



RD

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

FOR ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS
OF DISTINCTIVE HOMES

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A New Twist



Calistoga Estate

CALISTOGA, CALIFORNIA
AMY A. ALPER, ARCHITECT

A principle of Japanese garden design is that property lines do not define a site—the proverbial borrowed landscape. Neither, it is understood, do four walls define a house. Views out were the organizing principle of this Napa Valley house that absorbs the remnants of an older landscape. An existing vineyard, garage, meandering stone walls, pool, and outdoor fireplace were knit with the new, acknowledging the land's history.

Architect Amy Alper's clients, Oregon transplants, had lived at the house part-time for three years. During that time, the retired couple had planted vineyards. Their original idea was to remodel the house, content to let the property evolve. When they moved in permanently, however, they recognized that this approach would not serve them long-term and certainly would not do justice to the spectacular views of Mount Saint Helena in the distance. And so they decided to start from scratch.



Opposite and this page: A new house in California wine country makes strategic use of existing site features—maturing vineyards; landscape elements, such as stone walls, terraces, swimming pool, and fire pit; and a guest house. An existing garage burned down during the 2017 Tubbs Fire and was rebuilt; the main house, which was under construction at the time with materials specified for Wildland Urban Interface Zones, survived unscathed.





The new house, while larger than the original, sits on the same general spot and has some orientations in common. This, says Amy, was a way to preserve the memory and relationships. “There was a circular road around the back of the property leading to the garage, and beautiful stone walls, and there was no reason to negate that,” she says. Also, “there were certain classical relationships of garage to kitchen that remain, and the kitchen has a direct relationship

“One of the goals was to knit together the site elements so that when finished, it felt like it was meant to be from the beginning.”

—Amy Alper

to the outdoor kitchen. The kitchen generally wanted to be where it had been, and the living space wanted to have this very strong relationship across to the pool, outdoor dining, and fireplace.” What’s more, there was clearly an opportunity to focus the living room on postcard-perfect Mount Saint Helena to the northeast.

With these components in mind, Amy organized the floor plan along a strong axis and cross-axis. The long main axis



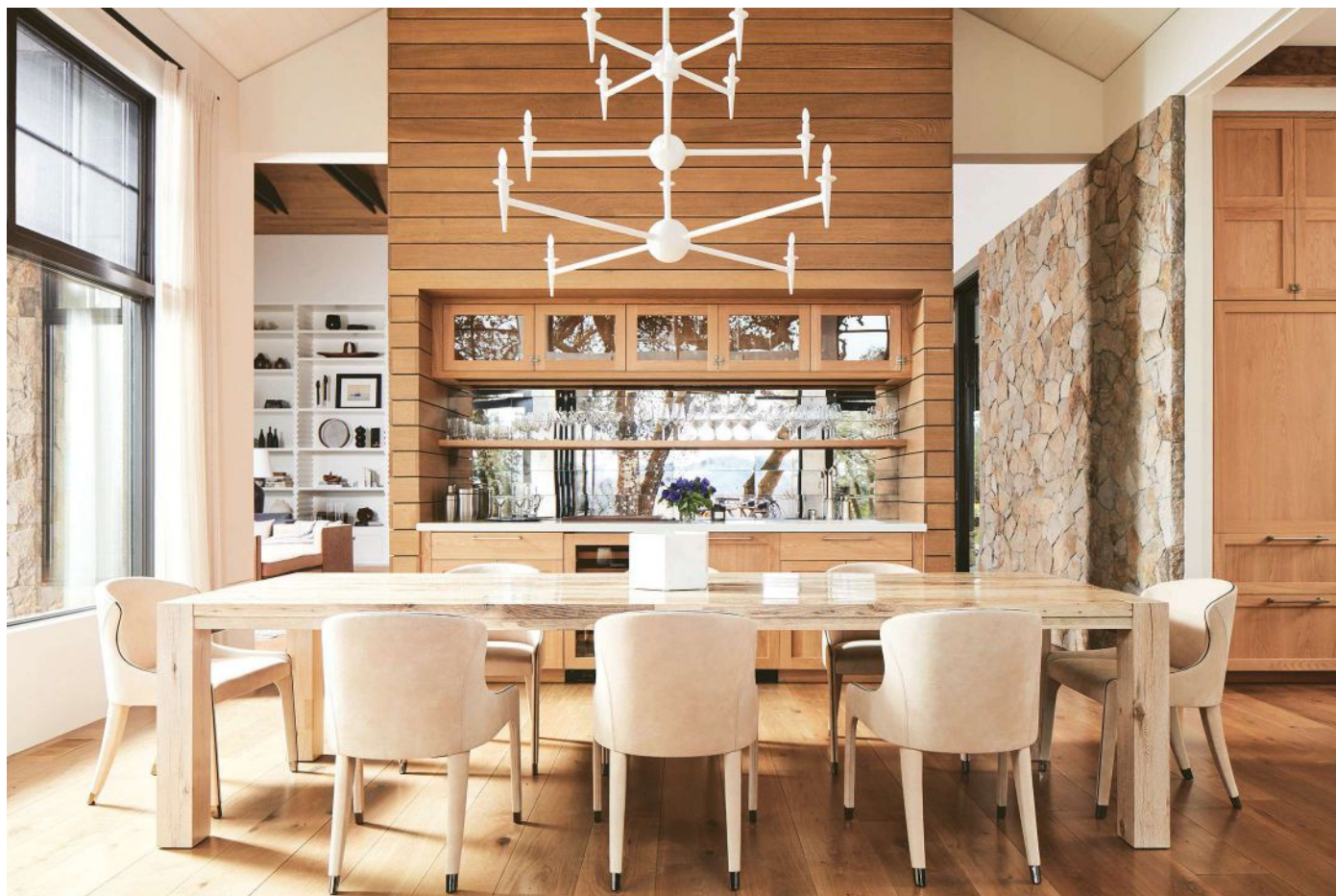
runs east-west from the living room, through the guest quarters, to the master suite, while two cross-axes spill out to the long, covered south terrace facing the existing landscape elements: pool, outdoor kitchen, and fireplace. This layout preserved the vineyard on the front slope and a generous rear yard facing south.

The big secondary move was to create a new entry sequence. Previously, the long drive emptied out at the back of the property, but a new spur drops visi-

tors at a guest parking court anchored by a Corten water feature. From there, stone steps pave the way through a garden to the stone entry pavilion—“a smaller, more intimate proportion relative to the rest of the buildings,” Amy says. “As you walk along the path, you engage with the view across the vineyard and hills.” Once visitors step inside and turn left into the living room, they can see directly across the house to the sunny south terrace.



Opposite and this page: A previous house on the 12-acre site got some things right, but did not take full advantage of spectacular views of Mount Saint Helena. Arranged along well-defined axes, all key interiors now relate to long-range mountain vistas or adjacent outdoor amenities.



This page: A clear logic applied to the detailing and material selection pulls together the public rooms and private realms. Woodwork in cedar and soda-blasted oak establishes a strong linear organization of elements, while the species' subtle, swirling grains complement the more organic patterning in the stone walls.



Passing Through

Taking cues from Sonoma County's agricultural buildings, the architecture marries rustic materials with a modern composition of points, lines, and planes. The stone-and-cedar-clad living room is the most prominent form. Its gabled, two-story roofline is made up of two parts—a seating area that engages the fireplace and the view of Mount Saint Helena, and another seating area focused on media.

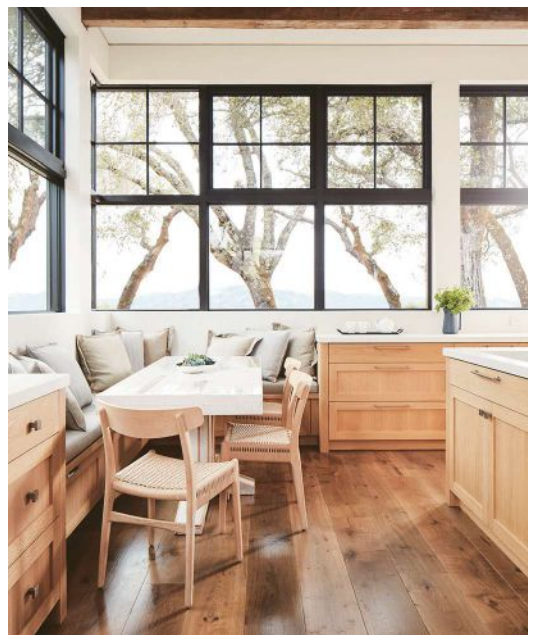
The stone-clad kitchen and stone-clad master pavilion, which includes the office, anchor opposite ends of the house. Connecting those two main zones is a cedar-wrapped guest wing

containing two bedrooms with en-suite baths. Inside, they flank a vaulted, skylit hallway whose battened walls echo the exterior. Along the hall, recessed thresholds lined in soda-blasted oak signal the guest room openings.

Repeating materials elevate the interior logic. "Movement through the house is as important as any particular room," Amy says. Interior axial views showcase the stone or cedar that wraps from outside to inside. For example, looking down the hall from the living room, you can see the master suite's stone passing through. This volume creates a bookend, and its doorway echoes the guest rooms' oak-paneled threshold, whose warm,



This page: The design team worked closely with Kolbe windows and builder John Rechin to achieve the four-over pattern in both the windows and custom cabinetry. Maintaining the top window mullions honors the area's traditional agrarian architecture without compromising views.





This page and opposite: The master suite and two guest suites share a wing of the house in cross-axis to the public rooms. Located at the terminus of the wing, the master captures multiple exposures of light and views. A window seat and the master tub take in western vistas over the pool area.



cognac tone complements the stone. Inside the master suite, “the owners wanted to wake up to an elegant existing tree, so the master is the crescendo of this primary axis you walk down,” Amy says. Flooring materials move in and out too: the bluestone entry path flows into the foyer, and the bluestone mudroom floor moves out to the terrace.

The building’s trio of large corner windows adds dynamism to an otherwise axial plan. “Just as the house started laying out, the major views lent themselves to be highlighted through the experience of looking through corner windows,” Amy says. In the living room, this pivoting view angle allowed the furniture arrangement to focus on the fireplace, she says. The office’s corner window frames the same Mount Saint Helena scene, while a matching window in the master bedroom outlines a more intimate object—the specimen tree.





Rooted in Place

Moving around the outside of the house is never dull or predictable either, even though it feels familiar. The volumes' different materials and heights come together at the south porch paralleling the pool and outdoor kitchen. "The roofline at the kitchen has a classic break, the way agricultural buildings in the area have a break to their shape; it turns the corner, becomes the porch, pulls back, turns the corner again, and finishes in a cedar pocket," Amy says. "In Napa and Sonoma, the gable roofline relates to barn forms that draw people to the area. Here it's the element that unites the composition."

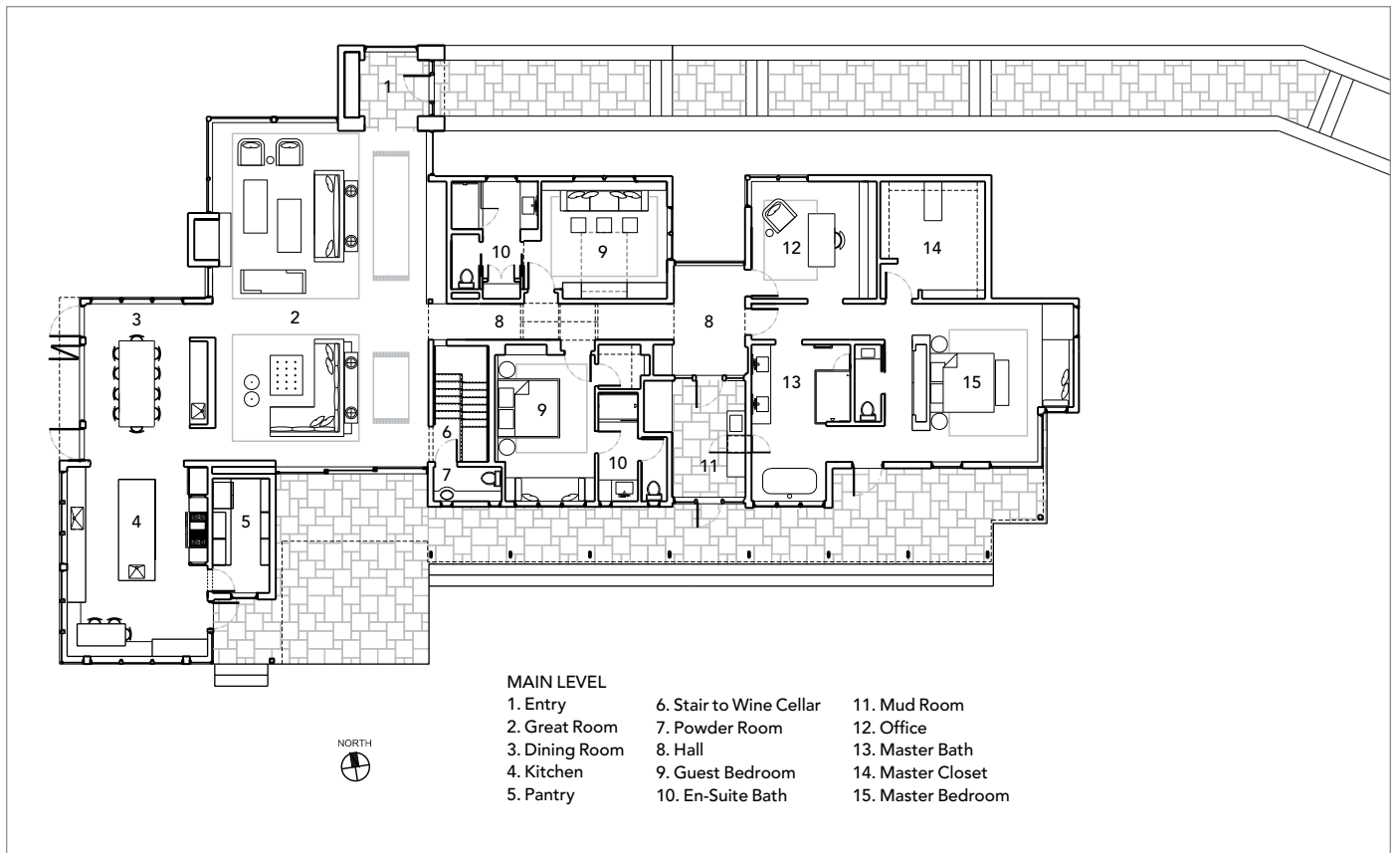
A hybrid of modern and traditional, the house's mixed messages serve a purpose. For example, mullions on the upper part of the windows help break down the scale and acknowledge wine

country's rural architecture, while the lower part is continuous so as not to obstruct views. This is echoed in the kitchen's upper cabinets, whose square motif relates to the windows across the room. And in the living room, a series of kickers ties the exposed trusses to the gable ends, eliminating the need for steel. "It adds an agricultural twist as a more straightforward way to approach architecture," Amy says. Builder John Rechin "weighed in on how to do things in a simple manner."

"We used steel minimally in a few cases," John says. "The large pieces of glass took quite a bit of structural coordination with the window company to accomplish the views we wanted. Steel posts are embedded into the foundation system, which is unusual. They come up between the windows, supporting them inside the wall structure."

This page: Both guest suites have window seats, too—a feature the architect likes to work into every house with good views. And what guest doesn't appreciate a space to relax in private without getting into bed? The west-facing guest room looks out to the existing fire pit.







Located in the Wildland Urban Interface Zone, the project also meets wildfire regulations. In fact, the use of noncombustible materials and assemblies—stone and chunky cedar siding, metal roof, and closed-cell foam envelope—helped it survive the Tubbs Fire that swept through in October 2017 while the house was under construction. Fortunately, only the existing garage burned, and it was redesigned and rebuilt.

Something old, something new: the property reads as the perfect vintage for a couple whose dream was to live in wine country and make wine. “One of the goals was to knit together the site elements so that when finished, it felt like it was meant to be from the beginning,” Amy says. At once orderly and unexpected, the pieces snap into place, redefined for comfort amidst the shifting activities of daily life.

—Cheryl Weber

Calistoga Estate

Calistoga, Calif.

ARCHITECT: Amy Alper, AIA, Amy A. Alper, Architect, Sonoma, Calif.; project architect: Dirk Smolak

BUILDER: John Rechin, Total Concepts, Santa Rosa, Calif.

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Jennifer Robin Interiors, San Anselmo, Calif.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Cary Bush, Merge Studio, Sebastopol, Calif.

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR: JKT Associates, Sonoma

LIGHTING DESIGNER: McCoy Lighting Design, Rancho Mirage, Calif.

PROJECT SIZE: 4,250 square feet

SITE SIZE: 12 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHY: John Merkl Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

BATHROOM VENTILATION: Panasonic
CABINETRY HARDWARE: Emtek, Ashley Norton, Waterworks, Rocky Mountain Hardware

COOKTOP/RANGE: Miele

COUNTERTOP: NuCrete Studios

CLADDING: Napa Syar Stone

DISHWASHER: Miele

ENTRY DOORS: Kolbe

EXTERIOR LIGHTING: Vision3 Lighting

FAUCETS: Kallista, Waterworks, Kohler

FIREPLACE: Isokern

FLOORING: Montaigne Beaumont, Honed Fountainbleu

GARAGE DOORS: Carriage House Doors

ICE-MAKER: Sub-Zero

INSULATION: Benjamin Obdyke

INTERIOR LIGHTING: Tech Lighting

LIGHTING CONTROLS: Lutron

MICROWAVE: Sharp

PAINTS, STAINS, COATINGS: Benjamin Moore

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero

ROOFING: Taylor Metal

SHOWER TILE: Fez Collection

SINKS: Kohler, Rohl

SKYLIGHTS: Solarium & Skylight Systems

TOILETS: TOTO

TOWEL HEATERS: Amba Products

TUB: Native Trails

WINDOWS: Kolbe

WINE REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero