AFFORDABLE
Architecture

GREAT HOUSES ON A BUDGET

Stephen Crafti
Open box house

FELDMAN ARCHITECTURE

Green elements
The old house was rehabilitated, saving it from being demolished.

Exceeds California Energy Requirements for envelope by 20 percent

Abundant daylighting

Low-E glass windows

Concrete front and rear yards were replaced with permeable 'softscape' and drought-tolerant plantings

Energy-star appliances

Low-flow plumbing fixtures

Insider’s tip

Figure out the details before you start construction. Changes can quickly escalate and blow your budget and indecision can slow down the construction schedule, which also adds cost.

This house in San Francisco is on the edge of a cliff with exceptional views of the city below. ‘We wanted to take advantage of these views’, says architect Jonathan Feldman, who worked with project architect Tom McElroy. Designed for Feldman and his family, the house has been completely transformed.

The original house featured small windows that ignored the view. ‘The original house was fairly small and ugly. The backyard was little more than a slab of concrete with gravel strewn in places. There was no access from the house to the yard, except a service door from the garage’, says Feldman, who removed the concrete and added a timber deck with planters.

As the renovation was on a budget, some of the exterior timber was patched and repainted. In other areas stucco was used to conceal new work. ‘The desire was to create a tactile and contemporary home that lent itself to indoor-outdoor living. We also wanted a place to test out new ideas and materials’, says Feldman, who was keen to use the renovation as a ‘billboard’ to show potential clients.

Feldman used industrial windows to open up views and capture the natural light. Relatively inexpensive to install, these windows added an industrial aesthetic to the design. The architects kept the original home’s footprint, which saved a considerable amount of money. ‘We completed this project in a relatively short period of time. With the high cost of real estate in San Francisco, this cut down significantly on costs involved in sitting on an empty house waiting for permits and construction’, says Feldman.
What was once a cramped home is now a spacious family abode. The ground floor features a large family room with sliding doors to a terrace. There’s also a bedroom and bathroom, which can be used by guests. Upstairs are the open-plan kitchen, dining and living areas together with two bedrooms, including the main bedroom and ensuite bathroom.

‘We originally hoped to add a third floor to this house. But that would have required more expensive structural upgrades and increased the construction costs by a considerable amount. It would have also lengthened significantly the timeframe for obtaining permits’, says Feldman.

One of the largest expenses in the renovation was the removal of the interior walls, particularly those between the kitchen and living areas, to create fluid spaces. ‘We replaced the main interior structural wall (which divided the house in half) with an exposed steel beam’, says Feldman. ‘This greatly freed up the floor plan’, he adds.
Project notes

Location
San Francisco, California, USA

Brief
The owners wanted a larger home that would take advantage of the views over the city with improved access to the garden.

Constraints and concessions
The architects wanted to use walnut timber on the floors, but walnut wasn’t available at the time and the owners couldn’t afford to wait so they settled for a lighter wood with a darker stain.

Timeframe
The project took just under a year to complete, including obtaining permits.
Green elements
Photovoltaic panels on the roof
Hydronic in-floor heating
Use of energy-efficient appliances
Highly efficient lighting
Drought-tolerant plants
Abundant day lighting

Open box 2
FELDMAN ARCHITECTURE

Originally built in the 1940s, this house in San Francisco had little connection to its site. An “opening up” strategy was implemented. We focused on the general expansion of space and vertical integration’, says architect Jonathan Feldman, who renovated the house with project manager Tristan Warren.

Located above the neighbourhood of Noe Valley, there is a dramatic rocky outcrop behind the house. This outcrop creates a moody outlook, but it also shades the rear garden. 'There’s a great view from the roof, so we added a roof deck', says Feldman. 'We also had to carve away part of the site to bring in additional light', he adds.

To keep within budget, the exterior materials were thoughtfully considered. Smooth stucco was applied over the original rough textured stucco, and timber was used in parts to create depth to the façade. Brushed aluminium sheet metal was used sparingly at bay windows and corners to give the façade a sharper edge.

The design had to be flexible. 'Our clients (developers) wanted to be able to sell if they needed to. They wanted flexible plans that would appeal equally to a family or a couple without children', says Feldman. 'They used words like warm, contemporary, Japanese and natural', adds Feldman.
Many of the interior walls were removed to create large open-plan spaces. These rooms are still modest in size, but removing key walls, such as those between the kitchen and living areas, provided more fluid spaces, says Feldman. "The terrace garden also increases the sense of space, particularly in warmer weather when the doors are left open," he says.

The ground floor features a spacious informal living area leading to a large terrace, a bedroom and a bathroom. On the first floor are the kitchen and living areas, together with two bedrooms, including the main bedroom. "We kept the original house's footprint, which meant significant savings. We didn't need to create new foundations. We also selected a builder who had a reputation of delivering contemporary homes on a tight budget and was willing to take on ambitious details," says Feldman.
Project notes

Location
San Francisco, California, USA

Brief
To convert a tired 1940s house into a contemporary and light-filled home, giving the house a new identity in keeping with its simple modernist origins.

Constraints and concessions
A roof garden and water feature in the back garden were planned originally, but these features would have blown the budget. The architect used Italian cabinets that had a long lead-time and planned originally to mix dark and light timbers in different rooms. When the cabinets finally arrived, a few of the pieces were made from the wrong material and all were dark timber, so it was decided to vary some of the tile and paint choices instead.

Timeframe
Eighteen months from design concept to completion.