Custom Home
The art and craft of home design
THE INDOOR-OUTDOOR ISSUE
The landscape often is an afterthought, fleshed out with leftover funds. But when land and house have equal billing, budget decisions can shift in ways that result in something far more satisfying. This Menlo Park, Calif., home’s sunlit interiors live larger because they’re planned and detailed around the outdoors. “The clients had very strong sustainability objectives, including a smaller building footprint,” says Jonathan Feldman, principal of Feldman Architecture. “They wanted to spend what little resources they had on making small, nice spaces and lots of outdoor connections.” The house consists of two stacked perpendicular rectangles, an arrangement that opens both volumes to more light than the typical box. Feldman’s design process illustrates how to achieve the alfresco fluidity that clients covet in almost any climate.

**Liminal Spaces**

Feldman creates seamless transitions by thinking about the site and floor plan at the same time. Siting is key: The house hugs the front and side of the narrow, deep lot, which allows for contiguous outdoor spaces along the side and rear yards. The open first floor is for living, dining, and cooking, with bedrooms slung along the cross-axis above. Beneath the upper-level cantilever is a glassy family room that opens to the front and back yards.

“The family room is clearly inside, but it feels like a garden room,” he says. “We are really just designing rooms. Some have only a roof or a floor, and others are enclosed and heated.” Continuous decking outside the first floor living spaces provides a patio on the south and a slender porch on the east, a place to sit under the deep roof overhang and interact with the yard.
GLAZED OVER
Feldman spends a lot of time choosing the right glass doors. “Are they trying to separate or connect, compress or expand space?” he asks. While he usually specifies either accordion doors or lift-slide doors, both are used here. In the family room, a glass wall folds completely out of the way and often is left open. However, the living bar’s long east side is fitted with lift-slide doors that don’t obstruct the view when they’re closed. “You have a visual outdoor connection, without the divisions of a folding wall and the cumbersomeness of parking all those panels to the side,” Feldman says. “Sliding doors are more practical for a family that goes in and out a lot.”

AGRICULTURED
The clients were content with using simple interior finishes throughout the home so they could splurge on the glass walls and a green roof outside the master suite, which is also visible from the stairwell. The roof’s wood framing incorporates a single piece of steel to support the additional weight, which helped minimize the cost and eliminated the need for headers over the windows. The choice of a lightweight engineered growing medium helped control the expense of beefing up the roof structure. At just 15 pounds per square foot, the garden’s saturated weight is extremely light. Rather than constructing a traditional shallow curb that “would have chunked up our fascia dimension,” explains project manager Tai Ikekami, the team devised a perforated metal strip to hold the soil in place, surrounding it with fist-sized river rock, so the garden looks like a carpet sitting on the rooftop.

“The master suite would not have had this richness without the green roof,” Feldman says. “It was refreshing not to have a client that said, ‘Oh, but now I need $30,000 worth of appliances.’ They showed restraint everywhere else, resulting in great spaces with great light.”


Open House Some of the louvers slide over the windows for sun control and privacy. The family room’s accordion doors fold away to make an open-air pavilion. “Doors are at the heart of designing indoor-outdoor spaces, and there are so many different solutions that figuring out which is best for all needs is one of the more challenging decisions,” Feldman says.
Inside Out: East-facing lift-slide doors bring the outdoors in, and vice versa. The two-sided stock fireplace from Heat & Glo was given a custom surround. In plan, the upper cross-axis houses the bedrooms and a pop-up loft accessed by a rock climbing wall.