

Rugged Modernism



EDITOR'S CHOICE

BY KILEY JACQUES

A site-inspired structure, Ricon Ranch is exceptionally sensitive to its fragile surroundings



Site solution. A T-shaped or hammerhead turnaround was mandated. A variance allowed for a bend in the T—the long leg of which is used as the main driveway, while one of the short legs wraps down the side of the main-house garage, providing easy access and a parking space for guests. The other terminates in a center hub connecting the main house and the guest house.

For 18 months, Rich Coffin, his wife, Krista, and architect Dave Mendro spent their time planning and building Ricon Ranch. They even developed a mission statement: The house should be organic to the land, warm in character, and in keeping with their surfing/ranching lifestyle. Additionally, given the region is subject to high winds and wildfires, all of the structures were to be weather- and fire-resistant as well as easy to maintain. The time they devoted to understanding the site paid off. Once construction was underway, they had a plan in place for protecting the surrounding coastal riparian habitat.

Because the 2-acre buildable area was constrained by specimen oak trees, the main house was situated outside of their drip lines and was designed to follow the contours of the sloping topography, hence the building's "S" shape. This helped minimize grading and the need to cut into root zones. The loca-



Settling into the landscape. Integrating the natural beauty of the site into the living spaces was the highest priority. The main house is oriented to the west, offering views of the hills and a sharp ridge line across the valley. The curvature of the two houses integrates with the ridge, making the structure feel right at home.



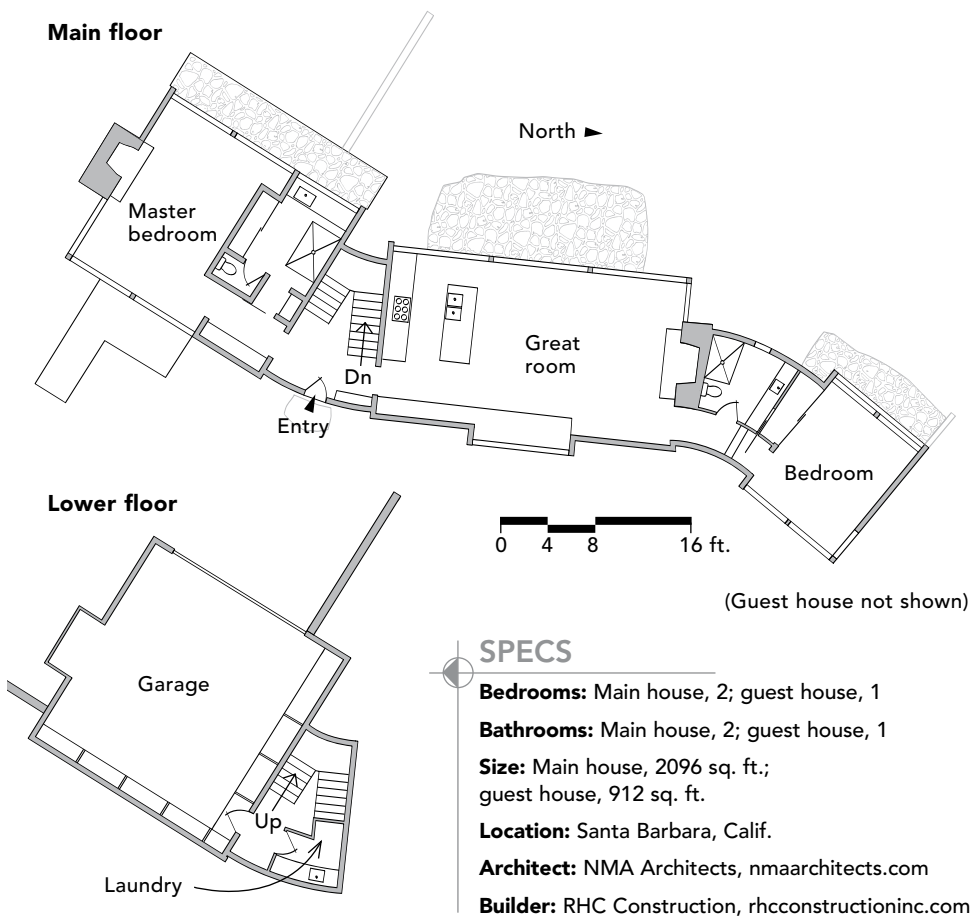
Smoothing the seams. The roof's copper material is low maintenance and its natural patina blends in with the scenery. A sheet-metal company was brought in to handle the seams; the goal was to achieve a soft look that would work with all of the curves. The sandstone-colored plaster emulates the eroded sandstone in the landscape.

tion of the guesthouse was also partly determined by zoning requirements—because of the limitations set by the trees, the structures ended up being closer together than desired.

To address the issue of strong winds, the house was built into the hillside, a design strategy inspired by ancient Mesa Verde cliff dwellings. Construction materials played a large role in the fire-protection plan, which includes a defensible space and fire-retardant landscape.

Researching traditional Andalusian features typical of early Californian homes gave the team a pool of design ideas. They also looked at architect Mickey Muennig's work; his Post Ranch Inn in Big Sur, Calif., informed the curved roofs—arguably the most distinguished feature contributing to the rustic-modern aesthetic. □

Kiley Jacques is design editor. Photos by Ciro Coelho.



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