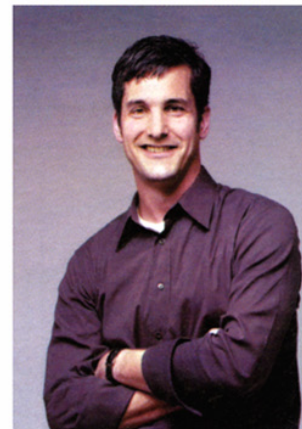


GARAGE STARTUP

Douglas Burnham's renegade design in Silicon Valley



Jeff Kraft, a developer and contractor, met architect Douglas Burnham on a job and admired his ability to work under pressure. Six years later, when it came time to build his house in Los Altos, Kraft called Burnham.

At Interim Office of Architecture, where he used to work before starting his own firm, Burnham had learned a trick or two. Instead of copious renderings, he delivered three little models that Kraft and his wife could examine in the palm of their hands. They picked one right away. "It was a nice way to look at the building, especially for my wife," says Kraft.

The two-story design they picked is essentially two conjoined slim rectangular structures that step down toward a swimming pool in the backyard. A separate single-story garage and pool house flank the H-shaped structure.

Loftlike, with a high-ceilinged living room and kitchen with concrete floors, the main house is nothing like its homogenous, peak-roofed suburban neighbors.

The first time Burnham visited the site, he noticed a view of the Santa Cruz mountains through the back fence. "It was breathtaking. I crouched down and walked the site and went to the top of the house, and figured quickly that the house could claim the view." Adjacent houses could be screened off to further the illusion of a vast, unspoiled terrain.

"If we dug the house into the ground to some extent and planted a green hedge wall in back, I knew we could merge with the distant view," says Burnham.

Once the form of the new structure was determined, the existing 1960s ranch house was razed and they raced against changing zoning laws to replace it with the new design. "We skipped drawing everything because Douglas and I were able to work on details on site," says Kraft. While this strategy sped things up, it did not necessarily save money, even though Kraft was his own contractor.

The kitchen, a focal point of their loftlike home, became one of the more expensive features, with a suspended aluminum frame for cabinets. "When you expose kitchens like that, it always costs more for the venting systems," says Kraft, who usually builds Craftsman-style structures for sale. Wood paneling inside and out may also have contributed greatly to the \$1.5 million price—double what they had hoped for—but it helped Kraft's wife to warm to the design's industrial palette. Garage doors installed on the west wall transform the room to outdoor space with the push of a button, but the uncommonly large doors were pricey. In the master bedroom upstairs, the roof is engineered to hover over a ribbon of costly operable windows that allow the owners to "live" in the view.

But this marriage of indoors and outdoors was well worth it. In the summer, "They roll open those doors and it cools down the house and catches the evening breeze," says Burnham. An outdoor fireplace also helps to warm the area around the heated pool which sees daily use even in the winter.

Since this is Burnham's biggest project to date, he experimented with refined details to make the large stucco and glass buildings more hospitable.



"We used exterior stucco in the interior so that there is no visual distinction between inside and out. We also needed stucco's thermal mass to keep the house cool in the day," says Burnham. The ceilings were one area that could be customized to suit his client's taste for wood.

"Our solution now seems surreal," says Burnham. "We used Makore floor boards on the ceiling in such a way that it seem like there is a floor on the ceiling."

The front stairs are also clad in the same Indonesian hardwood. "You spiral counterclockwise around this central wood box," says Burnham. In this tailored vestibule, you brush against what looks like traditional design until you come to a landing where

Top right: Architect Douglas Burnham. Above: A view of the lower living room structure; glass walled bridge connects the front and rear sections of the house. Facing page: The living room and open plan kitchen with an elevated island counter become seamless with the pool area when the garage doors open; low maintenance concrete floors inside and out. A tall hedge by Blasen Landscape screens off neighboring houses. B&B Italia sofa from Limn; Bertioa barstools and Brno dining chairs, Knoll; poolside furniture from Design Within Reach.





This page: The master bedroom's ceiling appears to float over clerestory windows. The tiled bathroom is only partially screened off. An obscured glass door leads to a deck with an outdoor shower. Next is a Cassin Study bed from DWR, vintage Coconut chairs designed by George Nelson for Vitra. Right, top: The wood-lined front stairway doubles as a vestibule, with an inset coat closet. Ceiling is covered with Makore wood floorboards. Right, bottom: The view of the Kraft house that shows the two interconnected volumes, with master bedroom above and living room below.



Burnham has quirkily inset a coat closet. "We were able to arrive at unusual compositions because Angela was worried that the building seemed too cold," says Burnham. That's also why the original loftlike master bedroom design is now broken into zones. The bathroom has no doors, but is defined by glass tiles, and the rest of the room is for sleeping.

The idea of framing and controlling views was the subject of Burnham's thesis in architecture school. "It is how landscape can give meaning to buildings," he says. In other words, if the interior of this house was not framing a long view of the Santa Cruz mountains, it just wouldn't feel the same.

"I could not have accomplished this design elsewhere," says Burnham.

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