



Design for Living, *At Play in Modern Times* - A husband-and-wife architectural team combines natural materials and a sleek design to create the perfect space for entertaining, by Kathryn Loosli Pritchett, Fall 2007

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When Emeryville architects Joy and Alan Ohashi first saw their clients' unassuming 1960s tract house with the swiss chalet trim, they thought they'd have to tear it down and start over. Their clients hoped to use their new east bay hills home for entertaining, but the original design was not inspiring the couple to open their doors to company. When emeryville architects joy and alan ohashi first saw their clients' unassuming 1960s tract house with the swiss chalet trim, they thought they'd have to tear it down and start over. Their clients hoped to use their new east bay hills home for entertaining, but the original design was not inspiring the couple to open their doors to company.

"Our clients really wanted to upgrade everything yet still remain budget conscious," says Alan Ohashi. "We tried to retain as much as we could while transforming this nondescript ranch-style home into a gracious modern home that lent itself to entertaining."

One of the primary design objectives was to open the back of the house to the spectacular bay view. A previous remodel had included a "barely tacked-on" sunroom with sliding doors that blocked the main house from the sweeping vista. The Ohashis envisioned a new roofline that would flare up from the original eight-foot ceiling at the front of the house to a height of 14 feet at the back. The back walls would be replaced with glass doors and windows that opened the entire living area to the view, and a generous new terrace would extend the living and viewing space to the outdoors. "The terrace required a huge amount of engineering," says Alan, "but along with extending the living space, it was designed to edit the view so that you don't see the industrial area below and instead focus on the bay beyond."

The clients were originally drawn to images of other Ohashi projects that featured beautiful materials used in their natural state to create a contemporary Japanese aesthetic. Accordingly, the Ohashis combined wood, stone, tile, and concrete finishes to make a serene, modern statement.

They began at the front entrance by pairing Canadian white cedar siding with a simple glass door and sidelights. The glass is sandblasted on the upper portion for privacy but clear at the bottom to show how the granite floor tiles continue from the exterior entry into the interior. Concrete flooring in the main rooms carries through to the terrace, creating a sense of flow from the exterior to the interior of the house.

In the living room, the Ohashis covered the existing brick masonry of the fireplace with elegant black metallic tile. A well-placed skylight illuminates the tile and the expanded hearth covered in honed black granite. The ebony accents are repeated in a black river rock border on the floor near the entertainment wall, where built-in red walnut cabinets and bookshelves house a flat-screen TV and stereo equipment.

Laminated glass doors embedded with rice paper lead to the dining room. Between upper and lower walnut cabinets, the wall is painted a rich persimmon red, inspired by a lacquered Japanese bowl found by the owners. "The whole unit is very sculptural," says Joy Ohashi.

The kitchen features more cabinetry. Here, it is topped with honey-hued Zodiaq countertops. Stainless steel appliances and fixtures as well as aluminum tambour garage doors complete the crisp, contemporary feeling. "One of the biggest challenges with this project was achieving a proper balance with all the natural materials," says Alan.

"We really see the entire space as a composition," adds Joy. "Making sure everything comes together to create visual effect and interest is part of the process."

In the master bath, striated beige tiles surround a generous tub, and coordinating iridescent glass tiles sparkle in the backsplash behind the sink. The combination of a sandblasted window in an alcove and a Pilkington channel glass wall illuminates the room with natural light.

The same striated tiles are used in the guest bath, but in black. "I think of black as a neutral, but using it here made the guest bath more elegant," says Joy.

The architects used green design products and principles wherever possible: radiant heat in the floors, thermostats in every room, on-demand water heaters, and a sleek, nearly invisible photovoltaic system added to the standing-seam metal roof to capture solar energy.

"These were wonderful clients who really participated in the design process," says Alan. "It was definitely a team effort."

Although some homeowners might think a contemporary design too cool for an entertaining environment, the Ohashis have created a home that is at once modern and inviting. "Because of the use of natural materials and the inclusion of the outdoor space, this home does not come off as cold or austere," says Alan. Adds Joy, "It just feels really good to be here."