

Silicon Valley

MODERN LUXURY

The Arts & Philanthropy **ISSUE**

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A Contrarian's RETREAT

Instead of downsizing, a retired Peninsula couple embraced the great outdoors in an even larger enclave.

By Zahid Sardar // Photography by Tom Rossiter

“Finally, a modern house,” architect Daniel Garber remembers thinking when his new clients asked for a contemporary home in Woodside, where Cape Cod cottage-style manses are more the norm. About to quit their active careers—he was an investment manager; and she, a management consultant—the husband and wife wanted an unconventional dwelling, perhaps even one with multiple pavilions. Seeking an architect conversant with regional building guidelines, they had fortuitously found Garber, a former planning commissioner whose Palo Alto firm, Fergus Garber Young Architects (fgy-arch.com), “was both local and experienced,” says the wife. Moreover, during the 1980s, Garber worked for the cutting-edge firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in Chicago, where homes by architect Frank Lloyd Wright—arguably the first American modernist—abound.

In 2005, the couple had purchased 13 acres of a partially wooded hillside that they knew well from their days at Stanford. Back then, fellow students who rented the property “had wonderful parties there,” the wife recalls. It was where her husband had also lived briefly, and over the ensuing years, the two continued to visit the tiny summerhouse and pool on the site. Its owners had become their friends and when the former decided to sell the place, Garber’s clients snapped it up within a week.

“We had been content in our 3,000-square-foot Eichler in Menlo Oaks for 24 years and didn’t ever intend to move,” says the wife. In fact, they didn’t move right away—opting to rent out their new house and visiting the grounds at will. They were thrilled to have access to nature, in a setting with views of the bay and Mount Diablo. Sometimes, they picked fruit from the orchard with their two children. And they would blissfully watch the creeping fog, or the neighbor’s horses that used riding easements across their land. In 2010, with retirement looming, they finally made the move to Woodside, deciding “to go big instead of downsizing,” the wife continues. “We’re contrarians.”

For the architect, it was a dream job. “Our firm has a history of working on topographically challenging sites like theirs,” Garber explains. After several iterations, they arrived at a 5,800-square-foot concrete, steel, wood and glass design that would cozy up to the hillside but also “stretch out and open to a pastoral landscape,” he adds. A separate pool house was also planned, and Garber admits that elements of both buildings—the cladding comprised of wide wood boards and pronounced 3 ½-inch-wide battens to emphasize a horizontal banding; the board-formed concrete spines that separate public and private zones; and the floor-to-ceiling windows aimed at the

MODERN IN THE MIST
In the morning fog, a Daniel Garber-designed home in Woodside meshes into landscaping by Bernard Trainor. Its sinker-cypress wood-clad entry porch includes a built-in bench.



A CLEAR VISION From top: For the foyer, Douglas Durkin paired an Emil Lukas painting with a custom console (nearby is a sculpture by Richard Filipowski); from the kitchen, the living room's mullioned glass wall offers views of the dining courtyard.



...CONTINUED views—were nods to Wright's designs from the 1930s and 1940s.

Greg Marrone of Campbell-based general contracting company Marrone & Marrone (marrone2.com), which has carried out nearly half a dozen other Garber projects, was handpicked to build the seemingly simple yet complicated steel- and wood-framed structures. The owners still marvel at the contractor's quest for perfectly crafted details and his many on-site samples of tinted and textured concrete walls that looked like megaliths at Stonehenge during construction.

The main T-plan residence has a two-story

east-west core with single-story wings on the north and south sides. Seen from the air, this glider that seems to have landed perfectly has flat, canted and subtly folded zinc roofs, some sections of which are topped with solar panels that cannot be seen from below, thanks to deep overhangs. The public areas—such as the living and dining rooms and the kitchen, all in the north wing—have large glass walls, broken by an asymmetrical grid of sinker cypress mullions and clerestory windows for cross ventilation. "Configuring those window walls was one of our most complex tasks because they have no

structural posts to support the roof," Garber says. The south wing, tucked slightly into a hill dotted with Douglas fir and redwood trees, contains the garage and utility rooms.

The central wing's two levels include a ground-floor family room adjacent to an ipe deck that looks out onto the woods, guest rooms that open to a completely private gravel courtyard abutting the hillside, an upstairs master suite situated directly above the family room, an office with a deck that also boasts enviable views, and a door on the south side that provides access to a bridge that connects to walking trails. Throughout the home, radiant heated floors are covered with blue stone and white oak. Every stainless or mild steel surface visible in the square structural posts and the flat stair railings, as well as in the fireplace surround composed by Garber of vertical steel bars, is acid-blackened for visual warmth.

About 500 feet away from the dwelling is a sunnier spot: The 1,100-square-foot pool house, which doubles as additional guest quarters, has a concrete back wall that shields CONTINUED...



WARM & WELCOMING
From left: In the living room, a fireplace surround comprised of vertical steel bars is acid-blackened; designer Durkin's tertiary color palette for furnishings links inside and outside.



...CONTINUED a broad ipe deck and swimming pool from view. The pool house details—including Marrone's custom-blackened stainless steel fins inserted into corners (where mitered sinker cypress boards meet) to camouflage untidy contraction gaps when they occur—imitate those of the main structure. Between the two buildings, linked loosely by a walking path, stone and gravel dining patios close to the heirloom orchard complete the new campus. To save water, landscape architect Bernard Trainor (bernardtrainor.com), in concert with Fox Landscape (foxlandscape.com), introduced masses of ornamental grasses that can thrive naturally without irrigation in that terrain.

Meanwhile, to bring the outdoors in, San Francisco interior designer Douglas Durkin (durkindesign.com), who came on board with congruent site-specific thinking, emulated

Wright's strategy of using a simplified palette of tertiary materials and colors derived from the architecture and the environs. "That way," says Durkin, "the views outside are what catch the eye." And the interior designer's attention to detail was not lost on the homeowners. "Doug even color-matched the light-switch covers on wood walls," the wife observes. "We really deliberated each decision carefully, but once we picked a few colors, they were used consistently throughout."

The interior is left spare, graced with only

a few objects and carefully edited art. Several custom pieces of furniture by Durkin's team—for example, a console in the foyer, under a painting by Emil Lukas from Hosfelt Gallery and near a sculpture by Richard Filipowski; and in the living and dining areas, a coffee table, dining table and console—are combined with classics such as Brno chairs from Knoll and vintage lounge chairs by Vladimir Kagan. "Everything is designed for comfort," says Durkin. "Even the vintage pieces with sinuous forms that express nature are comfortable." Also in that open-plan space, a custom kitchen pendant hanging above McGuire seating is balanced with a David Weeks chandelier in the living room.

Upstairs, in the office, a desk by Durkin and another pendant light by Weeks are enhanced by a sculptural 1960s Corona chair by Poul M. Volther. In the master bedroom, a photograph by Richard Misrach from the Fraenkel Gallery presides over more custom designs. The surprisingly compact master suite's large sleeping porch helps to expand it. "It is a vestige of the old house that was on this property, which had one like it," says the wife of the expansive balcony—adding: "All the bedrooms are deliberately small." With room to spare in their larger natural hideaway, they clearly did not want to waste any of it on sleeping. ■



SLEEPING BEAUTY
A photograph by Richard Misrach hangs in the master bedroom.