

Anonymity isn't stopping great Bay Area architects. Nor are cranky neighbors, permit nightmares, or wide public disdain for the modern. These five mavericks are among those creating epoch-mixing, landscape-loving homes with the potential to remake the Bay Area into a world-class center of residential design.

Architecture

As the Bay Area's last architectural moment—that of the loft—thankfully surfs into the age of dramatic projects like the de Young and the federal building, a tension is revealed: most new design landmarks aren't by local studios. In truth, the Bay Area, extensively built out and so defined by its historical styles, offers rare opportunities for hungry local architects to create high-profile work of international caliber.

Yet below the public radar, small, ambitious firms are designing remarkable residences, both in the city and beyond, that are sensitive to the best of local architectural tradition while pointing the way to a new modern moment. "More and more young firms are opening up every day," says Anne Fougeron, principal of Fougeron Architecture. "The Bay Area is becoming a center for great modernist architecture. It's thrilling to watch."

Over the next 24 pages, we spotlight four firms (including Fougeron's), picking their principals' brains on how they work with clients, what they think about the Bay Area, and more, and featuring one recent signature work from each firm. All these architects find challenges in the region's historical context, neighborhood opinion, and sometimes stodgy character. But with an increasingly sophisticated and curious clientele that wants to enjoy the scenic locale through bold design, they are forging ahead with great panache. Remember their names. Learn from their work. Let them inspire your dreams of home.

BY ALAN RAPP

LEARN MORE: The homes and architects spotlighted here are all part of *Small Firms, Great Projects*, a periodic showcase of excellence in local architecture organized by the American Institute for Architects' San Francisco chapter. To obtain a copy of the special magazine featuring more than 100 Bay Area architects and their work, call 415-398-2800.

The Conceptualists Luke Ogrydziak and Zoë Prillinger

Some people practice architecture as a craft, but to Luke Ogrydziak and Zoë Prillinger, a vivacious pair who met in the late eighties at Princeton, remodeling or building houses is as much a theoretical as a practical venture. "I may be too high-falutin'," Prillinger says, "but in truly creative practices, design is an ongoing practice of formal exploration." Luckily for those who also want a house at the end of the process, the duo's conceptually sophisticated designs yield extremely livable spaces. Their first project together was an installation at the Princeton School of Architecture that included a dramatic panopticon in the central stairway, and they've executed nearly a dozen local homes and remodels since, with several more underway.

"They're of a generation that's really up-and-coming," says Schwarzer, CCA's chair of visual studies. "They studied at East Coast architecture schools with a strong theory component, and that's very healthy for California architecture."

Perhaps their most intriguing new commission is the Enigma House, an extensive remodel of an existing four-story Pacific Heights Edwardian that guts existing interior rooms to create a series of open, loftlike interiors. They'll also be working on one of James Turrell's signature skyspaces in Sonoma County, something that allows them to pair with an artist who shares their sublime concerns—and keep their heads in the clouds.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM GRIFFITH
PORTRAIT BY DOUGLAS ADESKO

Signature style: It's hard to encapsulate, since each project sets them on a different design course, and no two places end up looking alike.

Brainiac lingo: "We try to isolate the question that belongs to every project. Architecture, like any other expressive medium, is just a language to study some abstract issues."

Biggest challenge to home-building here: "Planning restrictions in residential zones remain the primary obstacle for progressive design. The neighbors can really be quite vocal, too."

Best way with clients: "Our better projects involve the clients' idiosyncrasies...or pathologies. If you follow that strand, it always leads away from the generic."

Fantasy project: "Something on the Peninsula. The area is at the center of science and information revolutions, yet lacks architectural expression equal to its paradigm-shifting influence."

SEE THEIR WORK AT: WWW.OPARCH.NET



Family residence, Noe Valley →

The challenge: the neighbors

Confronted by one of the most formidable forces in Bay Area architecture—a project's neighbors—Ogrydziak and Prillinger had to completely overhaul their original plan for this three-story, five-bedroom Noe Valley home. "Everybody loved it and it was all good to go," Prillinger says. "The design was even published in *GA Houses [Global Architecture]*. But then there was neighborhood opposition because it was going to block a view. One of the developers was himself a neighbor and wanted to avoid problems. He came to us and said, 'Hey, I know this is horribly painful, but can we start over and take their concerns into consideration?' The funny thing is, it was already a pretty low project—technically you can build up to 35 feet, and this was only 18 feet. Still, we had to make the house a full story lower. Luckily, the site was sloping enough so we could make it work."

An exercise in design as good neighbor, this five-bedroom, 5,690-square-foot house has a low profile from the street but exploits its steep site for a fabulous city vista.





The materials used throughout the house create an exultant sense of luxury. Concealed kitchen cabinetry is made from a rich padauk; the surfaces are Cararra marble, giving the room a classic pedigree.

The living room (opposite page) shows off the aesthetic blend the architects were aiming for: it's crisp and minimal, but the columns and repetitive window structures reference formal classical architecture.

The central stairway unites the home's three levels with its uncurved (uninterrupted) wooden guardrail. "It really taxed the fabrication process," says Ogrydziak.