

A Place of Peace 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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Published: January 22, 2010



Living room with stairs to dining area

Lifestyle is what motivated Berkeley-based architect Robert Nebolon's clients to move from Texas to California. The retiring couple were looking for a change in how they lived and decided the Oakland hills would provide that transformation. The house, tucked into a ridge on a steep slope, is the perfect setting for this husband and wife, who enjoy their contemporary three-level home; peaceful, tree-shrouded surroundings; and spectacular views 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."

The property's distinguishing feature was a knoll surrounded by tall trees in the middle of the site. To take advantage of this feature, Nebolon oriented the building to incorporate the knoll into the home's architecture, so the house seems to sink into its surroundings. "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.



Living room (to the right) and the terraces



Living room

allowing in more natural light. Large French doors off the living room open to a terrace, reinforcing the indoor-outdoor connection.

The orientation also lets the home maximize the views. “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.”

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



Family room passage to the terrace

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 features 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.



Masterbedroom; 5 bridges can be seen from the deck



Kitchen dining nook with a view 1



Dining room 1



Family room and kitchen beyond 1



Master bedroom sitting area 1

The master suite is on the upper level and has its own deck, which looks 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 owners replaced most of their old furniture when they moved. A fresh way to furnish a new home suited to a new lifestyle.