

# Residential Architect

A magazine of The American Institute of Architects

## PROJECTS

From: residential architect March-April 2010 Posted on: April 27, 2010

MID-CENTURY MODERNIZED

## ranch revival

lightly built and heavily consumptive, our early modern houses are ripe for new millennium remodels.

By Nigel F. Maynard



### ranch revival

East Bay residence gets energy-efficient upgrade and new solar roof.

Whether it's a faux Mediterranean McMansion in Florida or a ranch in California, a tract home typically doesn't conjure up design excellence. There's just something about historical pastiche and cookie-cutter repetition that feels soulless. So when a pair of design-savvy house hunters found and purchased this tract home in El Cerrito, Calif., they called on Emeryville, Calif.-based Ohashi Design Studio to tap its unrealized potential.

Built sometime in the 1960s, the ranch was nothing special. It had an uninspired entrance, an unfortunate sunroom addition, and a convoluted floor plan with a tangle of dark rooms. In addition to a more streamlined design and light-filled interiors, "the clients wanted a house that was better suited for entertaining," says principal Alan Ohashi, AIA.

They also wanted to rectify the ranch's most

egregious flaw—its failure to exploit the view to San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. Energy efficiency was a major programmatic requirement, but the couple insisted it be seamlessly integrated. "They wanted to take advantage of any new energy efficiency technology available, but they wanted a beautiful house more than anything else, so the technologies had to work with the design," Ohashi explains.

To preserve the context of the neighborhood, Ohashi and his wife and design principal, Joy, retained the house's front portion containing the bedrooms, garage, and breakfast area and razed the rest. They organized the rebuilt structure in a large, open plan, with delineations for the main spaces and floor-to-ceiling glass to promote views and light. They improved the building envelope with new insulation and topped it with a standing seam metal roof integrated with thin-film solar panels to supplement grid dependence. Radiant tubes embedded in the custom-colored concrete floor provide heating, and on-demand water heaters fitted with recirculating pumps further promote efficiency. The firm also added obligatory Energy Star appliances and dual-flush toilets.

Ohashi says the clients' fondness for materiality—most notably their "love of unfinished wood with character" and other tactile characteristics—drove many of the firm's design decisions. Showcased materials include white cedar at the entrance and rear, red cedar interior paneling, luminescent tile encasing the fireplace, and striated ceramic in the baths.

The completed project not only gave the clients the view-embracing, energy-efficient house they had craved, it also proved a bellwether for the firm. "This project is one of our earliest experiences with using sustainable design principles, and we're happy with the way we were able to integrate them into the design," the architect says. "Every project we do now employs as many sustainable strategies as possible."

**project:** East Bay Hills Residence, El Cerrito, Calif.  
**architect:** Ohashi Design Studio, Emeryville, Calif.  
**general contractor:** Creative Spaces, Oakland, Calif.

**project size:** 2,230 square feet (before); 2,435 square feet (after)

**site size:** Approximately 0.2 acre

**construction cost:** \$400 per square foot

**photography:** John Sutton

### performance upgrades

- Newly insulated building envelope
- Galvanized standing seam metal roof with an integrated 3-kilowatt photovoltaic solar system
- Double-glazed Energy Star-rated windows
- Radiant heating embedded in concrete floors
- Tankless water heaters
- Recirculating hot water
- Dual-flush toilets
- Low-flow faucets and showerheads
- Energy Star-rated appliances
- Certified renewable Canadian cedar