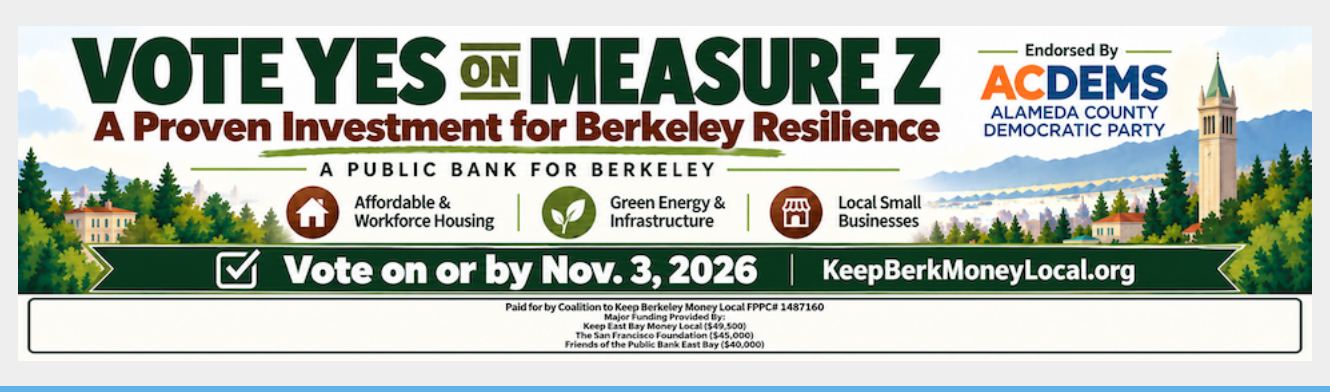
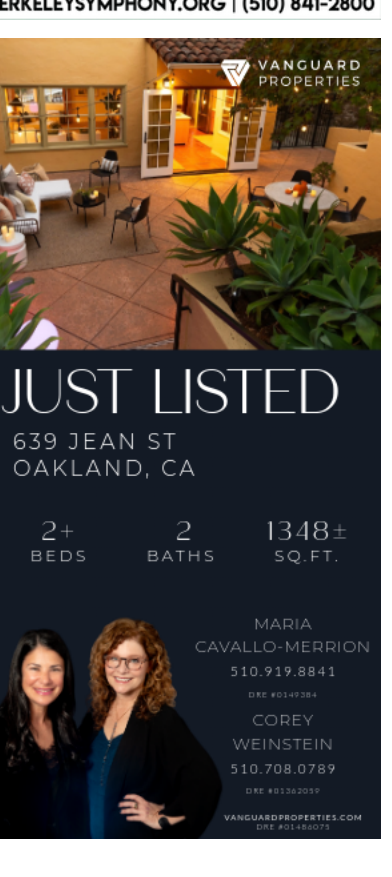






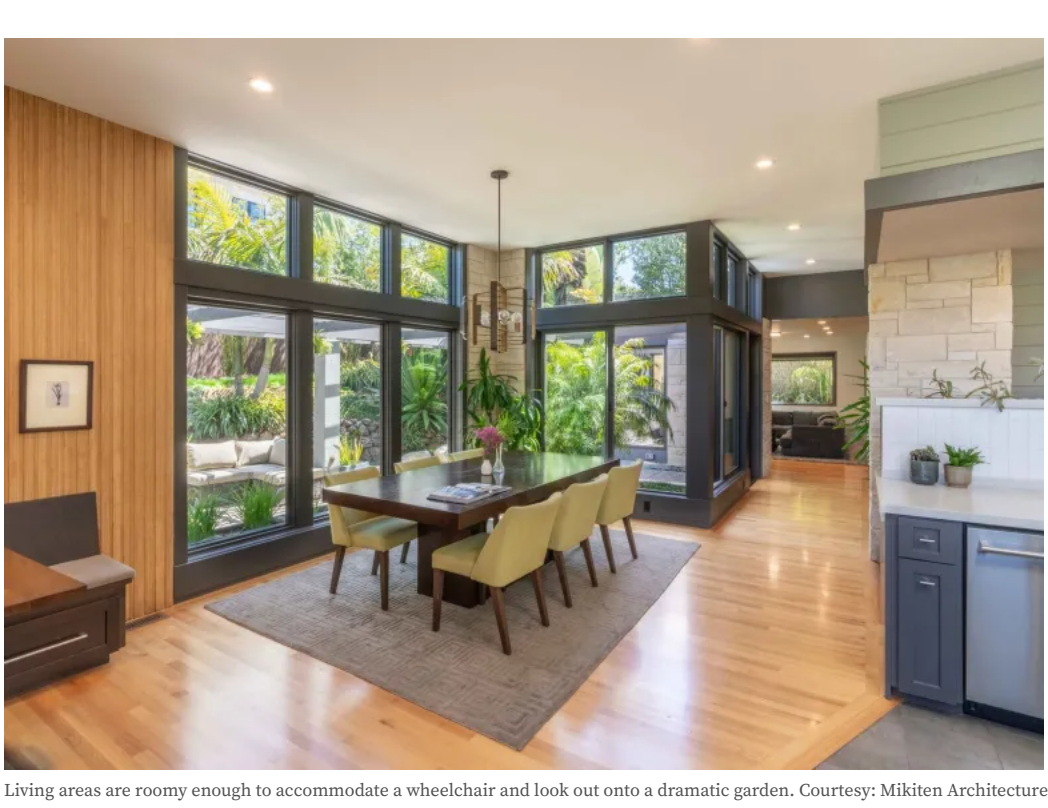
HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

East Bay home tours feature architects from Berkeley and Oakland

From a twice-remodeled house in the Berkeley Hills to a new Albany home designed to accommodate the needs of a disabled daughter, the five homes on the American Institute of Architects' annual tour will open their doors to the public on Saturday.

By Joanne Furio
May 1, 2024, 2:35 p.m.

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Living areas are roomy enough to accommodate a wheelchair and look out onto a dramatic garden. Courtesy: Mikiten Architecture

The houses on this year's home tours sponsored by the American Institute of Architect's East Bay chapter have one thing in common: home offices. Some of the homes even have two.

"Five or six years ago, nobody cared about the home office in the same way," said Mike Wilson, the chapter's executive director for the past four years. The pandemic changed that, as home-based workers turned an empty nook, an extra bedroom or a guest room into a full-time home office.

"That's our new normal," Wilson said. "Everybody's working from home a couple of days a week."

That's just one of the characteristics shared by the five homes on this year's tour, which will take place on Saturday, May 4, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Out of more than a dozen submissions, five houses made the cut because they fit this year's theme, "Lifestyle-Centric Living: Designing Homes to Suit Unique Needs," and had enough street parking for visitors.

Four out of the five houses are what Wilson called "radical remodels" that practically rebuilt the entire home. Three houses are in the hills — in Berkeley and Oakland — and were redesigned to make the most of their views.

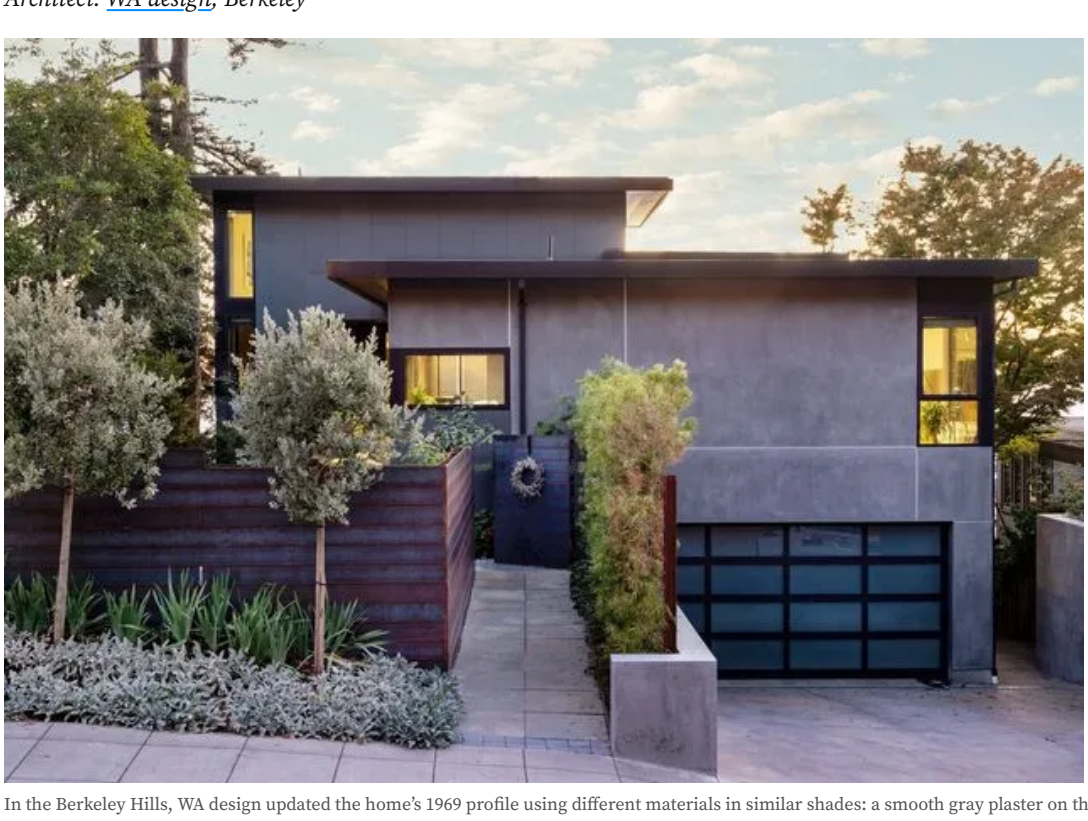
What distinguishes East Bay's tour from other architectural tours is that both the architects and the homeowners will be on hand, so visitors can have their questions answered or inquire about particular approaches or the use of materials.

Tickets for the tour are $125 ($85 for AIA East Bay members; $25 for students) and can be purchased online in advance or on the day of the tour at any of the homes on the tour.

Here are highlights from this year's offerings:

Berkeley

Architect: WA design, Berkeley

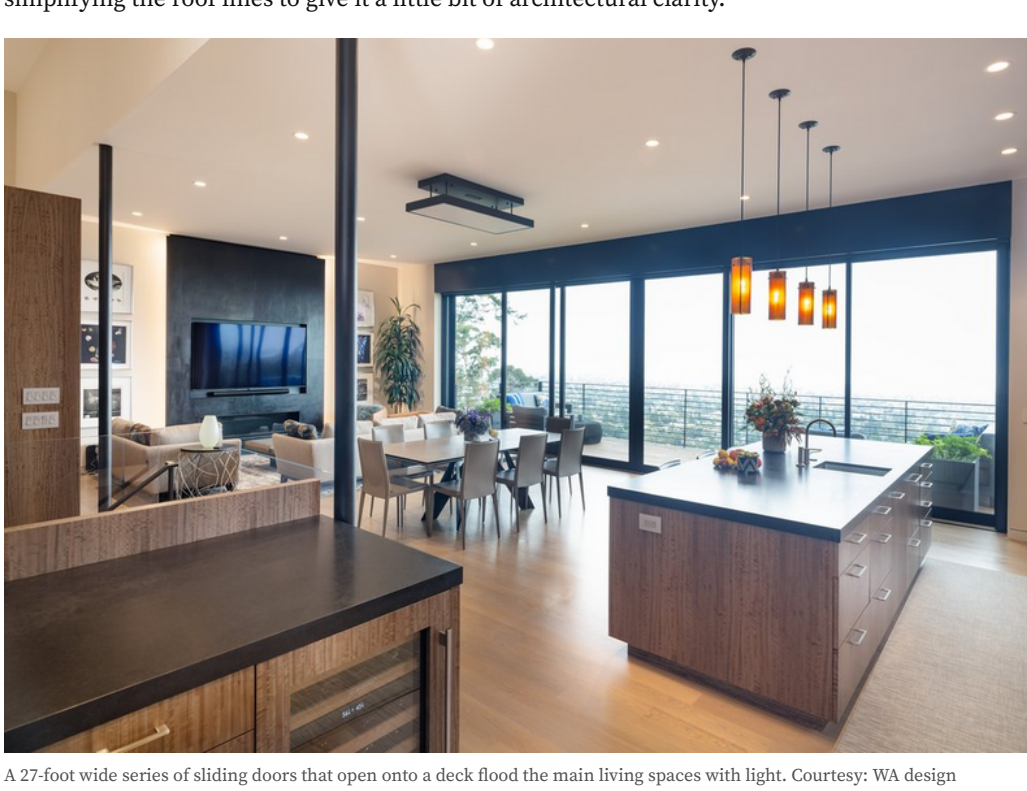


In the Berkeley Hills, WA design updated the home's 1969 profile using different materials in similar shades: a smooth gray plaster on the main and garage sections and a blue cement board on the entry tower. Courtesy: WA design

When it was built in 1937, this was one of the first homes in the then sparsely populated hills above the Claremont Hotel and was rumored to have incredibly expansive views of the San Francisco Bay.

A 1969 renovation made the building's street view more modern, but also created "a jumble of rooflines and walls," said architect David S. Wilson, principal of WA Design.

"We came in and really contemporized it," he said, "opening the plan up entirely on the main floor and simplifying the roof lines to give it a little bit of architectural clarity."



A 27-foot wide series of sliding doors that open onto a deck flood the main living spaces with light. Courtesy: WA design

A 27-foot-wide series of sliding doors that open onto a wooden deck now afford expansive views. Natural light floods the entire space and filters down into the lower floor via a stairway with a glass railing.

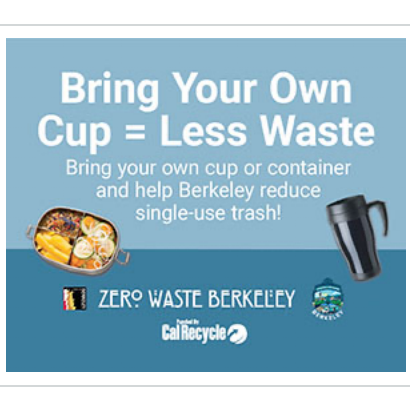
Albany

Architect: Mikiten Architecture, Berkeley



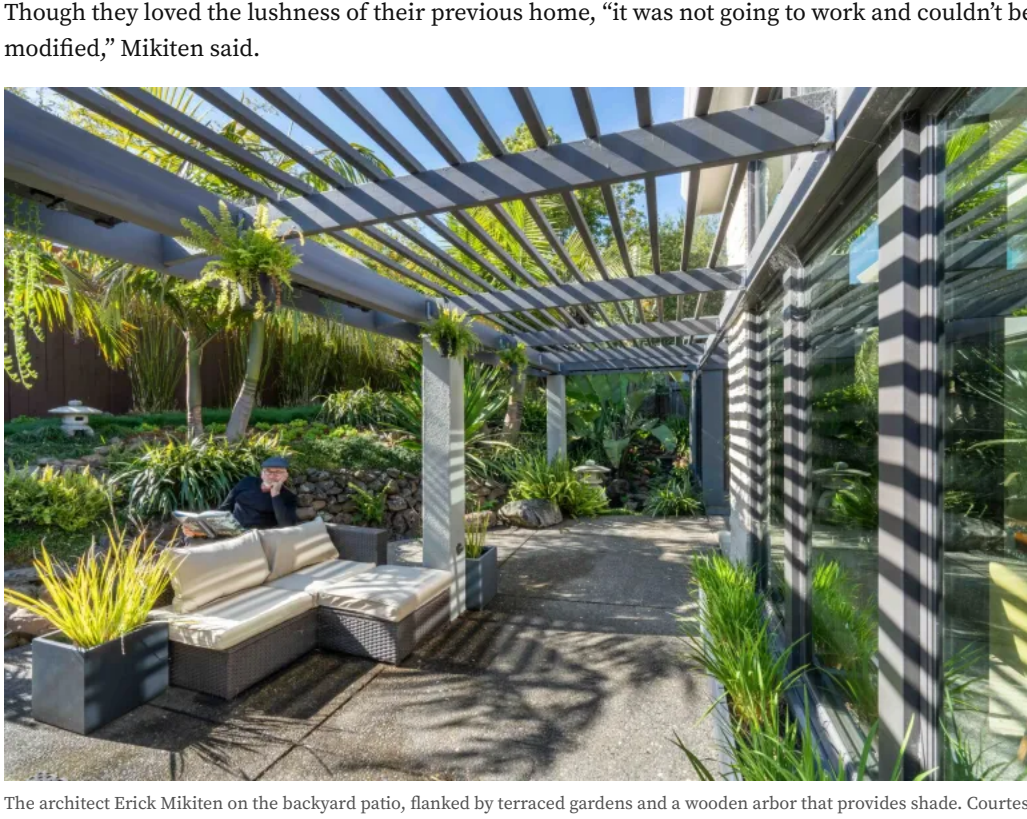
Mikiten Architecture got a variance to allow this triangular-shaped property to deviate from the 15-foot front setback at this Albany home. Courtesy: Mikiten Architecture

Architect Erick Mikiten has traveled the world, advising his peers on making work and living spaces more accessible to all, a concept known as universal design. Mikiten, who uses a wheelchair due to osteogenesis imperfecta, known as brittle bone disease, understands the needs of those who often can't access certain spaces due to their design.



"If you don't have the ability to get out to enjoy the yard without needing assistance, you end up being excluded," he said.

Mikiten is the architect of a new home in Albany built for a family of four who had to abandon their Berkeley Hills home after their daughter was diagnosed at age 5 with a degenerative brain disease. Though they loved the lushness of their previous home, "it was not going to work and couldn't be modified," Mikiten said.



The architect Erick Mikiten on the backyard patio, flanked by terraced gardens and a wooden arbor that provides shade. Courtesy: Mikiten Architecture

The new home reflects the hallmarks of universal design: no thresholds between rooms and an openness of spaces to accommodate wheelchairs; and flexible spaces that can be adapted as needs change or homeowners wish to age in place. The family now uses three bedrooms on the main floor, but an upstairs room accessible by stairs could become a bedroom for a caregiver in the future.

"This is the house of their dreams," Mikiten said. "They're going to stay here for a long time."

To recreate a lush landscape for the family, Mikiten turned a steep hill behind the house into a bucolic backdrop for a Zen-like garden. The common spaces are arranged around an atrium courtyard that opens up to the garden.

"Even if you don't get outside, you feel very strongly connected to the landscape," Mikiten said.



Albany

Architect: Eisenmann Architecture, Berkeley



Architect Stacy Eisenmann expanded this classic California bungalow in Albany with elements that make the home more contemporary. Courtesy: Eisenmann Architecture

The classic California bungalow often proves too small for the needs of 21st-century families. Many have been expanded, usually by adding another flat-roofed, stucco story to the original home.

This expansion by architect Stacy Eisenmann deviates from the norm. She designed the second-story addition with two peaked roof sections, one of which boasts dark wood siding, contrasting with the white stucco. Another noticeable change from the curb was her choice of a metal roof over the entrance instead of the traditional terracotta, adding a more contemporary look.



A detail of the metal stairway that leads to the new second floor. Courtesy: Eisenmann Architecture

A large portion of the existing house was gutted and reorganized. Most significantly, the main floor layout was completely rearranged. Breaking from the bungalow's traditional layout, Eisenmann placed the kitchen between the living and dining areas, which "creates a compression that naturally organizes the different spaces," Eisenmann wrote in a project description. A lower level was also created, creating additional public spaces.

Oakland

Architect: Ogle Design & Architecture, Berkeley



The exterior of this Montclair home renovated by Ogle Design & Architecture was updated with a seam metal roof and re-stuccoed. Credit: Patrik Argast

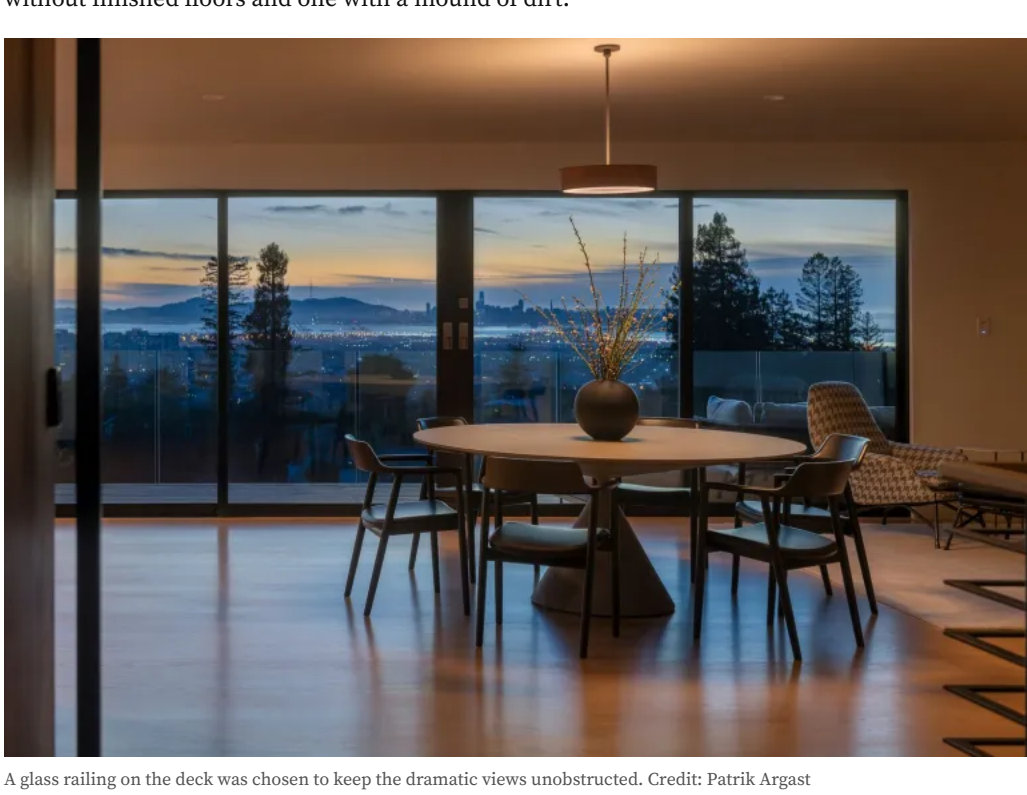
"Most people buy houses because they are dying to live in them," Karen Hartwig said in an interview about her Montclair home remodel. "I was dying to tear it apart and bring our dream house to reality."



Hartwig, an Oakland-based general contractor, purchased the mid-century home with her partner in 2019. The previous owners had lived in the house for 60 years.

"The goal of the remodel was to expand the size of the house, create a more harmonious flow, and feature the pretty incredible views — one of the best I've seen," said architect William Ogle, the principal of the firm.

The project's crowning achievement was to almost double the size of the house (to around 4,000 square feet) without increasing its footprint. That was achieved by carving out spaces downstairs that Hartwig called "pretty useless:" a long narrow room from one end of the house to the other that included an area without finished floors and one with a mound of dirt.



A glass railing on the deck was chosen to keep the dramatic views unobstructed. Credit: Patrik Argast

Additional square footage was also gained after the chimney for the fireplace was removed from the lower level, requiring a massive beam to hold up the rest of the fireplace, which remains in the living room above. When combined, the freed-up space created a media room, a gaming room, two home offices, a guest room and a bar.

Oakland

Architect: Design Draw Build, Oakland

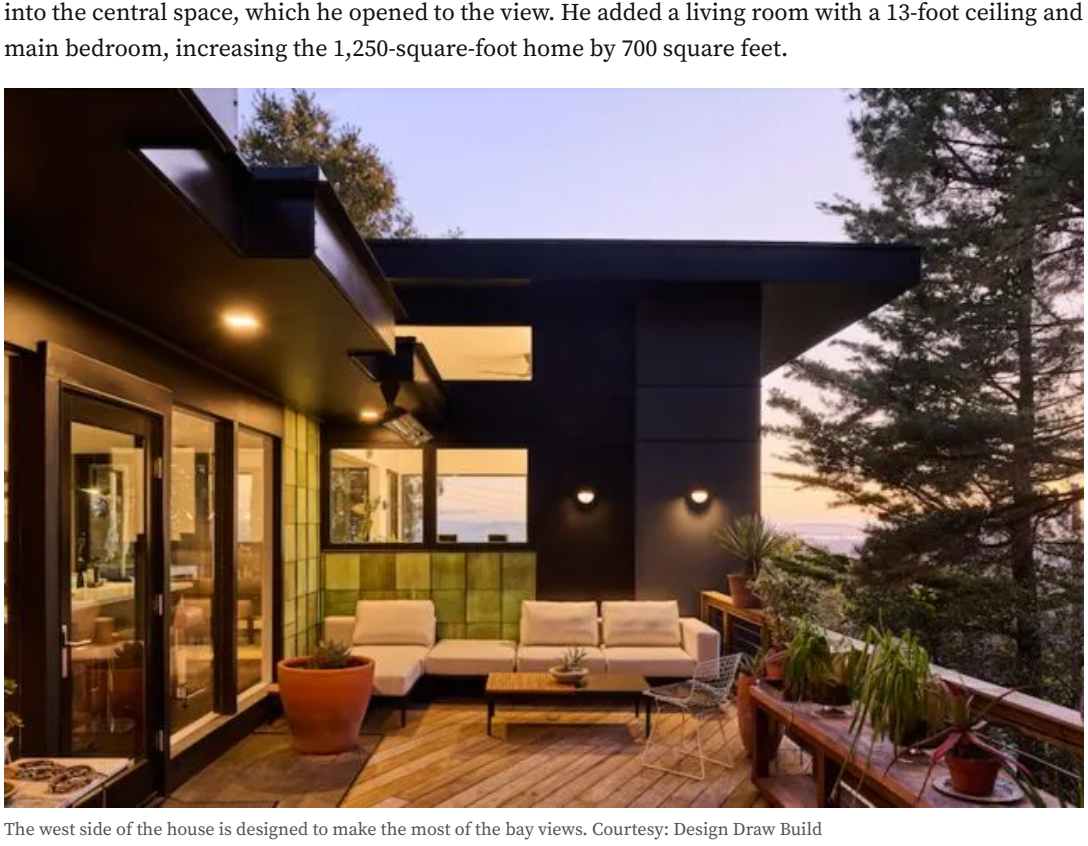


In the Oakland Hills, Design Draw Build used copper from a former World War II airplane hanger to clad the exterior. Courtesy: Design Draw Build

At this Oakland Hills home, the architect Tyler Kobick took a hands-on approach to the redesign. Kobick apprenticed as a stone mason in his youth, started his own construction company at 16 and ran it while getting his architectural degrees. The house reflects his dual background, which is echoed in his firm's makeup. Half of his staff are architects; the other half are makers.



On a site with a two-bridge view, the house was built in 1949 for jazz musician Virgil Muhler. Kobick gutted the home, updated its systems, and moved the kitchen from its dark, back-of-the-house location into the central space, which he opened to the view. He added a living room with a 13-foot ceiling and a main bedroom, increasing the 1,250-square-foot home by 700 square feet.



The west side of the house is designed to make the most of the bay views. Courtesy: Design Draw Build

For the exterior, Kobick discovered copper flashing from a former World War II airplane hangar in Alameda on Craig's List. "When I saw it, it blew my mind," he said.

His staff turned the former roofing material into siding, which Kobick helped install.

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