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## Domesticities| The Immaterial World

By [PILAR VILADAS](#)

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Nikolas Koenig

“What you reveal, and what you don’t, is the key to good architecture,” said the architect Peter Bohlin. He was speaking in particular about a house that his firm, [Bohlin Cywinski Jackson](#), designed for a bucolic five-acre lot in Woodside, Calif. The house’s 10,000-square-foot bulk is broken into what looks like a cluster of mostly low, and low-key, buildings. From the outside, you never see the entire house at

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once, and inside, you discover the ways in which its various pieces subtly intersect, their elegantly detailed, sensual materials making the journey even more rewarding.

But Bohlin was also describing, in part, his design philosophy, which helped earn him the American Institute of Architects' [prestigious Gold Medal](#) for 2010. His company's body of work, which spans 45 years and ranges from small vacation houses to Apple's striking retail stores, is based on the idea that architecture should murmur rather than shout, and that it isn't about style. Instead, it's about responding to a building's context in every sense of the word — a process that is described in the new, aptly titled monograph, "Bohlin Cywinski Jackson: The Nature of Circumstance," published by Rizzoli.

In the case of this house, which Bohlin designed with his associate Denis Schofield, the "circumstance" was the site, with its two creeks and a large meadow ringed with trees. As you move along the road to the house, you pass two small, wood-clad buildings — a guest cottage and an office — that overlook one of the creeks. Their modesty sets a tone for the house to come: located on the edge of the meadow, it looks almost disappointingly humble when you first see it, an angled arrangement of horizontal wood-sided volumes — the kitchen and bedroom wings, respectively — that slide under a deeply overhanging roof. But that's the point. "You can't tell what's a fence and what's a building," Bohlin noted.

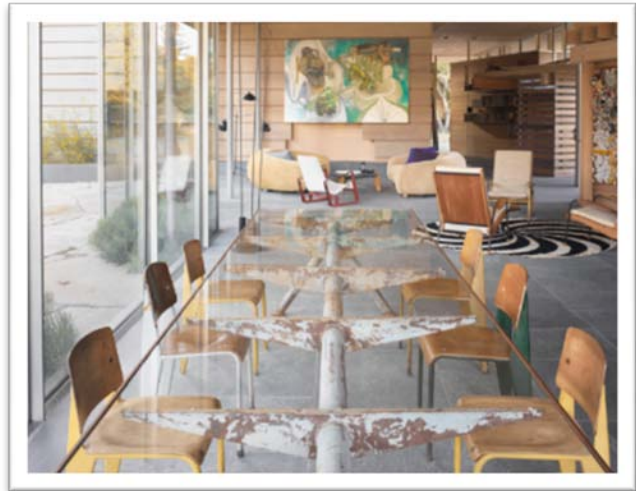
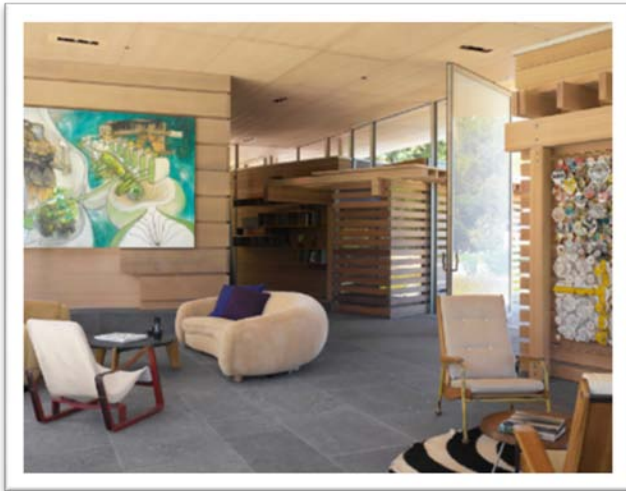
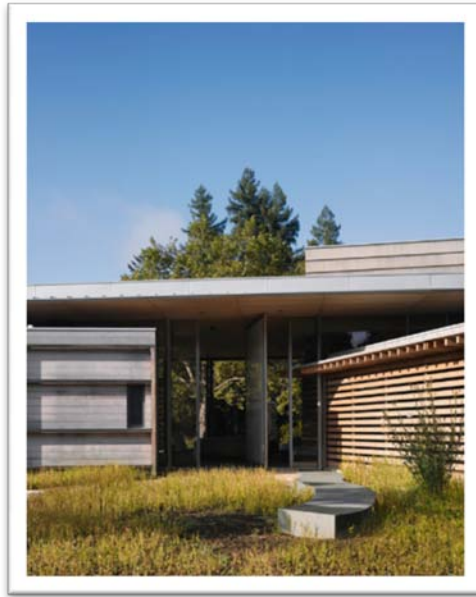
Once you look closely, however, you see that the centerpiece of this arrangement hints at spectacular things. A 13-foot-tall glass door pivots to admit you to a spare, sweeping glass pavilion under the aforementioned roof. The pavilion contains a living-dining area at one end and a music room at the other, and is intersected by a tall, wood-clad box that contains a grand library, as well as by the kitchen and bedroom wings. The pavilion's glass walls and doors, with their barely there detailing, seem to disappear, leaving only the roof (which, despite its 10-foot overhang, seems to float), stone floors, and the owners' impressive collection of furniture by 20<sup>th</sup>-century design masters like Jean Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand and Jean Royère. Much of the furniture is placed at an angle to the room, which looks out over the meadow and trees. "It's a little like pick-up sticks," Bohlin said of this arrangement. "It makes things less insistent and fits better with the natural world, which is more random."

In contrast to the crystalline cool of the pavilion, the inviting kitchen, the soaring library and the rambling, intimate hallway that leads to the bedrooms are studies in warmer materials like cedar and Douglas fir. Bohlin admires materials for their expressive qualities. "When you get close to something and you touch it, it has to tell you something of itself," he explained. On the terraces just outside the house, quartzite paving stones do just that, their surface ripples revealing their Lake Champlain origins. Even the water in the swimming pool has its say. It overflows into a narrow slot between the pool and deck, and you can hear the sound it makes while you swim. "Swimming is not just a physical experience, but an emotional one," Bohlin maintained. "Intellect and rigor are important, but emotion is, too."

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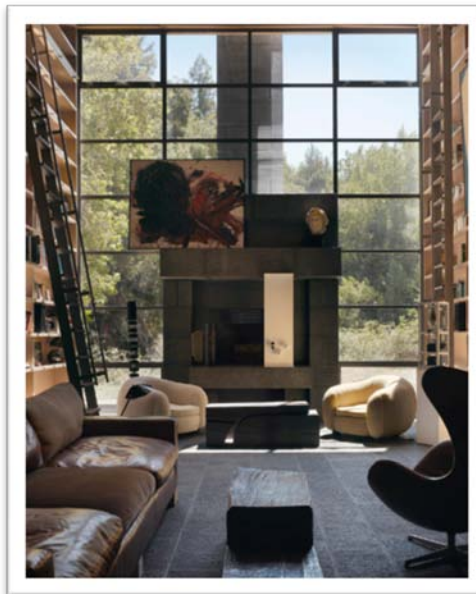
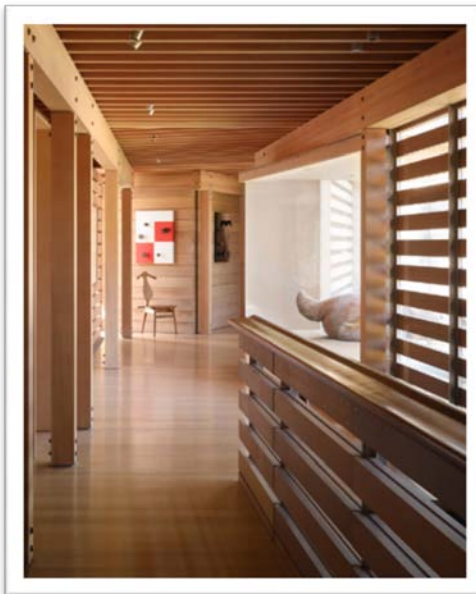
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