



A Place of Solace and Serenity

A retiring couple looking for a change from their Texas way of life find tranquility in their new home, tucked into the peaceful Oakland Hills

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LIFESTYLE IS WHAT MOTIVATED ROBERT NEBOLON'S CLIENTS TO MOVE FROM TEXAS TO CALIFORNIA. THE RETIRING COUPLE WERE LOOKING FOR A CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE, AND DECIDED THE OAKLAND HILLS WOULD PROVIDE THAT TRANSFORMATION—THAT IS, WITH THE HELP OF THE EAST BAY ARCHITECT. TUCKED INTO A RIDGE ON A STEEP SLOPE, THE HOUSE IS THE PERFECT SETTING FOR THIS HUSBAND AND WIFE, WHO ENJOY THEIR CONTEMPORARY THREE-LEVEL HOME; PEACEFUL, TREE-SHROUDED SURROUNDINGS; AND SPECTACULAR VIEW OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY.

"It was a lovely lot, where an old home had burned in [the Oakland Hills fire of 1991]," Nebolon says. "My clients were living in Houston at the time. They had seen another house I had designed up the street and loved it. When they found this site, they remembered that house and asked if I would design one for this site."

When Nebolon first surveyed the property, he discovered a knoll surrounded by tall trees in the middle of the site. To take advantage of this feature, Nebolon rotated the building to incorporate the knoll into the home's architecture so the house seems to sink into its surroundings. The slight rotation allows the home to maximize the view. "We wrapped the building around the knoll, and then built the main terrace on top as a European-style belvedere with no guardrails, which creates the feel of a great expanse."

The house comprises three pavilions: the entrance, the living room, and the main story. "The owners wanted an interesting entry, so you come in on one level, then go up to a second and a third. By bending the house into an L-shaped courtyard, I could give it great views from all levels."

"Tying the house into the landscape was key to the design and we immersed the building into the hill to evoke the sense of it coming out of the ground," says Nebolon.



Nebolon sloped the ceiling, which gives the sense that the roof emerges from the hillside. In a practical sense, the roof acts as a wind shield while also allowing in more natural light. "Tying the house into the landscape was key to the design, and we immersed the building into the hill to evoke the sense of it coming out of the ground," he says. Large French doors off the living room open to a terrace, reinforcing the indoor-outdoor connection.

The architect painted the red cedar stained siding in tones of brown and rust for a contemporary look, and other finishes match that palette. "We must have looked at 20 paint colors to get to the right one [for the ceiling]," Nebolon says. The landscape includes several oaks that survived the Oakland Hills fire, as well as ferns and rhododendrons planted to re-create the site's original flora.

The light, airy interior boasts white oak floors, cherry cabinets, and natural stone counters and surrounds. Designer Tina Voight chose a soft finish for the baths and the kitchen. "The owners didn't want anything shiny, so counters are flamed granite for texture and to embrace the architectural details of the setting," she says. The slate for the living room fireplace adds texture and reflects light from the clerestory windows.

The couple wanted four bedrooms. One is an exercise room that connects to a Jack and Jill bath, and the other is a guest bedroom where their children stay when they visit. A third, converted to the husband's office, has two walls of windows and two custom desks designed to offer views at any angle.

The master suite is on the upper level and has its own deck looking out to the bay and surrounding hills. "The couple didn't want a huge master bath, but this one has his and her closets and separate tub and shower," Voight says. Natural light was crucial, so a skylight is located over the shower and an expansive window is positioned along one wall by the tub. Stainless steel fixtures and brushed metal trim complement the shower's stone surrounds.

The interior is filled with contemporary furniture and accents to match the modern design—the couple replaced most of their old furniture when they moved. A fresh way to furnish a new home suited to a new lifestyle. ★

