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Oceanfront Oasis

Organic Shapes Take Hold on the California Coast

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We wanted a house that would be sassy and sexy and romantic," says a midwestern executive who, with his wife, commissioned a vacation home from architect Tim Martin and designer Mark Boone. Jutting 30 feet above a beach in La Jolla, California ("more like the bow of a ship than a house," says the architect), with sand-colored stucco, angled overhangs and glass walls that flash with reflected sea light, the house certainly meets the owners' criteria. It also represents an unusually complementary combination of creative skills.

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To begin with, the clients knew they didn't want a modernist house like the one already on the site, which they planned to replace. Then they visited a house in La Jolla that had been designed by Boone and his partner, Mimi London (see *Architectural Digest*, December 1995), and the clients said, "That's it!"

From that point on, Boone says, "there was perfect synergy between the client, the architect and me. We left our egos at the door, and we were able to develop a project that is a unified collection of ideas. The architecture speaks to my aesthetic, and my furnishings do the same for the architect.

"My longtime partner, Mimi London, has been a tremendous influence," he continues, "particularly in terms of scale, the organic nature of the work, and fluidity. She worked with the late Michael Taylor at the beginning of her career, so in showing her influence, I feel that I am carrying on a long California tradition."

Initially the project posed problems because of regulatory restraints on beachfront building in La Jolla. "We had to build a house in the same footprint as the existing one," explains Martin, "but we wanted a house that would be unique to the terrain, where the rocky, sandy land meets the sea."

"The former house had a rigid geometry to it," says Boone, "like the surrounding houses. The faceted beachfront façade of our house, on the other hand, recalls the cliffs of La Jolla. The rocks on the beachfront have facets to them, and this façade has the texture and colors of the rocks. It is organic in a way that the earlier house was not."

"The whole envelope of the house was conceived in a weekend," says Martin. "The original house was shaped like a big V, with a dining room at one point and the master bedroom at the other point. We kept the dining room and the bedroom, but we took the roof off, leveled the floors and added a living room between the dining room and bedroom. Then we cantilevered wide overhangs above the windows, which face toward the ocean in every room, so as to modify the relentless sunlight coming off the water."

The pie-shaped property has extensive frontage on the ocean side but a narrow entrance on the street side, where a 19th-century Rajasthani gate with an ornately carved frame, which Boone found, opens into a courtyard. "The antique gate and the courtyard make a soft entry," says Martin. "The beach side of the house can be very noisy and very windy; the courtyard, which is roofless, has a fireplace in it, which makes it a room rather than a corridor. It's a very peaceful space." Determined to carry out a unified vision in every detail, Boone found the sand-colored stones that pave the courtyard in Turkey and had a stone yard there cut them in random lengths. "I didn't want a squared ashlar pattern," he says. "I wanted something that seemed more natural."

The fireplace and the gas lanterns that illuminate the courtyard give the house "mystery and romance," says the designer. Martin concurs but feels that "the real magic of the house is the living room, which faces the ocean—this is the core, the heart, of the structure."

The living room is indicative of the variety of materials used throughout the house. The fireplace wall, for instance, is paneled in sandblasted organic spruce. "Mimi and I have used spruce a lot in our furniture," says Boone. "Stone was going to have too heavy a look on that wall, so I created spruce tiles and mounted them in a running bond pattern, as if they were stone or brick. The fireplace surround is made from pieces of Texas shell stone, which makes a contrast with the spruce."

In a similarly unexpected use of material, the bronze-colored steel I-beams, which support the cantilevered roofs over the windows, were left exposed in the living room. Tree trunks with a natural finish form vertical support posts for the ceiling.

Perhaps more unexpected, the organic space also functions as a state-of-the-art media room. A projection screen can be lowered against the window between a pair of sculptural floor lamps created by glass artist Alison Berger. Boone also conceived a banquette that conceals a large-screen TV.

"I designed most of the furniture in line with standards that Mimi and I had established long ago," he says. "The material for the furniture came from a windfall of reclaimed walnut from a 100-year-old walnut orchard in Northern California that had been cleared for a vineyard. The walnut had been cured for 10 years when I heard about it, and I cured it for a longer time and bleached it. I even had the faceted handrail at the edge of the living room carved out of walnut."

The sea is a constant presence, visually, aurally and in the smell and feel of the breeze. The varied textures and the subtleties of the design reflect and manipulate that constant interaction with the outdoors.

"You can see the ocean from every single room in the house, except for two powder rooms," says the executive. "We paid for the view when we bought the land. While we like to retreat to the quiet of the courtyard, we always know the ocean is there!"







