

This high-performance house embraces local materials, modern lines, and the craftsman's hand

BY MELA BREEN

# Arts & Crafts MEETS Modernism

**T**he DNA of the *Fine Homebuilding* House (or “Good Haus” as we’re calling it) is established by the steep and rocky hillside that spills down onto a small neighboring foothill meadow. The site’s limited buildable footprint, seasonal drainage concerns, and an inviting flat outcrop of granite drove the initial design. My own DNA, though, informs the aesthetic.

I am the child of craftspeople, and my rural upbringing is embedded in me like the red

dirt of the Sierra Foothills. I like handmade things and local materials. I believe buildings need to connect and respond to the landscapes we build in. Yet I am drawn to the clean lines of modernism and the illusion of simplicity that relies on rigorous craft and thoughtful detailing. Designing and building our own house was an opportunity to explore finding the balance and harmony between the three intersecting areas of our work: the handmade (and maybe somewhat “imper-

fect”) house, modern architectural forms, and a commitment to high-performance building standards.

### **Balancing performance and appearance**

I start designing around an intellectual idea so that there is a thread of a story that I can come back to throughout the process. In our case, the idea was the notion of design and high performance being inextricably tied



together and overlapping each other—hence the two rectangles intersecting over the main mechanical core and balancing on each other.

The primary rectangle is the long, south-facing first floor. At the west end, a deep porch protects the house from overheating, bridges the seasonal drainage, and links the open floor plan to the landscape with a large outdoor living space. The second-floor rectangle runs perpendicular to the main living space and cantilevers to create a covered

## FOLLOW THE BUILD IN THREE PARTS

- **Foundation and framing**  
(FHB #277, August/September 2018)
- **Envelope and mechanicals**  
(FHB #278, October/November 2018)
- ▶ **Design and reveal**

In this three-part series, we explore the design and construction of a new contemporary net-zero home in California. This installment recounts the design features and material choices that add warmth, beauty, and a strong outdoor connection to this net-zero modern-style house.

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**Bespoke kitchen.** A mix of cabinet styles and finishes lends a furniturelike feel that fits the open living space.



**PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE**

**Stanley FatMax tape measure**

- 13 ft. of straighter standout
- Compact case design with less bulk and more comfortable grip
- High-impact ABS case for durability



**PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE**

**FLIR**

- C3, a compact, full-feature thermal camera that shares images over Wi-Fi, fits in a pocket.
- After defining a box on the C3 screen, you can determine the highest or lowest temperature in the box.
- FLIR's moisture meters use infrared guided measurement for noninvasive location of leaks.



north entry, while a balcony on the south side cantilevers toward the nearby treetops.

To underscore the architectural volumes, I chose standing-seam metal roofing by Bridger Steel that turns down onto the walls as cladding. Because the same material is used on both roof and walls, the eye doesn't separate the two planes; the intersecting rectangles are therefore reinforced. I used the metal on the sides that are most exposed to the weather. In places that are more protected, however, I used cedar siding that my father had milled for us from his property. The wood beneath the deep north overhangs provides a "softness" in those locations where we will be moving around the outside of the building.



## PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

### CabParts

- Custom cabinet boxes and closet components can be ordered directly.
- Flat-packed cabinets in custom sizes come either with Conformat screws or glue-and-dowel assembly.
- Hardwood dovetailed drawers are available.

### A kitchen for the extended family

Dave and I have lived in modest spaces since we have had children—first in a one-room cabin and then in a two-bedroom cottage. Our children are now seven and nine, and we are all ready to have a little more separation. The master bedroom is upstairs, and the kids' rooms are downstairs. Their rooms are connected to each other via a hidden bookshelf door, so they can share the space when they feel like it or close it off when they want privacy. The bedrooms are modest in size because we wanted to devote the primary square footage to the main living space and outdoor porch.

As I have thought about what kind of home I wanted to create, it has always been

one where the kitchen is central. The kitchen in this house is integrated with and open to the main living space. We live informally and have a lot of family members who live locally, so there are frequently grandparents and friends at our house. We wanted the kitchen to feel expansive and to accommodate large gatherings, but it also had to feel inclusive and intimate when just the four of us were there.

The kitchen is adjacent to the front door, with the main sink located under a window from which we can see guests arriving and know to greet them at the front door. The island, which will be the primary food-preparation area, spans the length of the kitchen and faces out toward the living room

so that we can interact with our children as they do their homework or with our guests while we cook. The whole space is filled with light and has large windows that look out upon a lovely live oak tree and the forest canopy below.

I generally prefer islands with a lower bar, but because this kitchen is so wide open, we opted for a raised bar to shield the creative mess I usually make while cooking. The island is paneled in Claro Walnut (a species of walnut tree endemic to Northern California) that my father, Dan Guyer, harvested 20 years ago. My dad's barn is a treasure trove of wood he has milled over the years. In his stacks of wood, he not only had the Claro walnut but some beautiful black-oak slabs

that we were fortunate enough to be able to use in the kitchen.

English kitchen designer Johnny Grey has influenced how I design kitchens. I prefer kitchens with a mix of cabinetry types and styles—so that the space feels like it is made up of furniture pieces—rather than a monolithic block of cabinets. We have a mix of walnut cabinets at the island, black oak-faced cabinets and drawers in most of the kitchen, and a few painted pieces.

I like the look and feel of concrete countertops, and we have made our own in the past. However, I have found that concrete stains easily. With two young boys, we wanted durable and repairable surfaces throughout the house, so we chose a quartz product that looks like concrete.

### Hearth for a high-performance house

California's brand of modernism embraces the indoor/outdoor connection, which I strive for in my designs. Because of the topography, connecting the house to our site in a beautiful and functional way was a design challenge. We chose to have several covered exterior areas that reach out and extend the house into the landscape. On the western end, the deep porch provides solar shading so that the house doesn't overheat. It also serves as a four-season outdoor room that's an integral part of the floor plan.

Because this is a tight, high-performance house, we decided not to have wood heat in the building. But we do live in a semi-rural area, and there is plenty of firewood to burn. The idea of a hearth and a gathering fire remained important to us, so we opted for a Morso fireplace on the covered porch. With wide French doors, we will be able to open the main living space up to the porch. I expect we will eat outside much of the year, so we included a simple outdoor kitchen that consists of a sink and a barbecue.

The overhanging roof of the porch continues around the north side of the house, which protects the cedar siding and lets us move around the building while being sheltered from the rain.

The size and location of the windows reinforce the house's connection to its natural surroundings. From the entry, the primary sightline is straight through to a wonderful old moss-covered oak, a view also experi-



#### PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

##### Build Direct

- Online marketplace for thousands of flooring choices, including hardwood, engineered wood, vinyl, and tile
- Also offers materials such as siding, decking, and kitchen and bath fixtures
- Ships directly to the home or job site



**Sheltering room.** StepStone concrete pavers at finish-floor height extend the indoors out, while the wall-like chimney and fireplace will ward off a chill.



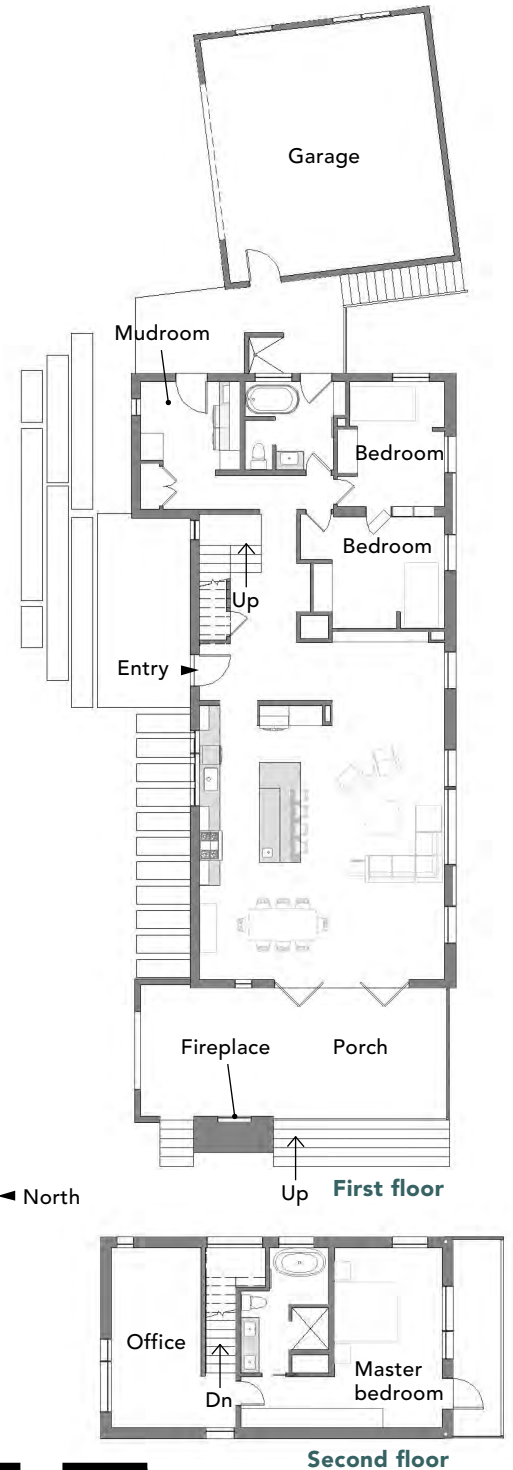
*Warm wood. Southern light floods the main living space, bringing a glow to the built-ins and wide-plank floors.*



**A charred chimney.** The Shou Sugi Ban treatment of the cedar creates a cladding that is resistant to rot and decay and that highlights the grain pattern.

## CONNECTING THE OUTDOORS

We spend a lot of time outdoors, and this plan allows access to the property in different ways. The house is oriented so the utility space, garage, shop, and gear storage are on the east side, with the mudroom/laundry adjacent to those spaces. They are connected via a covered breezeway that has an outdoor shower and a separate entrance to the downstairs bathroom. The porch and landscaping on the western end are for gatherings, meals, and sitting around the fire.





**PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE**

**Schluter**

- Waterproof Kerdi-Board tile substrate protects the wall assembly.
- Ditra uncoupling membrane prevents cracked tile and grout from floor movement.
- Prefab shower kits include shower tray and curb, waterproofing membrane, and seals for plumbing penetrations.

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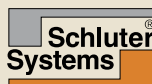
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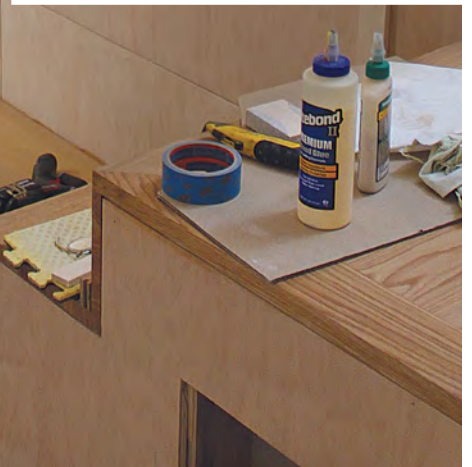
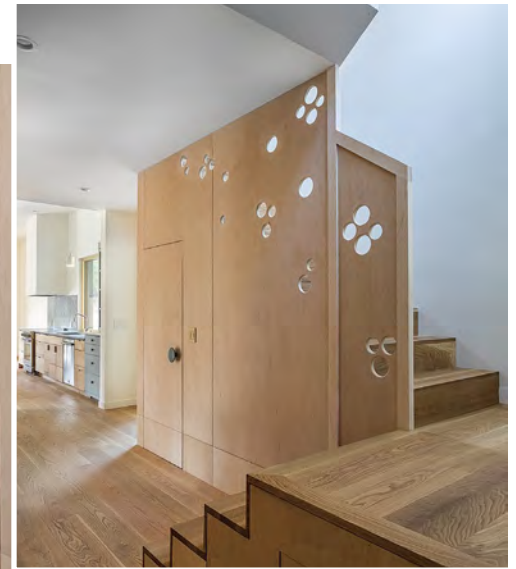
**NorCal immersion.** Framing the morning light through the east-facing window, handmade fireclay tiles bring a local, handcrafted, modern sensibility to the refined master bath.



### PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

#### Titebond

- Color-matched metal sealants are flexible enough to accommodate expansion and contraction.
- Painter's caulks create smooth, gap-free finishes.
- Glues ensure a tight fit for trim carpentry.



enced from the kitchen, the living area, and the master bedroom. The cantilevered balcony off the second-story bedroom is essentially a reimagining of a tree-house porch that allows us to step out into the canopy of the surrounding trees.

### Bathrooms for utility and retreat

Even though there is a proper front door and entry, the mudroom—connected to the garage with a breezeway—will be used as our day-to-day entry. It will also house the laundry room; its commercial rubber flooring will be durable and easy to clean. We built a closet, cubbies, a bench, and cabinetry in the laundry room, where we will store various gear, shoes, and clothing before it enters the living spaces.

While we love the outdoors, the downstairs bathroom is also part of my effort to keep the dirt from taking over the house. Although it is primarily the boys' bathroom, it has an exterior door to the breezeway where there is

also a covered outdoor shower. I imagine that we will be able to shower outside for much of the year, removing the dirt and grime from local adventures before entering the house. It is my hope that the kids will at least clean off before running exuberantly through the house that I optimistically painted white! For both of the bathrooms, I chose large-format tiles (with not much grout) for easy cleaning.

The master bathroom is meant to be both functional and a bit of a retreat. For years, all four of us shared a bathroom, and I am ready to have my own space. We try not to waste water, so we stayed away from multiple showerheads and body sprayers, but the tiled stand-alone shower is open and roomy. The tub, a freestanding center-drain model, is from Duravit's new LUV series. □

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