



HONORING THE PAST

JUST SOUTH OF SAN FRANCISCO, A MIDCENTURY HOME BY A FAMED ARCHITECT IS REVIVED BY A FEW OF HIS BIGGEST FANS.

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ARCHITECTURE / RICHARD BEARD, RICHARD BEARD ARCHITECTS
INTERIOR DESIGN / PAUL WISEMAN, SADIE DARSIE AND JAMES HUNTER, THE WISEMAN GROUP
HOME BUILDER / LOUIS PTAK, LOUIS PTAK CONSTRUCTION, INC.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / TODD R. COLE AND GERARDO GUARDADO, STRATA LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

When renowned Bay Area architect Joseph Esherick built this modernist home in 1961, its unabashedly modern concrete façade must have surprised the residents of this quiet San Mateo County neighborhood that’s populated with more staid, traditional dwellings. Some 50 years later, when it went up for sale, its muscular architecture and dichotomous interior were still confounding people. “It languished on the market because no one could figure it out,” explains designer Paul Wiseman. “The floor plan made no sense and, although it’s a modern home, it had many traditional overlays inside.”

Luckily, one couple saw potential where others saw problems. They had a vision for what the house could be, and that included honoring the home’s pedigree (Esherick was a cofounder of University of California Berkeley’s College of Environmental Design and is celebrated for his work at Sea Ranch) while bringing it into the present. They assembled a team that included Wiseman, architect Richard Beard, landscape architect Todd R. Cole and general contractor Louis Ptak to make their vision a reality.

Given Esherick’s revered stature in the annals of Bay Area architectural history, the design pros would be forgiven if they suffered a touch of performance anxiety. Wiseman had a bit of an advantage, given that he worked with Esherick on one of the last homes the architect created and calls that experience a “complete delight.” Beard admits that his first visit to the house awed him, but while he approached the project with a great deal of respect, he was also mindful of what his clients desired as well. He calls the remodel around their needs and taste “part of the continuum of the house.”

The home’s main issues included layout and style. Although it was built at a time when open floor plans were beginning to be all the rage, the house was tailored to its original owner, an interior designer from Chicago who favored compartmentalized rooms—including a kitchen that was tucked well away from sight and bedrooms outfitted with their own sitting rooms. The result was a rabbit warren

of interconnected spaces. What’s more, the interior aesthetic married both classic and modern features in a way that’s unique to the early 1960s. “The odd assembly of elements was something of a surprise, although many houses of the midcentury period had this dichotomy,” Beard notes.

The first order of business was to remove some of the seemingly out-of-place features (including dark wood paneling and elaborately detailed French-style fireplace mantels) and to reconfigure the floor plan. The home’s defining element is a large atrium with a dramatic concrete-and-glass ceiling. To make the house “live more contemporarily,” Beard added slot windows to an interior atrium wall and repeated that feature in an adjacent alcove to increase light and views. “I give Richard credit for opening the house up,” says Wiseman who, along with designers James Hunter and Sadie Darsie, divided the atrium into two distinct entertaining areas. At one end is a bench fronted by tea tables that can lift to dining table height. “Just add leaves and it will seat 20 for a banquet,” Wiseman notes.

The rest of the room is given to comfortable seating that moves the design needle decidedly into midcentury territory. “Most period furniture isn’t the right scale for this room,” Wiseman says, explaining why he opted for many custom pieces here. “This project took me into more of a midcentury aesthetic than I’d ever done before—and I liked it.”

The 1960s vibe continues throughout the house with vintage pieces the designer calls “amazing,” including a ’60s Danish armchair and a Fontana Arte lamp scaled perfectly for the wife’s dressing room. There are newer classics too, like a Wendell Castle bench in the entryway. The look is even found in the “new” rooms, such as the open, eat-in kitchen which is sited where the formal dining room used to live. Here, Wiseman installed Heath ceramic tiles for a quiet look he terms “midcentury chic.”

What makes this house doubly special is a garden designed by respected landscape architect Lawrence Halprin (who worked with Esherick often). “He didn’t do many residential gardens, and this is one of his best that’s still relatively intact,” says Cole, who worked with his firm’s project manager Gerardo Guardado and local preservationists on the renovation. The original shallow reflecting pool had been converted to a swimming pool by previous owners and was allowed to remain, but Cole’s team reconfigured the fountains and rills to circulate pool water for better conservation. “Originally this garden was designed more to be seen, so the ability to better use it is a nice update,” he says, noting the addition of a hot tub and more entertaining space.

The result is the clients’ vision fully realized, down to the concept of appreciating the original intent of the home. Wiseman sums it up by saying, “By bringing the house up to date, we’ve made it relevant again.”

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—PAUL WISEMAN

Noted Northern California architect Joseph Esherick created the bold concrete exterior of this home in 1961. Fifty years later, it languished on the market because many didn’t understand its design. Visionary new owners assembled a team made up of architect Richard Beard, designer Paul Wiseman, builder Louis Ptak and landscape architect Todd R. Cole to launch the home into the modern era.





Opposite: In the atrium, the bespoke table that wraps the sofa, a trio of adjustable tables and a number of benches make for a casual, flexible place to eat or relax. A quartet of white architectural ceramics by Erin McGuiness through De Sousa Hughes, a trio of smoked glass hurricanes from March and a painting by Julie Mehretu add artistic notes.

Below: "The new kitchen is a fantastic space, the heart of the house," says Beard. Wiseman selected a row of black, fan-like pendants from Urban Archaeology that hang above an island crafted by P.A. Bet and topped by Calacatta Crema vein-cut marble from Da Vinci Marble. Walnut Seido counter stools by McGuire line one side of the island, while Heath Ceramics tile composes the backsplash.





The family room features a sofa and chairs from Bright, a custom coffee table crafted by Thomas Sellars Furniture and leather ottomans by Hilde-Brand Furniture. Near the doors are a game table from Ironies ringed by Giorgetti chairs. The bookcase picture lights are from Besselink & Jones.

Opposite: The atrium leads out to the pool, which was designed as a reflecting pool but modified to a full-blown swimming pool at a later date. Rose Tarlow Cat's Cradle lounge chairs for Sutherland wear a bright-yellow upholstery. Landscaping by Cole makes use of the home's original planters and enhances its bold architecture.

Below: In the recreation room, four yellow Tufty-Time lounge chairs by B&B Italia surround a custom segmented coffee table with an orange lava-stone top sourced through Sue Fisher King. The area rug is by Stark and the angular sconces are by Phoenix Day.



Opposite: A corner of the study features a midcentury-style chair by Craft Associates Furniture that's upholstered with Mokum fabric. On the custom console is a lamp by Ochre, and above them is a work by Sarah Sze.

The Danish center table is from Antique Avenue and the rug is by Merida.

Below: "The beautiful concrete steps were covered in shag carpeting, and uncovering and restoring them was almost like an archaeological dig," recalls Wiseman. "They are very cool-looking now, and we kept the original handrail."





Above: Wiseman clad the master bathroom with Heath Ceramics tile and stone from Da Vinci Marble. The tub is Blu Bathworks with a Kohler filler.

Left: "The master suite is a beautiful room," says Wiseman. Link fabric lines the niche, inset with Marset reading lights. The lamps are Paul Marra Design and the linens are C&C Milano. Holland & Sherry fabric covers the Hilde-Brand bench. An Ironies table pairs with a Jens Risom chair from Ralph Pucci.