

TRADITIONAL HOME

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SMART AND
ELEGANT

OUR SHOWCASE HOUSE OPENS ITS DOORS

Out of the Ashes

A new home is crafted on a fire-ravaged site in the Oakland Hills.

By Eliot Nusbaum



All it took was a spark in a pile of building rubble from the just-remodeled house next door. The fire that had begun on the ridge behind them in the Oakland Hills leaped from the debris to Fran Delegeane's house and consumed it, and along with it, all the evidence of the life she had lived there as a single mother raising three children. Nothing was left. Nothing but a great site and the will to rebuild.

Rebuild she did. "There was absolutely no thought of not rebuilding here immediately," says Fran. After a couple of false starts, she found architect Carolyn Walker Davis through a friend of Jim Bahl, Fran's longtime companion.

"I think Fran wanted a woman [architect]; she wanted someone who would listen," recalls Jim. Her charge to Davis was to design a house in keeping with the Berkeley Hills architectural tradition.

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Above and left: Built on the ashes of the house Fran Delegeane lost in the Oakland fire, this structurally complex Craftsman-style home, designed by architect Carolyn Walker Davis, takes advantage of an extraordinary view of San Francisco Bay. The tower, which was the idea of Fran's longtime companion, Jim Bahl, assures plenty of sunlight and a great view no matter what gets built behind their home.

PHOTOGRAPHS: JON JENSEN



Above left: The public spaces in the house, including the living room and dining areas, are oriented toward the bay. The ceilings are clear hemlock. The beams are Douglas fir.



Above right: To keep the views unobstructed, an open divider was used to hide load-bearing posts and brace the center of the structure.

PERSONAL ARCHITECTURE Continued from page 114 To Davis that meant an Arts and Crafts-style house in the spirit of turn-of-the-century architect Bernard Maybeck, the region's principal proponent of the style, which incorporates lots of natural materials and handiwork.

"When I was thinking about how the new house should be, I knew I wanted an open feeling and a sense of togetherness," says Fran.

Despite the incredible location, the house that burned was a single-story structure hunkered down on the ridge with no view at all. Given a chance to start over, Fran asked that all of the public areas be able to take advantage of the 360-degree view, which includes San Francisco and San Francisco Bay.

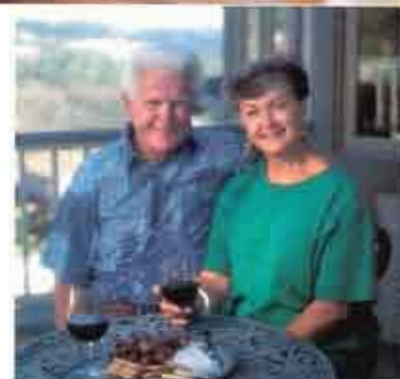
To ensure an unobstructed view no matter what kind of houses are built on the lots between Fran's home and the bay in the still-recovering neighborhood, Davis designed the house with most of the

public rooms on the second floor. Because of the way Davis arranged the windows, Fran will continue to have privacy even though the only shades in the house are in the bedroom.

Most important, the semiretired school-teacher asked Davis to design a house she would not have to move from as she grew older. Other than that, Fran's requirements for the interior plan were fairly simple. She wanted an open floor plan, as much natural light as possible, and a place to do her sewing.

Davis, starting atop a foundation laid before she was hired, designed the house of Fran's dreams.

Given the hilltop site, bringing in natural light was easy. Davis provided enough



Above: Jim Bahl and Fran Delegeane enjoy the patio outside their kitchen.



LOWER LEVEL



MAIN LEVEL



TOWER



Left: Because the kitchen is so public, dressy German cabinets and granite countertops were used. The extra-large island is a natural buffet area for entertaining and gives Fran plenty of work surface for baking.

PERSONAL ARCHITECTURE Continued from page 116 windows all around to flood the house with light. The light is controlled by three-foot eaves and a deep, overhanging porch. The central tower, which was Jim's idea, also brings in plenty of light. However, the tower created an engineering problem in that it limited the number of structural supports in the middle of the house. To get a structure that would stand, Davis had to devise a complex system of cantilevered

beams and an open interior divider wall. The wall's sculptural good looks belie its load-bearing function.

Making the house a place Fran can stay in as she grows older meant designing it with accessibility built in. The open floor plan and generally wider spaces will accommodate a wheelchair, plus an elevator from the ground floor to the second floor means easy access to the main spaces in the home.

Because the primary living space is on the second floor, home builder Walter Cox took on the task of making the relatively small first-floor entry work gracefully. He did that by designing and building a handsome cherry staircase that leads from the front door to the main floor. Cox, who trained as an architect and is responsible for all of the detailing in the house, spent six weeks on the staircase, but he thinks it was well worth the effort.

"This house, more than any other in the neighborhood, truly graces the hill," says Cox.

For Fran, it's both simpler and more emotional than that. As she puts it, "It's so nice to be back home. And I am enjoying watching the rest of the neighborhood come back." ■

Architect: Carolyn Walker Davis
Regional Editor: Carla Breer Howard

For more information, see the Reader's Resource on page 178.



Below left: The cherry staircase is the centerpiece of builder Walter Cox's handiwork in Fran's house. To meet local code and still get the Craftsman-style look he wanted, Cox had to design a double handrail, which still required special approval.