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HOME



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MODERN FUSION IN THE PALISADES

by Lynn Morgan
Photography by Sharon Risedorph



Our clients gave us a great opportunity to design the project holistically," says architect Erik Evers, AIA of the KAA Design Group, recalling this proj-



ect in Pacific Palisades. "Because of that, it produced extraordinary results. It was a lucky convergence of enlightened clients and motivated designers."

It began with a close study of the property,

before demolition. "The owners invited us up on the roof of the existing house, where they had been living," Erik continues. "It was a dreary, 1960's era ranch house of no particular distinction. But they wanted us to get a strong

sense of the site, to ascertain how high the second floor should be to take advantage of the sweet views."

The location, and its spectacular vistas, became KAA's main source of inspiration. "It's



an unusual parcel of land, with wonderful views to the south west. You can see the ocean, LAX and even Catalina from the upper floors."

The clients' goal was simple: the creation of a family home, not a financial showcase. They wanted family-oriented interior and outdoor spaces where their three children could play and ones that reflected their fascination

with Asian design and culture. In response to their needs, KAA nestled the house in between garden spaces designed by Damon Hein, the firm's landscape architect. "It was very much an integrated project between the architectural side of our practice and the landscape group," says Erik.

The great lawn became the organizing









idea: a vast and velvety expanse that serves both as a frame for the presentation of the house and a design feature on its own. "It's a play area for the kids," says Erik. The great lawn is bordered at the perimeter by walls of Pennsylvania blue stone, a rugged building material used abundantly in other parts of the house. The living room projects boldly, like the prow of a ship towards the great lawn, which arcs smoothly around it.

The 13,000-square-foot house is essentially modernist in its conception, strongly

reminiscent of Rudolph Schindler, flavored with other influences. "We used masses of smooth, white plaster on the lower levels – a nod to the Spanish Colonial tradition that's so prevalent in Southern California," says Erik. "I'm not exclusively a modernist," the architect continues. "I'm more eclectic. I consider myself a 'style agnostic.' I feel free to select a particular architectural language that suits the client and the building site. I'm looking for the right language to tell the story of that particular place."

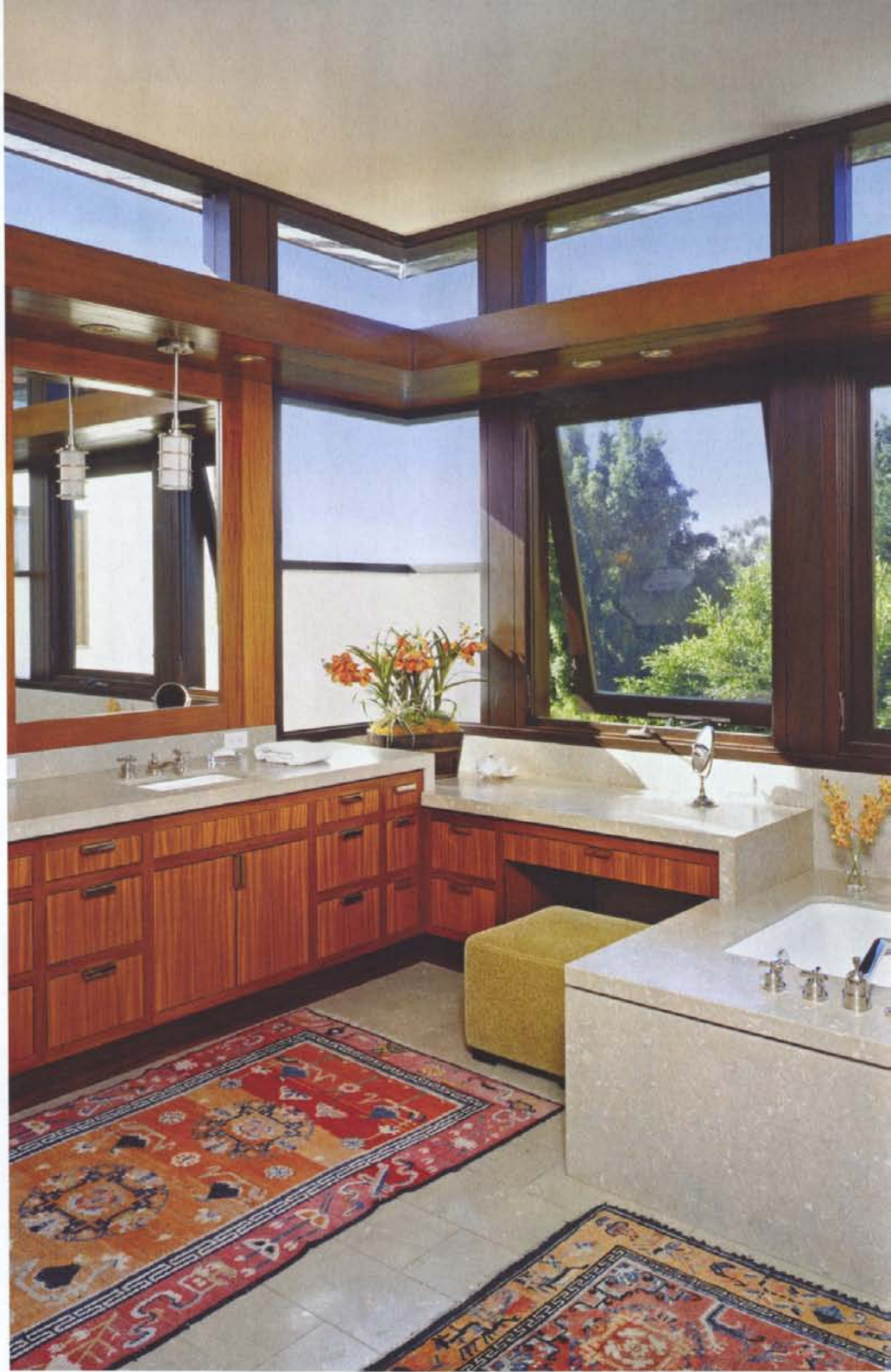


Erik used the Pennsylvania blue stone throughout the house, with glass and mahogany stained dark as his primary materials. The eaves are copper, which has developed a green patina that complements the dark wood. The owners insisted that the house be designed around a central space for the family to gather and pass through, so Erik designed "the atrium" – a two-story space at the center of the entryway that is the organizational focus of the house.

"The living room, kitchen and family room radiate off of it on the first floor," he explains. "On the second floor, the bedrooms, media room and kids' playroom are all extensions off of the central atrium. It's a metaphorical village," Erik reflects. "The bedrooms are sleeping pavilions, expressed in the architecture."

The staircase at the atrium's core has detached, cantilevered steel treads and custom-designed bronze railings, created specifically for this project. It is a bit of architectural sleight of hand: "It looks very simple and effortless, but it was actually incredibly difficult. It looks as if it's floating."

The master bedroom is spacious, featuring a 20" by 8" closet. "It's the biggest one I've ever seen!" Erik laughs. "If you added a fold-out bed, I could live in it." The adjoining master bath is equally luxurious, with a huge steam shower. It features cabinetry of vertical grained



mahogany and counter tops and floors of "sea glass" limestone, which has tiny fragments of fossil material embedded in it.

Outside, the expansive gardens are divided into distinct areas and themes. You enter the property through the Zen garden, a simple, classic Japanese inspired space with a wooden bridge traversing a gravel bed, flanked by a blue stone wall, a manicured grove of reeds

and bamboo and a juniper tree. It is grounded by five immense boulders, selected to represent the Five Virtues of Confucian Meditation: Politeness, Benevolence, Wisdom, Fidelity and Justice.

The Water Garden embraces the pool area and lanai. It features bridges and waterfalls, and a sixty-foot long koi pond that acts as a "moat" taking the place of a fence around the



swimming pool. The lanai clearly reflects the owners' fascination with Asia, featuring light fixtures he inherited from his father who had, in turn, purchased them in China, where they had been salvaged from an old train station.

The final garden, known as "the Jewel Box," is the smallest and most intimate of them all. A tiny space outside the dining room, Erik describes it as a "place for medi-

tation." The architects selected a gnarled, cracked boulder as its foundation and added a Japanese maple and water feature. "It's a place for contemplation and a nice backdrop for dining," says Erik. "On a summer evening, you can throw open the door and enjoy the warm weather and the sound of the splashing water."

Apart from its sprawling size and mani-



cured landscaping, the house is not imposing or ostentatious. "It's not a *showy* house," Erik observes. "It's kind of introverted. It's all about the private dreams of the client, not impressing someone else or out-doing the neighbors."

The house has many moods. "It has a lot of layers," says Erik. "It reveals itself slowly, in stages, as you work your way through it." ■



Erik Evers

Architect: KAA Design Group

310-821-1400

kaadesigngroup.com