

san francisco

light HOUSE

ARCHITECT ANNE FOUGERON USES PLENTY OF GLASS—AND BOLD COLOR—TO TIE TOGETHER INDOOR AND OUTDOOR SPACES IN THIS AWARD-WINNING COLE VALLEY HOME.

BY LYDIA LEE PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD BARNES



The orange wall draws the eye to the courtyard, making it a focal point from within the house. A tiny stripe of the bright color runs along the steel framing—a subtle decorative detail. Panels of glass, back-painted in pale aqua, cover stuccoed areas, creating the illusion of a wall of windows.

The concrete floor is deep brown, a color that softens the industrial material. A wall of white anigre built-ins was designed by architect Anne Fougerson; she also selected the furnishings from Joe Kish in San Francisco. The green rug looks like an extension of the landscaping visible through the sliding doors.





After 20 years of solo practice, Anne Fougeron has quietly become a force in Bay Area modern architecture, known for the finesse of her streamlined buildings. These days, her projects rack up AIA awards with clockwork regularity. Her latest, a home in Cole Valley, is no exception. The jury at the AIA California Council, which gave it a 2006 Merit Award, singled it out as “a modern interpretation of the traditional San Francisco row house on a sloping site; very elegantly handled.”

The owners of this latest achievement—she’s a painter and he’s a venture capitalist, the parents of two young children—started out with an aging dowager of a house. When they bought the Cole Valley property in 1997, it was the site of a 1911 two-bedroom “typical mishmash of Edwardian and other traditional styles,” as they describe it. But it was located on an exceptionally long lot (185 feet at its farthest corner) that backed up onto a steep slope, creating a large, private backyard. Their plan was to do an extensive remodel by upgrading the rapidly deteriorating structure and replacing the ad-hoc additions. However, they soon learned that it would cost about as much to renovate as it would to start from scratch.

While on a trip to Kyoto, they were struck by the delicate interaction between Japanese architecture and landscaping. “It was very inspirational,” says the wife. “You feel transformed by being in those spaces.” The clients asked Fougeron, a friend of a friend, to help with their own transformation. With plans to start a family, the wife hoped for a

ABOVE: As a tribute to the client’s art, which is inspired by textiles, Fougeron designed a custom staircase, with a railing of plastic strips that are basketwoven through the balusters.

To ensure that natural light streams in from the side of the house, Fougeron set the third floor back three feet from the property line—and gave the resulting balcony a translucent glass floor, so that more light can pass through to the main living space below.



space that would provide some privacy and allow her to continue painting at home. The husband asked for an interior courtyard.

"We definitely wanted something minimal that wasn't too masculine or cold, something that didn't look like a bachelor pad," says the wife. "Like other row houses, ours was typically long and dark in the middle, so natural lighting was another of our obsessions." They liked Fougerson's style of approachable modernism, but were a bit concerned about working with a high-profile designer. "We wondered how much of her attention we'd get on the project," she says. "But we realized right away that Anne can't help herself from being completely involved—she's a perfectionist."

Indeed, Fougerson typically goes several steps beyond the creation of space, giving equal attention to almost every element of the interiors. For this house, she created a built-in media unit with glass doors back-painted in aqua to hide the flat-panel TV, selected furnishings from Scandinavian vintage specialist Joe Kish—and chose a pale lilac shade of paint for the ceilings so they would glow softly in the light.

But the architect's primary objective for this project was to create the effect of translucency through the extensive use of glass. Paneled walls and sliding doors—a few of which are a startling 14 feet long—are fashioned from clear and frosted glass. And back-painted glass is used as a decorative element throughout: Where there are no windows, glass panels are attached to the stuccoed walls with steel clips and aluminum channels, so that "the wall reads as one big window," says Fougerson.

To address the homeowner's desire for the maximum amount of natural light, she had to figure out how to bring it in through the side as well as the front and back of the home. In a perfect example of the creativity that arises from limitations, she set the exterior windows on the third floor back three feet from the property line to comply with California building code—and then gave the resulting balcony a glass floor, allowing more light to reach the level below.

The house is laid out as two separate units with a courtyard in between. At the front of the lot, the studio sits above the garage and is connected, both visually and structurally, to the main house. A ten-foot-square window offers a direct line of sight all the way through to the backyard. The studio's front windows are shielded with cedar slatting—allowing natural light to enter but preventing a sense of "being in a fishbowl," says Fougerson.

Directly behind the studio is a courtyard that draws the eye outside with its giant orange wall. The same color continues throughout the exterior as a tiny orange stripe running along the edges of the home's steel framing.

TOP RIGHT: The art studio's distinctive facade, partially screened by cedar slatting, has a 10-foot-square window that protrudes two feet—a perfectly sized observation deck for the family dog. BELOW RIGHT: The top-floor study overlooks the city beyond a light-filled stairwell.



The “master bedroom” overlooks a surprisingly pastoral backyard. For the moment, it’s the guest quarters while the parents need to be near their young children on the bottom floor. “Someday everyone will grow up, and then we can move upstairs into this bedroom,” says the wife.



“The new environment has an impact on everyone. Even the dog sleeps facing the garden.”



The main house's second floor is dedicated to a great room that combines kitchen, living and dining, with a spacious deck overlooking the courtyard. One flight down are three bedrooms, a half-bath and a full bath. The top floor was reserved for the master suite, with office space tucked between the bedroom and bath. The stairs also lead to a rooftop patio, featuring views of the Golden Gate Bridge. "A lot of houses in San Francisco are insular boxes that relate only to themselves," says Fougeron. "This rooftop patio lets you be involved with the rest of the city and provides yet another outdoor space." The house, in fact, has no fewer than seven outdoor spaces, including the various balconies.

Fougeron's juxtaposition of the indoors and outdoors has in fact transformed the lives of four people—and that of the family dog. Even the children, young as they are, evince appreciation for the work of a perfectionist. The baby swivels his head to look at the interestingly patterned stair railing. And the toddler has settled in happily. "The rental apartment we lived in while this house was being built had a really dark interior, and she constantly asked to go outside—she was always saying 'park,'" says her mother. "When we first moved in, she ran around in circles, she was so happy. You know how natural light affects you as an adult, but it's interesting to see how the new environment has an impact on everyone. Even the dog sleeps facing the garden." ■

ABOVE: Bathers in the master bathroom have a view into the garden courtyard. RIGHT: Architect Anne Fougeron takes a break from the drawing board.



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