley, albeit one that needed a significant remodel. To update the home, they turned to architect David Stark Wilson, AIA. His firm, WA Design, primarily does contemporary design, but the clients were old family friends. Their first question was, "Our goal is to do an addition that harmonizes with traditional work, can you do it?" After looking at the existing house, Wilson responded, "Absolutely!"

The project included adding a new family room and enlarging the kitchen on the main floor, plus an expansion of the master bathroom on the second floor. The changes were realized through a few deft architectural moves. A two-story addition along the north side of the building allows the kitchen and upstairs bath to expand, adds a large bay window to increase daylighting and still respects the neighbor's proximity. It also extends westward into an oversized bay window that faces the San Francisco Bay, balancing the home's rear façade.

This home demonstrates the ability of a talented architect to respond to historic conditions and blend them with a modern sense of space, light and proportion. Equally critical to the project's success were the skillful 'borrowing' of materials and design motifs from the existing architecture, to integrate the new and remodeled spaces seamlessly. The original wood trim was refinished throughout, while cherry wood was selected for the new trim and cabinetry. The original architect's four square detail, which is visible at the entry stairway, grew into a theme that now includes railings, cabinets, tile insets, kitchen hood, landscape details, and even the custom light fixtures. As a result, when you walk into the rejuvenated home it is difficult to discern what is original and what is new. Goal accomplished.



Roll Up House

Berkeley

Completed: 1996

Renovated: 2012

Architect: Leger-Wanaselja Architecture, Karl Wanaselja, AIA

Abstract:

In this artfully crafted house, built after the Oakland Hills fire of 1991, the architect used an abundance of inspiration and resourcefulness to create an original and personalized home. Exposed wood, steel and concrete give the house a raw, loft-like feel, while dramatic relationships with outdoor patios, through a wall of roll up garage doors, create a dynamic indoor-outdoor home. A recent design update brought the same architect together with the new owner for a collaboration that reinforces and improves upon the original.

Story:

This home connects dynamically with its wooded site and with the traditions of woodworking. Large garage style roll up doors extend the interiors to the exterior spaces and landscape. Rustic timbers, a curving staircase built by a shipbuilder, and exposed steel connectors confidently demonstrate the art and process of building. There is an honesty and solidity to the structures and their assembly.

Architect Karl Wanselja, AIA of Leger-Wanselja Architecture originally designed this home after the Oakland Hills fire of 1991, resolving difficult constraints posed by the triangular lot and the nearby freeway. When a new owner, who had previously lived in a downtown loft, bought the house, Karl returned for a collaborative redesign of the kitchen and bath areas. Ingenious touches like a rolling bookshelf wall that reveals a bedroom and cabinet lighting that pulses with color, give this home a highly personalized and artful feeling.

The original design pre-dated the current era's green building standards. However, the architect integrated salvaged red cedar flooring at the loft level and reused the fir concrete form boards as finish ceiling material. Additionally, a garden structure was built from the framing scraps and the house uses columns milled from trees that were partially burned on the site in the 1991 fire. Blown in cellulose insulation, passive solar design, radiant heat, solar hot water, natural ventilation and extensive daylighting complete the list of green, sustainable features implemented by this conscientious architect long before they were widely understood.



Skyline Modern

Oakland

Completed: 2004

Architect: Dommer Architects, Jerry Dommer, AIA

Abstract:

Spare and elegant, this confidently modern house perched on a steep slope in the Oakland Hills was inspired by the Bauhaus designs of the 1930's. Minimal detailing and tranquil interiors allow the furnishings and artwork to provide the décor, while large expanses of glass soak in light and the panoramic views of San Francisco Bay. This house shows how an experienced modernist architect uses restraint and a light touch to achieve maximum effect.

Story:

Perched on a ridgeline overlooking Oakland and the San Francisco Bay, this spare white stucco house harks back to 1930's Bauhaus modernism in its rigorous simplicity. Large, artfully arranged windows bring the views inside with power and serenity. Interiors are predominately crisp white planes, softened only by ash and limestone flooring. Custom furniture and the owner's art collection complete this classically styled modern home.

Since the site is steep, vertical movement has been considered carefully in the design. Cars arrive at the top of the site so walking into the house is a natural progression; while interior staircases are wrapped in windows that make you feel as if you are gliding through the tree branches. Climbing and descending never feel like a burden. A hot tub placed at the edge of the back yard slope beckons you toward the view for a respite.

The architect, Jerry Dommer, AIA of Dommer Architects, worked closely with his client, who was deeply involved in establishing the modern style of the house and its performance as a comfortable and low maintenance 'machine for living'. Special attention was given to passive and radiant heating strategies, air filtration, targeted cooling, daylighting, and acoustics. Together, the owner and the architect created a balanced combination of open plan public rooms and more nurturing smaller private spaces. This house shows how an experienced and skillful architect can use restraint and a light touch to achieve maximum effect for his client.



Lafayette In-Law

Lafayette

Completed: 2005

Architect: LDA Architects, Thomas Lee, AIA

Abstract:

When asked to create a backyard rental dwelling in a neighborhood of suburban ranch style houses, the architect produced an exquisite gem that blurs the boundaries between indoors and out. Exposed wood, expanses of glass, and attentive detailing helped make this compact in-law unit so desirable that the owners moved into it themselves and rented out their house instead, reminding us all that a smaller space can be lived in well.

Story:

In Lafayette, California, the Buller-Lee family presented Thomas Lee, AIA of LDA Architects with a challenge – to create a new, free standing in-law unit in a contemporary style, while respecting community design guidelines. The site is an exposed hillside behind the family's suburban ranch style home, overlooking Happy Valley. The owners asked only for abundant space to display their eclectic collection of art.

The architect designed a gracefully transparent solution that captures broad views across the valley and makes this modest building feel much larger than its 750 square feet, reminding us all that it is possible to live very well in a space this size. Floor to ceiling glass comprises the eastern face of the home, which is shaded by a trellis that appears to extend through the glass. The interior portion of the trellis acts as a shelf for the owner's art. Outside, the trellis supports flowering vines. The result feels like an inviting nest cut into the hillside.

The in-law unit is a model of sustainable design. The rear side of the building is dug into the earth to minimize the impact of the structure and gain natural insulation value. The east-facing windows allow for early morning warmth while the trellis screens out the midday sun to reduce cooling loads.

Though the project was originally conceived as an income producing opportunity, the clients so loved the new residence that they moved into it themselves, choosing instead to rent out the main house. Thanks to their architect, this small project intended as a financial venture resulted in an abundance of clever design that captivated the owners beyond their expectations and became their home.



Rancho Diablo

Lafayette

Original: 1929

Renovated: 2007

Architect: Ace Architects, Lucia Howard, AIA

Abstract:

The original house on this grassy slope in the foothills of Mt. Diablo was built in 1929 as a hunting lodge. Recently, the architect-owner designed an extensive addition that preserves the original house and continues its architectural lines, yet is vigorously eclectic - combining and amplifying architectural styles to create a whimsical, theatrical composition. Outdoor spaces, cactus gardens and a small museum complete this delightful, artistic estate.

Story:

The original house on this site in the foothills of Mt. Diablo was built in 1929 as a hunting lodge. The original architect, Lillian Bridgman, was a contemporary of Julia Morgan and Bernard Maybeck. Over the years, the house fell into disrepair and suffered many poor additions. In 1990, a series of improvements began that would ultimately celebrate the Bay Region style, especially Maybeck and his gothic touches. However, the older home is used as a reference only. The new structures are a re-interpretation of the past, with their own exuberant and distinctive style.

Owner and architect Lucia Howard, AIA, of Ace Architects, designed the renovation, which includes living and museum spaces. The museum area houses a collection of souvenir architectural models (reportedly the world's most extensive). The addition respects the original house and continues its architectural lines, yet is vigorously eclectic and new, combining and amplifying architectural styles to create a whimsical and theatrical composition. Materials and details pay homage to the originals but are employed more boldly by this talented and artistic architect, who also designed much of the furniture. The house is a home, a stage set and a gallery.

A re-designed landscape, done by the architect, includes a new pool, an extension to the existing cactus garden and a sculpture garden sited on a nearby knoll. Expressive architecture, valley views and interesting artwork make this an inspiring rancho.