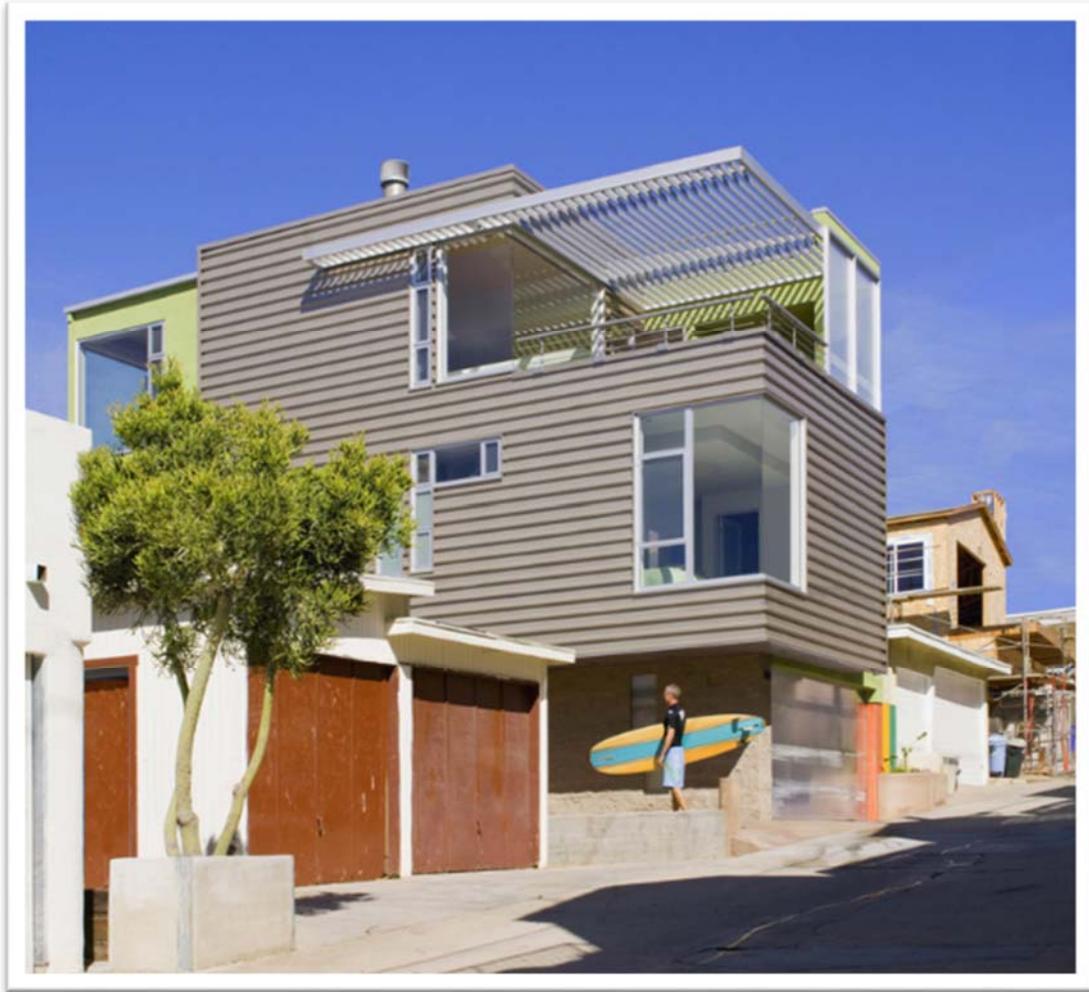


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Pardon Our Dust: A Hermosa Beach Makeover



Beachy redo is a family affair

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IMAGES BY DAVID DUNCAN LIVINGSTON

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When architect Robert Nebolon started sketching out ideas for his sister's tear-down and rebuild in south Hermosa Beach, he felt pretty confident that his design would meet the needs of her family -- despite the challenging 30-by-50-foot lot they had to work with. But he was also a little anxious about doing a good job because he knew their four siblings and other relatives and friends would be watching. "I didn't want to screw up in front of the whole family," said Nebolon, 48. But Barbara Gunning, 42, never doubted her big brother could create a house right for her, her husband, Joe, 42, and their two daughters. Even though Nebolon lives in Berkeley, he had spent enough time with his sister and her family to have a sense of their Southern California lifestyle -- fun, social, vigorous, beachy yet

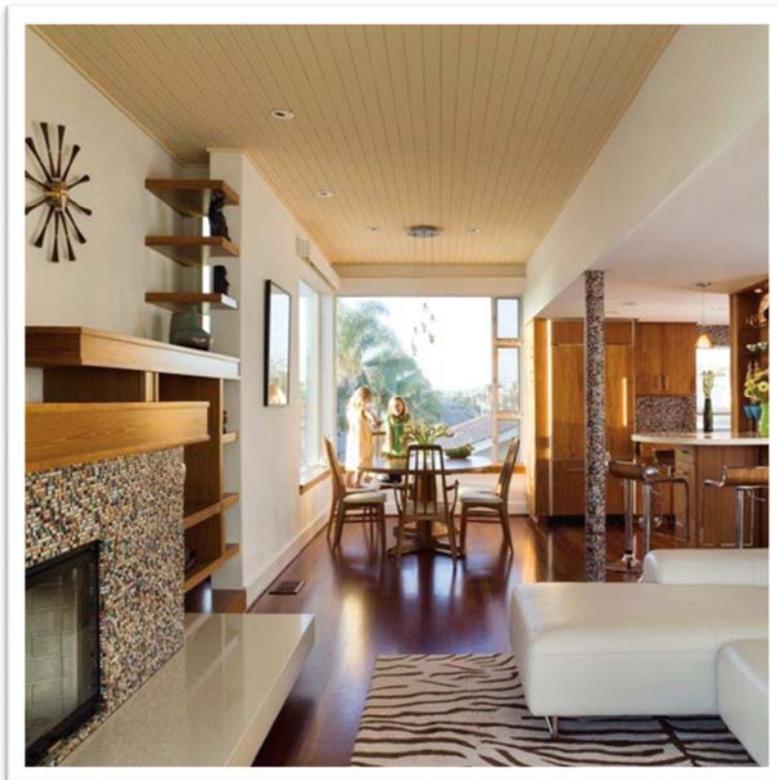
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sophisticated. “I trusted Robert,” said Barbara, who moved her family into the airy house with ocean views a year ago. “He knew.”

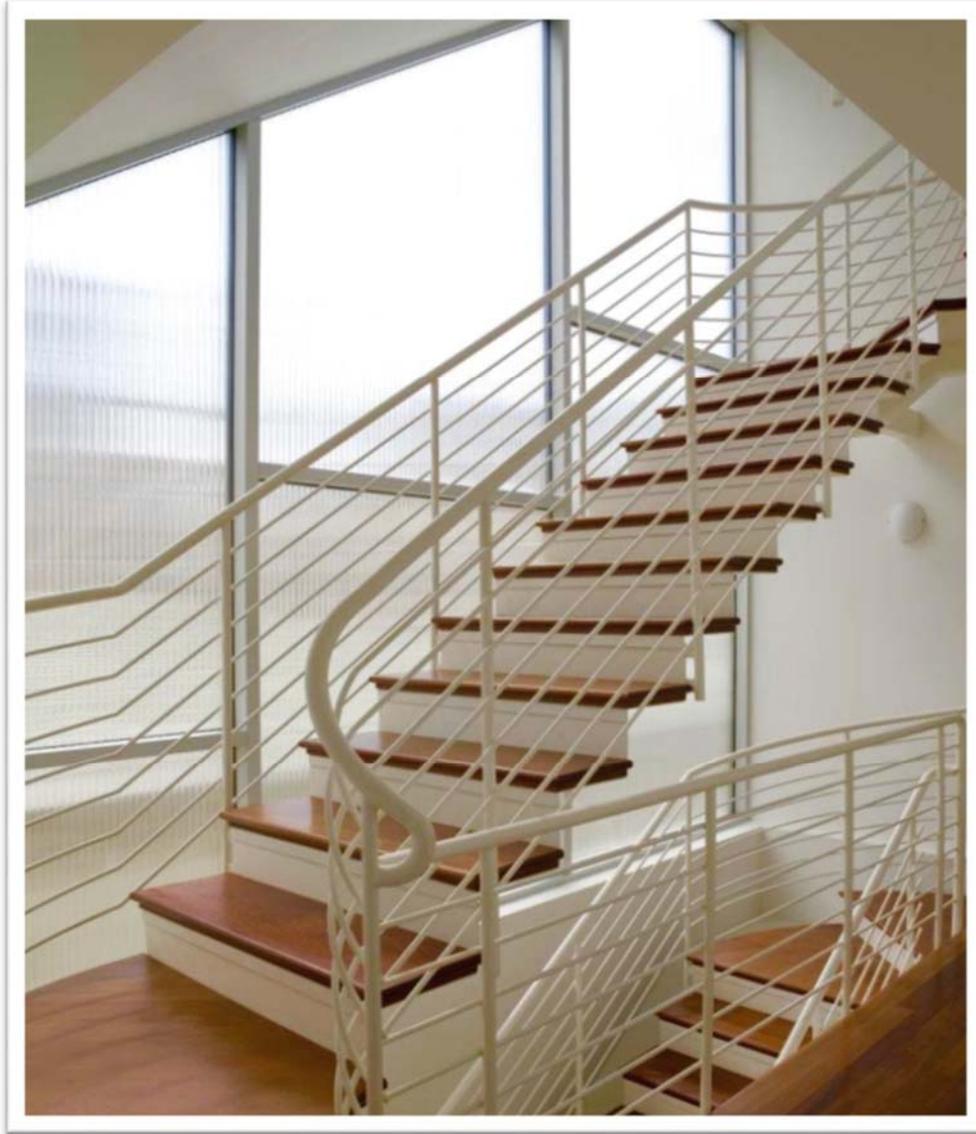
When the Gunnings bought the original house in 1994, it had two bedrooms in less than 1,000 square feet. The 1948 home sat on a legal half-lot on an alley one block from the beach and cost \$249,000 at the bottom of the market. After Barbara became pregnant with their second child, the couple realized they had to move out of the increasingly worn-out house or rebuild. “You want a nicer home for your family than a beach house,” Barbara said. Joe, who is a sales manager for Novartis Pharmaceuticals, agreed: “We were done with the headaches of an old house.” But in 2004, at the top of the market, the couple discovered that every house they could afford still would require \$300,000 worth of work, so they decided to tear the old house down and start anew.

To give her brother an idea of the contemporary look she liked, Barbara showed him photos from books and magazines. Her main request was that the front door not be right on the alley but set back. For his part, Joe wanted a home office that was separated from the home’s living areas and that had room for a couch and a large-screen TV. In other words, he said, a “man cave.”

Nebolon had his own visions for the three-story, 2,000-square-foot house. He wanted to situate the living room and kitchen on the top floor, the bedrooms below that, and the entrance, garage and man cave on the ground. He called it “an upside-down house,” a configuration Barbara said is common in the beach town to afford residents better ocean views.



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He envisioned a white metal and mahogany stairway illuminated from the side by a wall of huge translucent polycarbonate panels. He created a computer model to show Joe and Barbara how they could stand at the bottom of the stairwell on the ground floor and look all the way up to a large skylight at the top of the house directly above the stair. In a house where the stairs would be used many times each day, a dark stairwell would not do. "I wanted the whole trip up the stair to be really interesting," Nebolon said. "I wanted to make it a fun trip as a way to distract from the two flights of stair."

Nebolon also wanted the house to be green, incorporating energy-efficient design and materials, along with resource-conserving materials such as wood from forests certified to be managed in environmentally sensitive ways. When construction began, the family moved to an apartment nearby. The budget was originally \$510,000, but after the Gunnings made several upgrades, the final cost was \$600,000, or \$300 per square foot.

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Finding a contractor was not difficult, as Joe grew up in nearby Manhattan Beach and knows nearly everyone in town, according to Barbara. They hired Manhattan Beach contractor John Madison, the stepfather of a childhood friend, to build the unique home.

Two elements of the house design caused trouble: the stairs, which are supported from below and not attached to the polycarbonate wall—“a floating stair”, and the huge polycarbonate wall itself, which Barbara said dumbfounded the builders.

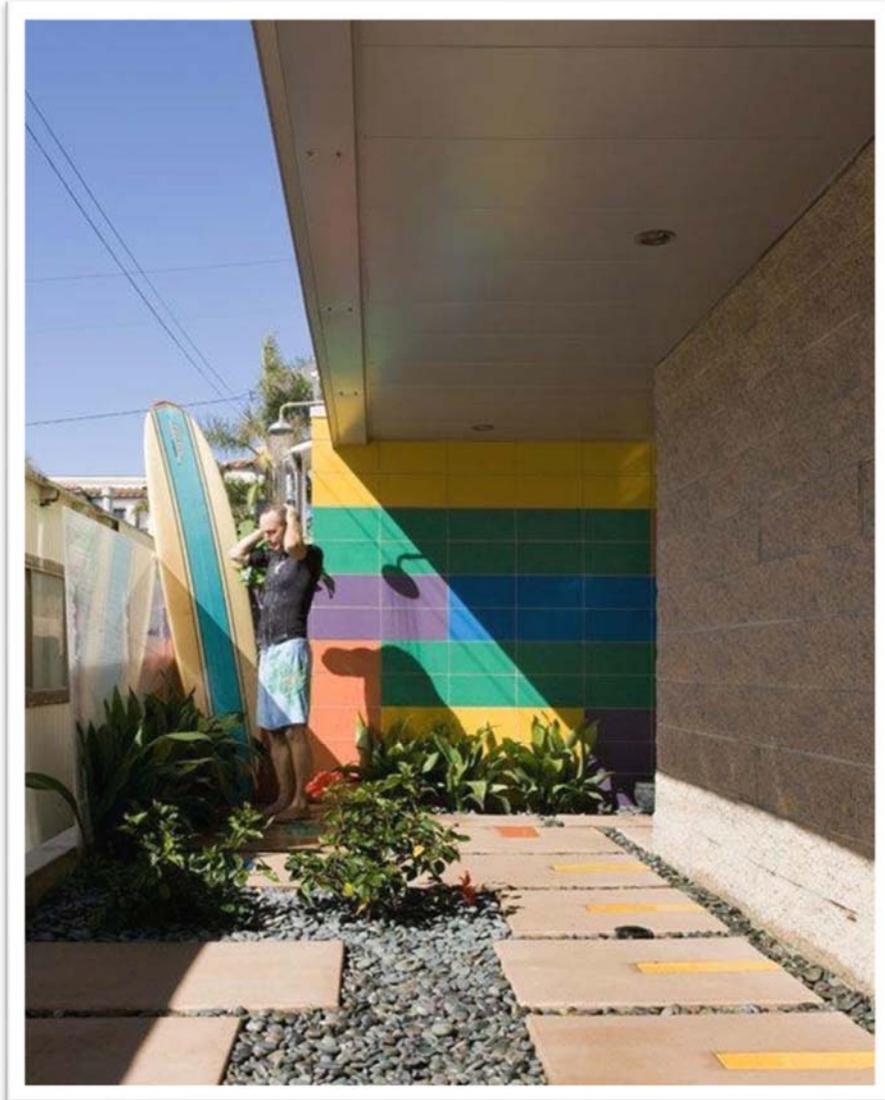
“The trades had never seen it before,” she said. The stair assembly pushed the total building time to a year and a half, but Barbara feels the extra time was worth it. “They’re perfect,” she said of the stairs. “Wonderful.”



The exterior of the home is Avocado green elastomeric stucco and high-quality metallic silvery metal paneling, set horizontally as two durable exterior materials suitable for the coastline. Barbara says “The stucco installers were completely coated with green from head to toe and looked like aliens,” said Barbara. The silver metal panel system and the wall assembly it sheaths also shields the house from the intense summer and western sun.

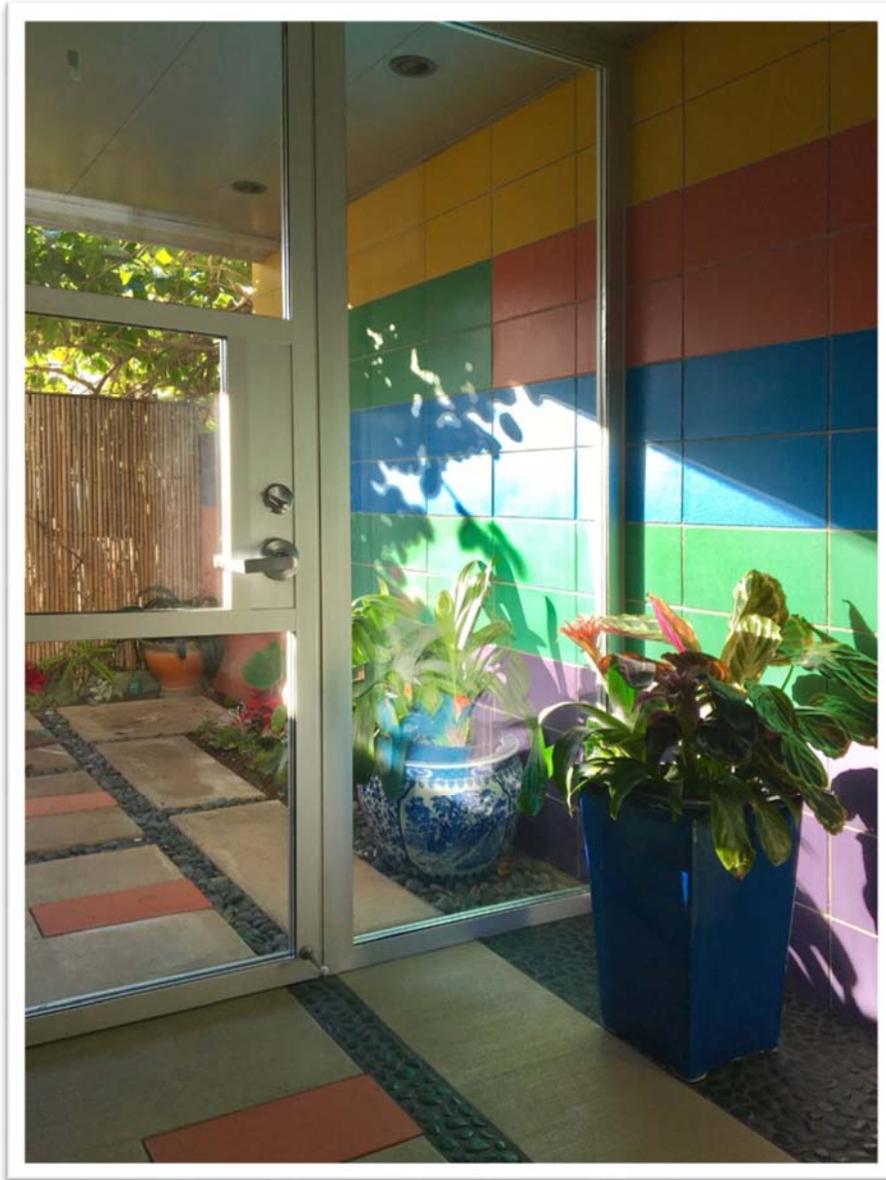
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Since the family moved in a little over a year ago, they have discovered that the house is indeed suited to their lifestyle.



An outdoor shower is used often as the family and guests run back and forth from the beach. The floor of the entryway, set back from the alley as Barbara wanted, is a cheerful blend of plain and colorful glazed concrete squares surrounded by black pebbles. The motif carries past the glass front door and into the foyer, blurring the line between inside and outside. A feature wall composed of colorful glazed concrete square leads one to the front door. These colors are inspired by the colorful beach towels found on the beach and “draped over all the fences and clothes lines to dry in the neighborhood,” said Nebolon.

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Entry hall and the colored feature wall

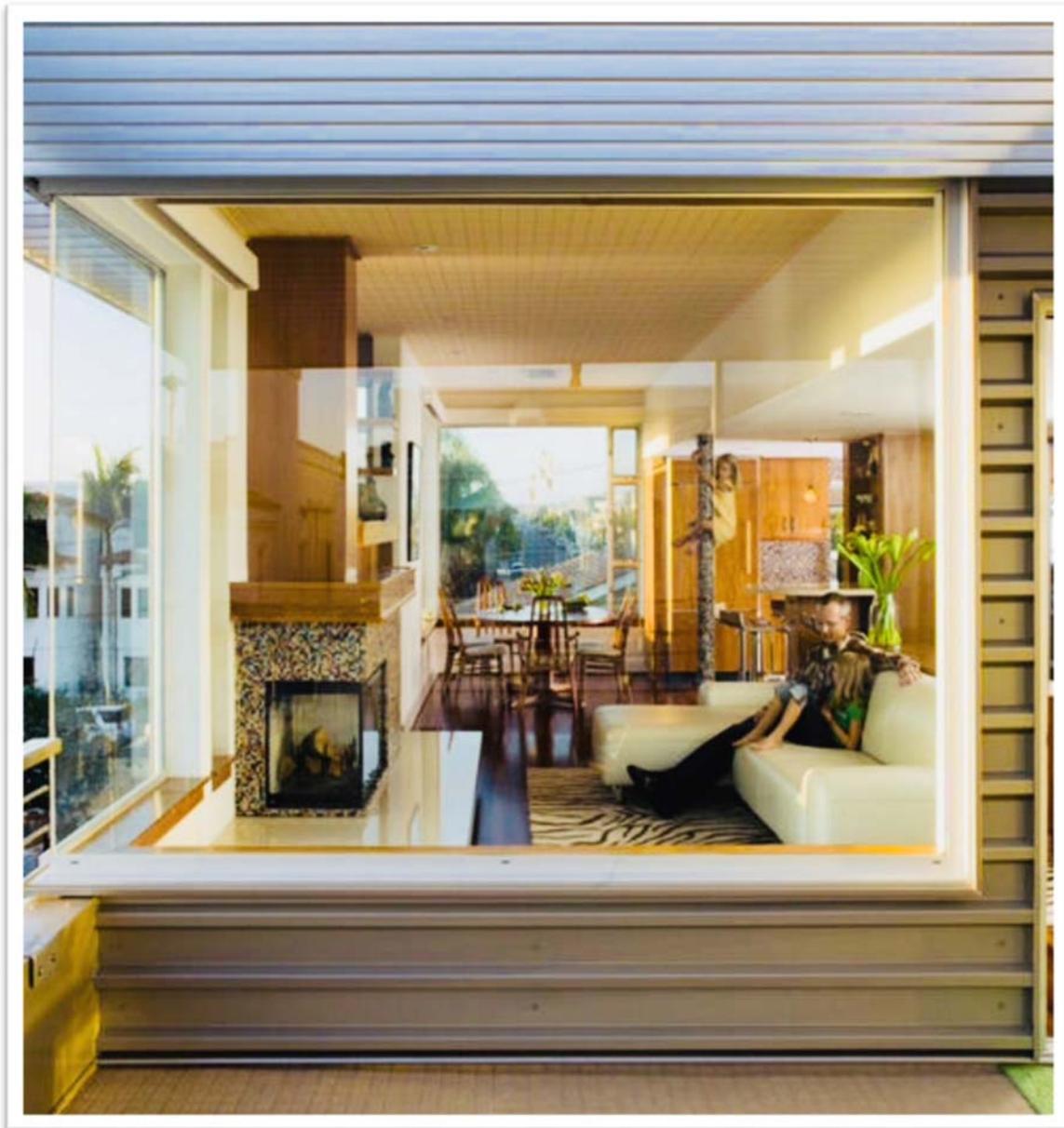
Barbara especially enjoys a dumbwaiter her brother included -- she unloads groceries at the garage level and sends them two floors up to the kitchen. For trash, she reverses the process. The family also makes good use of a built-in vacuum system that avoids the need to haul a vacuum cleaner from floor to floor.

"It's a very easy house," Joe said.

The three bedrooms and two bathrooms are on the second floor. Because the girls are young, and Nebolon knew they enjoyed bunking together, he left out the wall between their two rooms to create one large room. But each half has an entry door, closet, window and independent heating vents should the rooms be divided in the future.

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The top floor contains the kitchen, dining room, living room, guest bathroom and outdoor deck with an aluminum trellis cantilevered off the building to create post-free views of the sea.



Because the lot is too small for much outdoor space, the deck satisfies the city's requirement for that. Although the house reaches the 30-foot maximum height allowed, Nebolon also managed to design another small roof deck and remain within the limit.

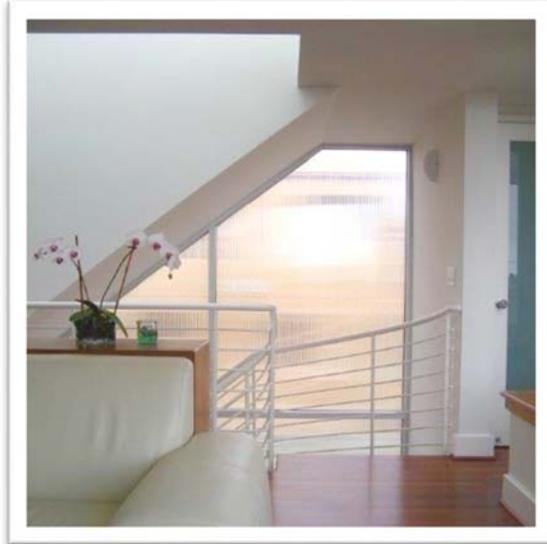
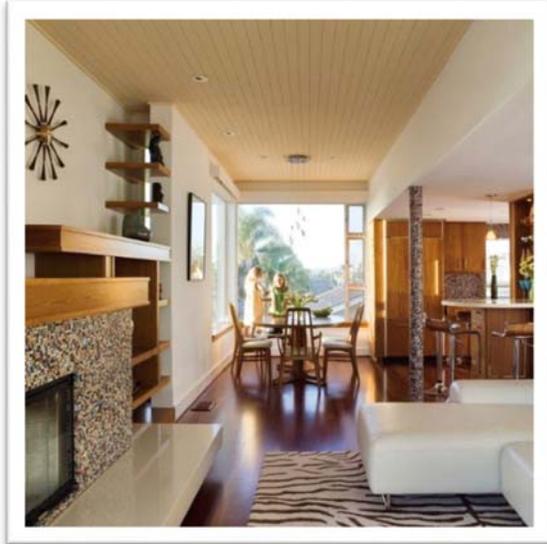
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The living area is bright and open, with views down a long boulevard to the Catholic church where Joe was baptized as a baby and where the couple was married. From the deck on the other side of the house, they can see the sand volleyball courts on the beach and the ocean. Narrow “slot windows” set throughout the house provide light and unexpected views.

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To set off the home's fun yet sophisticated architecture, Barbara decorated the living areas by mixing an expensive Italian leather sofa with a 1950s teak dining set and teak credenza she got on eBay.



After living in the house for a year, Barbara is grateful her architect already knew so much about her family going into the project.

As a result, she said, the house "is perfectly designed for us."