



Venturing Outside the Box

A modern Palo Alto home that rounds out the edges. By Lauren Murrow

Above: A 7-foot-wide oculus in the patio roof lets natural light into the adjoining indoor-outdoor living room.

Right: The back of the home features 10-by-14-foot sliding glass doors.

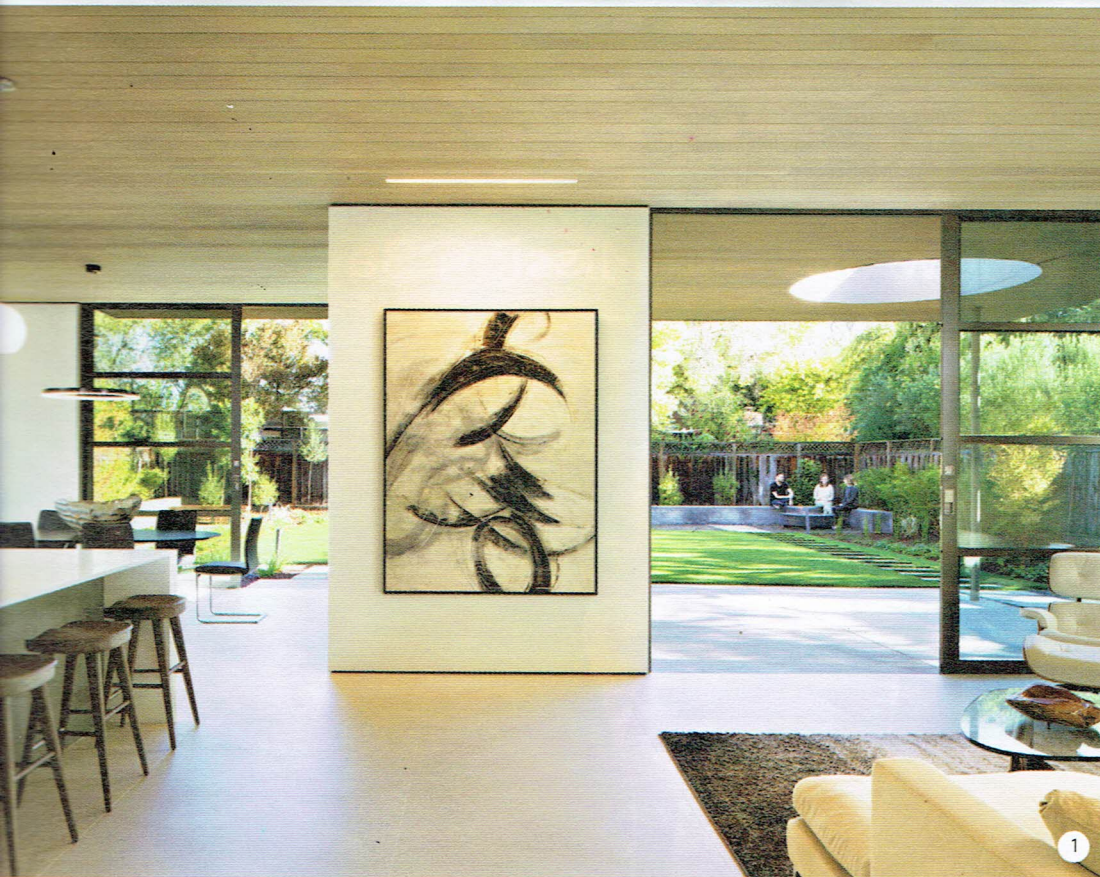


"How much wood is too much wood?" asks architect Jonathan Feldman. In modern design, that's a careful calibration. Too much wood and you have a rustic cabin; too little and you end up with a sterile white box. The ideal balance of organic yin and modernist yang in this Palo Alto house—the minimalist home of a Stanford business school grad—was the outcome of a creative collision between the wood-loving Feldman and Steven Stept, the project's whitewash-revering principal architect. For every sweeping plane of cedar or floating stair tread of oak, there's a wall-size sheet of glass or a cream-colored porcelain paver underfoot. "I pushed Steven toward warm wood and natural materials," says Feldman, "and he pulled me toward glass, boxy forms, and crisp edges." The result is a cedar-swathed, uncommonly inviting feat of modernism—"less edgy; more livable," says Stept.

The pair conceived an indoor-

outdoor plan in which the living room, kitchen, and dining room overlook the backyard through 14-foot-wide sliding glass doors. The cedar ceiling of the living room and dining room extends over the back porch, furthering the link to the outdoors. "There was an effort to make everything about the materiality of the building as light and airy as possible," says Feldman. The porch roof, seemingly suspended above the floor-to-ceiling glass curtain, appears to float. The architects maintained a neutral palette and kept the emphasis on texture: oak in the cabinets and stair treads, off-white porcelain on the floor, charcoal-gray window beams, and a slatted cedar facade.

Nowhere is the break from traditional modernism more apparent than in the two-story home's floating stair tower. Swathed in a vertical pane of glass and sheathed in cedar slats, the tower glows like a lantern as light streams through the slats through-



1. A cedar ceiling extends from the kitchen and living room over the back patio.
2. Art and interior decor by Da Lusso Design is restrained in color, keeping the emphasis on the home's materials and texture.
3. Sunlight floods through cedar slats in the stair tower. "I don't think any of us could have predicted how magical that effect would be," says architect Steven Stept.
4. The green roof, planted with drought-resistant grasses and flowers, is visible from the second-story bedrooms.



out the day. The light-play continues on the back patio, where a round opening in the cedar roof, seven feet in diameter, reveals the sky and provides a whimsical contrast with the home's otherwise straight edges. In clear weather, a long beam of sunlight cascades through the opening, swinging across the patio and lawn as the day passes.

The architects' attention to subtle detail continues even on the roof, where a patchwork of drought-resistant native grasses and flowers is visible only from the second-floor bedrooms.

It was important to Feldman, a Palo Alto native, to create a structure that differentiated itself from the neighborhood norm. The existing hodgepodge of faux-historical homes, from hacienda-style to old Tuscan to New England clapboard, constitutes what he calls "design no-man's-land." Though the back of this home may be awash in glass, Feldman and Stept turned once again to cedar to clad the front facade and rain screen. "There's almost a Japanese style in it," Feldman says. "That wood exterior gives this boxy, modern building a delicate refinement—a sense of craft." ■

