

GENTRY

HOME

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EAST MEETS WEST

A brilliant young architect conjures
a sublime Silicon Valley residence
with Zen-like influences.



ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN:
LEONARD NG OF LNAI ARCHITECTURE, SAN FRANCISCO
LANDSCAPE DESIGN: EAD LANDSCAPE
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: BERKELEY STRUCTURAL DESIGN
CIVIL ENGINEER: LC ENGINEERING
PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW MILLMAN

The home's central living spaces seamlessly blend together overlooking a peaceful horizon garden. Glass walls slide away providing an intimate connection with nature. Architect Leonard Ng added hand-scraped French white oak floors to unify the grand space.





P eninsula native Leonard Ng's passion for this project is evident from the first few moments of conversation. The house under discussion is so much more than a home; it is the living, breathing embodiment of tranquility. Ng emphasizes, "The thesis here was, how do I get away from the buzz of Silicon Valley and have a sense of calm?"

Ng answered the question with an elegant design that, as he so eloquently says, "was conceived as an intentional moment of pause and interlude—one that distills natural light and greenery from its surroundings and interweaves them deep inside the spaces of the home."

Set in the heart of Palo Alto, the home is close to a school and busy neighborhood with all of the accompanying noise, privacy, and sightline issues. Ng's mission was to address all of these issues with thoughtfulness and grace. Indeed, he notes, "The house must perform at a higher level to serve not just as house, but as a carefully calibrated osmotic filter—one that precisely edits out the adjacent buildings, noise, and public views while capturing the selective moments of existing greenery and pulling them deep within. Part of the ethos of the house was to capture moments of greenery, including a combination of new landscaping and existing old growth redwoods."

To accomplish this, Ng created a series of episodic garden moments, some expected and others surprising. “At the center of the house,” he relates, “a hidden-view garden with a maple and sculptural boulder brings a slice of greenery and moment of surprise; a concealed portal in the kitchen frames an unexpected view of the stair landing and majestic redwood beyond; and a clerestory band above the kitchen brings in daylight and creates a splash of linear green from the podocarpus pines beyond.”

The home’s elegant main living space consists of a living room, dining area, and kitchen—all of which open up to a horizon garden. Ng says, “It is a garden of linear compositions and textures designed as a focal point to help mediate the towering scale of the soaring redwoods behind.” In the living room, a wall of steel-troweled Venetian plaster is integrated with a fireplace and bookcase. The floors are covered in French white oak that has been hand-scraped with a micro bevel. A vertical slat screen just outside of the living room allows for the interplay of light and shadow—a technique echoed on the home’s staircase.

Ng adds, “Anchoring the heart of the house, a floating staircase hovers above river rocks and invites ascension, while diaphanous wood screens of vertical grain cedar and rift white oak filter and dapple light, landscape, and views throughout.

The open, flowing floor plan leads to an elegant kitchen. Ng integrated a horizontal slice of windows above the cabinetry to emphasize the linear quality of the kitchen. He utilized an engineered stone for the counters with a quartz-like fine-grain texture to play off the white oak vertical-grain book-matched cabinets with a warm walnut stain. “The light fixtures in the kitchen and above the dining table were tricky,” he relates. “I wanted to be able to see through them.” He selected a blown-glass pendant by FLOSS for the dining table and an abstract fixture by XAL Lighting for above the kitchen island.

Upstairs, the master suite benefits from the same garden view as the main living space, but given its elevation, privacy was a major concern. Ng edited out the surrounding homes with the repetition of slices of clerestory window to highlight exterior greenery and added a clever slice of mirror to do the same. The resulting effect is that the master bedroom seems perched almost with a tree-house quality atop the home. The master bath, too, edits out the surrounding homes with window placement. A dark textured ceramic tile contrasts with a deep white porcelain soaking tub.

When asked about his favorite aspect of the finished project, Ng replies, “Space and light. It’s exciting to see how the spaces overlap and flow together, inviting a calming connection to the landscape and the light and how it changes throughout the day and the seasons.” ♦





Ng's mandate for designing this home was to provide spaces of calm and tranquility. In many cases that meant editing out the surrounding neighborhood, so that the homeowners would only see moments of garden and greenery. In the second floor master suite, Ng used rectangular clerestory windows in both the bedroom and bath for privacy and to highlight the beauty of the treetops.





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