

Published June 9th, 2010

## It's All in the Details

By Andrea A. Firth



Architect Rick Kattenburg and his design assistant Laszlo Petrik take in the view from the backyard of Dan and Laura Wall's home, Winner of the Orinda Mayor's Award for Architectural Excellence in 2009. Photo Doug Kohen

Perched at the top of Los Altos in Orinda, Dan and Laura Wall's home sits in a spectacular spot. The home faces eastward and has a panoramic view of the valley and hills beyond. The long, rectangular infinity spa and pool in back appear to gently cascade over the edge and vanish into the horizon. The adjacent Wi-Fi and stereo equipped open-air cabana provides a comfortable place to relax and take in the scenery. The beautiful outdoor setting distinguishes the property before one even ventures inside, but the architectural and interior design details of the house are what really makes this home special.

The Walls' home was one of five Orinda homes recognized by the City for architectural excellence last year. Laura knew this home was a good fit for her family the first time she saw it about a year ago. "When we moved into this house, it was pretty much ready made," states Laura. She was pleasantly surprised to learn that the owners who had renovated the home had worked with Orinda-based architect Rick Kattenburg. Coincidentally, Laura had worked with Kattenburg on two major renovations to the family's previous home in Lafayette.

The three-car garage with carriage doors and part of the kitchen footprint are all that remain of the original California ranch house that sat on the .9 acre property for forty plus years. The house has been transformed into a 6,000 square foot, two level, four-bedroom home. The long, narrow hallways of the traditional ranch home have been eliminated, and the new design has an open and airy feel with each room flowing to the next. The conservatory, a bright, elongated room, connects the living areas to the wing with the guest and master bedrooms and stairs down to a game/media room with full surround-sound flanked by two bedrooms-the perfect crash pad for the college kids returning for the summer. "This is definitely the hang out house," says Laura who finds herself cooking for her two college age sons, high-school aged daughter and their friends in the summer time.

The house is sandwiched by two old Coastal Live Oaks that are the focal points for the front yard and the back patio. Two cupolas-small architectural structures reminiscent of a crow's nest lookout on a ship -crown the top of the house and provide natural light and interest to the roofline. The large, mahogany front door opens into an entranceway with a domed ceiling and intricate circular design centered below in the floor. Arched pocket doors directly to the right lead to one of the three offices/den-type spaces in the house. Centered on the axis of the pool, the house has glass doors and transom windows across the backside to take full advantage of the vista. "The sun pours into the great room in the mornings," says Laura, "It's glorious."

The great variety of natural wood, stone, and glass materials used in the flooring, cabinetry, trim, and doors throughout the house creates a kaleidoscope of visual interest to every room. The kitchen, with distressed v-groove hickory floors, thick granite countertops in two colors, beveled, leaded glass in the cabinet and pantry doors, and a custom-made copper hood over the cooktop provides a good example. And almost every room has a different architectural design feature in the ceiling that draws the eyes upward, like the unique, cathedral-like barrel vaulted ceiling in the great room.

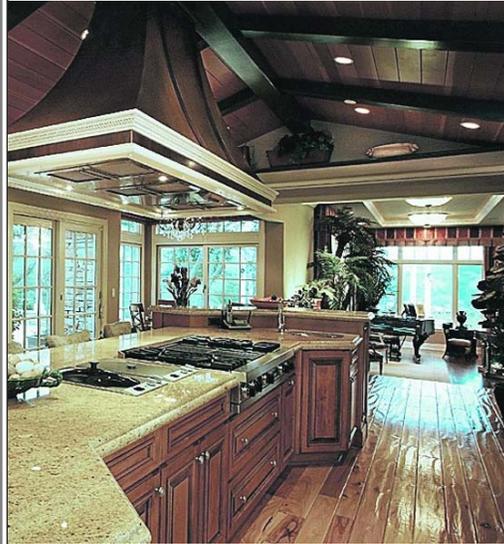
A detached greenhouse with a louvered roof, heating, and air conditioning that provides for a 12-month growing season completes the property. "The gardening is all new to me," says Laura, whose thumbs are getting greener. She has planted a number of tomato plants in large 10-gallon plastic tubs, along with string beans, rhubarb and a variety of herbs. "They thought of everything," says Laura, "It's perfect."

The City of Orinda will be accepting nominations for the Mayor's Award for Architectural Excellence 2010. Nomination forms and guidelines will be posted at the City website, [www.cityoforinda.org](http://www.cityoforinda.org), later in the summer.

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The Wall's cat, Indy, takes a stroll through the rotunda-shaped foyer. Photo Doug Kohen



Distressed v-groove hickory floor in the kitchen  
Photo provided



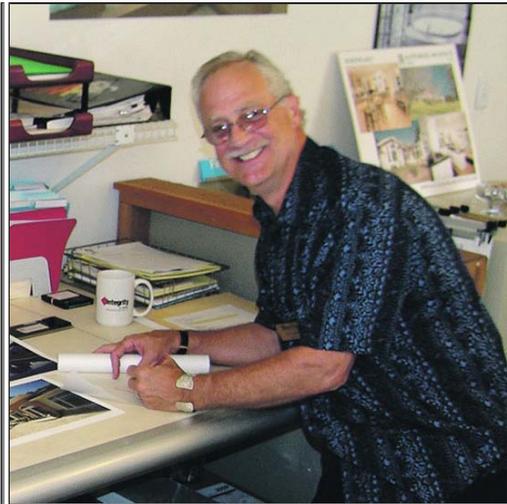
The Wall's dogs, Simon and Piper, enjoy the shade of the oak tree on the back patio. Photo Doug Kohen



The conservatory provides a bright spot to relax and enjoy the view out back. Photos Doug Kohen



This pineapple is one of the many interesting wood details found throughout the Wall's home.



Rick Kattenburg in his Orinda office

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