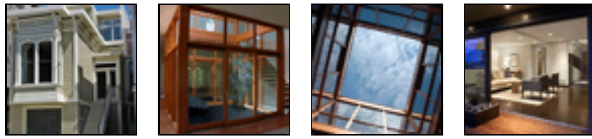


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MODERN DESIGN: The sky's the limit

AIA San Francisco home tours demonstrate how architects are making connections to history, neighborhood and nature Modern design: The sky's the limit I

Susan Fornoff, Chronicle Staff Writer
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It's not so easy picking 10 residential projects that represent the latest and greatest in contemporary San Francisco architecture, says Erin Cullerton, assistant director of the American Institute of Architects' local chapter.

"We've showcased 40 modern homes now in San Francisco, and we're getting nervous about that," Cullerton said. "We had a harder time this year finding what we want."

Well, you'd never know it judging by the roster for this weekend's tour, an annual highlight of Architecture and the City month, Sept. 1-30. And this year, the architects take center stage in every way, playing their own client in a full half of the 10 chosen projects.

What does a floor plan look like when an architect designs it to accommodate his wife and new baby? See Alex Terry's sun-seeking Diamond Street house and Joshua Aidlin's compact Potrero Hill remodel for ideas on where to splurge and where to economize.

What's the best result for the architect who on spec turns a typical San Francisco 1950s box into his dream house, linking to both an intimate garden and expansive downtown views? It might have been the easy sale of Jonathan Feldman's Kronquist residence -- but then there was the phone call from an admiring neighbor wanting to do business.

And which finishes are chosen by the architect who plans to rent out his property? Inexpensive ones for Stanley Saitowitz, whose new apartment building nonetheless beams among its row of neighbors on Natoma Street. Ditto for Nilus de Matran, who chose to put his money into creating the light-filled series of rectangles that define his Pennsylvania Street lofts.

De Matran's two-unit building is one of two older projects featured on this year's tour; another is a virtually budget-free Mariposa Street house that Charlie Barnett created for a grateful client during the dot-com boom. Two other single-family residences link modern architecture to a house's history: John Maniscalco's surprising solution to the deep and narrow property behind a historic Victorian Fell Street facade, and Byron Kuth's respectful updating of a 1961 William Wurster house in Russian Hill.

Add Paulett Taggart's Folsom Apartments -- a trio of townhouses behind the kitchen co-op La Cocina -- and David Baker's 67-unit Curran House in the Tenderloin, then toss in Dwell magazine's premiere "Dwell on Design" weekend expo at the Concourse Exhibition Concourse, free to all tour ticket holders.

It's a whirlwind. Here's a preview of the 2006 tour projects:

Saturday

Mariposa Street residence Charlie Barnett Associates,

www.charliebarnettassoc.com,

(415) 824-0478

When Barnett turned a 1923 stucco cottage into his client's dream home seven years ago, he opened the rear to a big garden and city views, even installing a floating stair of oak slabs for maximum see-through factor.

But there are two features here with major wow factor. First, a two-story bookcase of aluminum rods and ash shelves extends a slot skylight from roof through the second floor down to the entry. "It really made the project," Barnett said. And, in the master bath, a shower reaches just as high to another skylight; it's tiled 20 feet up in tiny, gray glass squares that give off an all-day show of light and shadow.

Potrero Hill residence

Aidlin Darling Design,

www.aidlin-darling-design.com, (415) 974-5603

"An interesting experiment in designing a small home for a family" is how Aidlin describes gutting a 1950s stucco box and installing a see-through layout that connects sweeping views in the living room/kitchen on through the master bedroom to a hillside garden in back.

With only 1,000 square feet of living space on the main floor -- and wife Jen's painting studio downstairs -- there are lots of lessons here in space economy. Unique features include a secret nook in the baby's room, a redwood slat deck over the shower drain and a light well that creates a surprise view from back of the kitchen.

1008-1010 Pennsylvania

Nilus Designs, www.nilusdesigns.com, (415) 826-3434

Developer-architect de Matran designed this pair of live-work units overlooking Interstate 280 downtown in 2002, when "live-work" equaled "loft." "But I don't think lofts really work as live-work, because they're too exposed architecturally," he said. "The idea here is to have lives separated from work."

So he connected a rear studio with its own entrance to the lower unit; the soaring three-level upper unit has its work space at the entry. "It's a bunch of volumes -- glass, wood, cubes -- that crash into each other," de Matran said of the intricate array of rectangles, positioned for passive solar heat so that the light from the south can creep through glass or plastic panels.

Folsom Street townhouses Paulett Taggart Architects,

www.ptarc.com, (415) 956-1116

As in many residential projects, this was all about the kitchen, though in this case the kitchen meant a commercial, cooperative small-business venture that faced the street. "Once we developed that part, we looked at the neighborhood to see how we should develop the rest of the property," Taggart said.

The answer: three rental townhouses of about 1,100 square feet each with varied roof lines set along a mid-block courtyard behind the kitchen. Taggart's design admits plenty of light from both north and west -- and keeps all the sounds and smells of cooking in the kitchen.

Kronquist residence

Feldman Architecture,

www.feldmanarchitecture.com, (415) 252-1441

"There are thousands of these San Francisco boxes from the early '50s, with vinyl siding, the living space all on the second floor," Feldman said. Most of their owners couldn't possibly imagine a transformation like this one -- from two bedrooms and a bathroom to three bedrooms, three bathrooms and a downstairs family room, all within the original shell.

"It's efficient, not big," Feldman said of the 2,040-square-foot residence made for family living, a project he bought, remodeled his way and then sold to an appreciative couple. Expansive glass in the family room and great room makes connections that turn a former box into a bridge to the garden and city -- all at under \$200 a square foot.

Sunday

Natoma Street apartments Stanley Saitowitz/Natoma

Architects Inc., www.saitowitz.com, (415) 626-8977

Discovering how the architect created privacy and admitted light -- aluminum bar grating on the exterior, light wells on the interior -- into four unique units at under \$200 a square foot is half the fun of touring Saitowitz's new apartment building. Melamine cabinetry never looked so chic.

The other half is seeing the way he aligned all of the "programmed elements" (kitchen, closets, bathrooms) along one wall to maximize the free space in the heart of the units. For instance, steel and glass sliding doors conceal three separate compartments of: shower and sink here, toilet and sink there, and tub in between.

"I'm getting older and impatient with details," Saitowitz said. "My interest is in making things simpler."

Diamond Street residence Terry & Terry Architecture, www.terryandterryarchitecture.com, (510) 525-0504

Alex Terry remodeled his hillside house for family living when new baby Sophia showed up last year -- but the ubiquitous great room is nowhere to be found.

Instead, Terry made sure the kitchen was big enough for dining and lingering, then connected a cozy, modern version of the formal parlor of old. "Sometimes you just want to escape the kitchen area," he said. "We like to hang out in there."

They also like the outdoors, so there's a patio in back and, one of the tour highlights, a rooftop living room that looks up at Twin Peaks.

Cube House residence

John Maniscalco Architecture, www.mearchitecture.com,

(415) 664-9900

The prospect of updating a dilapidated, deep, dark, one-level 1895 Victorian full of tiny rooms intrigued Maniscalco, who devoted 12 precious square feet to a two-story glass center court opening to the sky.

"It's an exceptional client who will give up space in the center," Maniscalco said. "But this was a way of bringing light and air into the house without giving up the envelope."

Maniscalco also gave the family in residence a kitchen big enough to hold a dining table, and a new level of bedrooms upstairs. His nod to the house's heritage: a modern, paneled library that replaces the old front parlor.

Wurster renovation residence Kuth/Ranieri Architects/William Wurster,

www.kuthranieri.com, (415) 544-9880

While other architects were connecting to the city and outdoors, Kuth tried to do that and more, connecting to Wurster's original 1961 design of a four-level Russian Hill house in a way that was both respectful of the architect and practical for a work-at-home couple. "Wurster introduced a courtyard into this building, which makes it very unique for San Francisco," Kuth said. "It's so clever the way he did it."

Kuth opened the living space, added a guest wing under the garage and expanded the connection to the Alcatraz-facing courtyard and surrounding neighborhood to "bring some contemporary touches to the Wurster." And to painted roughsawn wood siding interior walls he added anigre wood floors throughout.

Curran House residences

David Baker + Partners, www.dbarchitect.com, (415) 896-6700

Light and air characterize the living units, which are mostly of two and three bedrooms. Green colors the urban exterior, with a decompression garden inside the entry and community gardens on the roof.

All this, in a building for the poor, developed by the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp. and the Mayor's Office of Housing.

Baker is the only architect with a project on both the 2005 and 2006 tours, and he continues to fill a need for affordable housing with this 67-unit Tenderloin complex for very-low-income families.

See for yourself

Homes are open either Saturday or Sunday, with self-guided tours from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Headquarters is at the Dwell on Design Conference and Exhibition, which showcases modern prefab design and many vendors at the Concourse Exhibition Center. Advance tickets \$50 for one day, \$90 for two; \$65 on the event day. www.aia.org/hometours; (415) 362-7397.

The Architects Forum on Thursday night features the participating architects discussing the parameters of their projects and is free to tour ticket holders, \$20 to others. 5:30-7:30 p.m. At the AIA San Francisco's new offices, 130 Sutter St., Suite 600.

The "San Francisco Living 2006 Exhibition" offers a look at all of the tour homes via photos and words. Friday-Sunday at the Dwell on Design Conference and Exhibition at the Concourse Exhibition Center.

For more information about these and other events in conjunction with Architecture and the City month, visit www.aiaf.org.

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