

An Embraceable View



The Marin County hillside home designed by Gustave Carlson strikes a balance between modern pied-à-terre and cozy retreat—while maximizing some remarkable views

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GUSTAVE CARLSON'S RENOVATION OF A MARIN COUNTY HILLSIDE TRACT HOME GRAZES THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE WITH THE LIGHTEST OF TOUCHES. STEEL POSTS AND CONCRETE PIERS HOLD THE CANTILEVERED HOUSE NEARLY 30 FEET ABOVE THE ROLLING TERRAIN, WHILE THE EXTERIOR COLORS, CUED BY THE FLORA OF LAVENDER AND FESCUE, PULL IT INTO THE EMBRACE OF THE SURROUNDING HILLS. FROM THE OUTSIDE, THE ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT IS SUBTLE BUT APT FOR A WEEKEND RETREAT THAT ABUTS THE OPEN SPACE OF A LAND TRUST. THE OWNERS WANTED WARMED-UP CONTEMPORARY STYLING THAT DID NOT CLAMOR FOR ATTENTION, AND THE BERKELEY-BASED ARCHITECT DELIVERED.

For this house, though, the larger story takes place on the inside. The architecture emphasizes the sweeping view of Tiburon's port, the bay, and San Francisco. Even for a region full of beautiful vistas, this exposure is among the best around. And for the Los Angeles-based couple who bought the 1960s-era house, it sealed the deal.

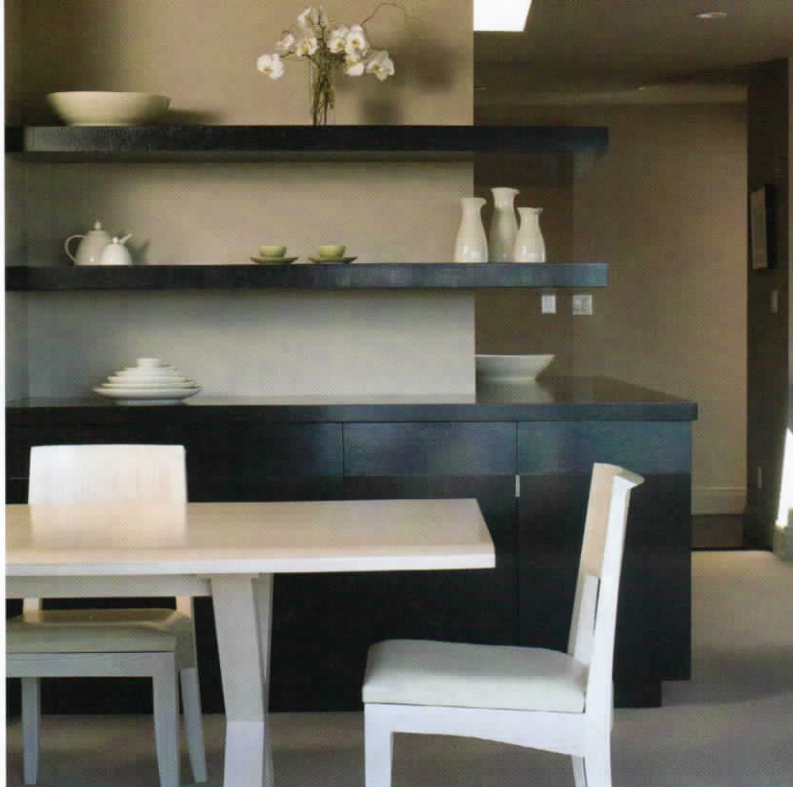




Turning the drab, outdated house, which Carlson describes as being in “a state of aesthetic disrepair,” into a contemporary haven was up to Carlson and Southern California interior designer Carolyn Lawrence. The two had collaborated some 10 years earlier in the design and construction of the same homeowners’ primary residence in L.A. The reprise was just as easy for the designer-architect duo—both banned details of architecture or furnishings that would interrupt the visual flow to the outdoors, and selected colors that would pay tribute to the panorama.

“My goal was to recast the house as a clean and modern pied-à-terre without turning it into a white box,” says Carlson. As a weekend home, it didn’t need more square footage, especially when enlarging the 30-by-30 footprint would mean running Marin County’s permit-approval gauntlet. Instead, Carlson solved the home’s inadequate circulation by wrapping a deck around the upper level and enclosing the lower level to create a sleeping porch for the master suite. The specter of the white box faded further with the addition of Western red cedar shingles and painted fasciae and decking.





On the inside, Carlson stripped the remnants of the 1960s. Out went a brick-faced fireplace (including pizza oven and extensive planters), drab cabinetry, and dated lighting. That left him with 2,000 square feet of cleared space in which to realize a spare, well-designed and well-crafted home showcasing its best feature. He diverted the flow of the living spaces toward the view by moving walls, enlarging windows, and expanding the decks. He also minimized linear distractions by controlling the placement of structural features, selecting windows that don't divide the light, and installing tempered glass in the deck rails. Each element helps frame the vista, and the interior color palette harmonizes the interaction between indoor and outdoor worlds.

Carlson's mantra, "Err on the side of simple," works for this getaway home, especially partnered with his corollary, "Don't overdesign." Essential to the pared-down architecture is extensive custom cabinetry. The dining and living rooms alone have 36 linear feet of cabinets as well as open, cantilevered shelving for display and storage. The built-ins, which have presence without bulk, are unembellished except for a minimal reveal of brushed nickel pulls and a dramatic espresso-brown finish. Furniture from Christian Liagre, a line renowned for its sleek modernity and exquisite detailing, sets a tone of elegant comfort in the social and private rooms. Minimalist decorative accents add rich textures and sculptural drama.

The kitchen, once a closed galley configuration with worn appointments, is now an open L-shaped space with an extended peninsula. Where the other spaces have minimal colors, the kitchen draws from a broader palette: eggplant cast-concrete countertops, glass tiles in greens and lavenders, and custom cabinetry stained red cedar. Even though the owners, who are uprooted San Franciscans, come to Tiburon to decompress, the kitchen has resources for extensive use and an ambient warmth for family-centered entertaining with teenage children and assorted friends.

Carlson's reimagined box is the perfect weekend hideaway: a forthright, modern, and user-friendly haven suitable to its pastoral setting. And that jewel of a vista? Well, from every spot, indoors and out, it is the constant embraceable view. ★

