

# diablo properties

The resource for distinctive East Bay homes

## THE COURTYARD HOUSE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLES MILLER,  
FINE HOMEBUILDING MAGAZINE®,  
2011, THE TAUNTON PRESS, INC.  
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A client who wanted to build a home on a west-facing ridgetop lot in the Berkeley hills hired JSW/D Architects of Berkeley. The property's spectacular Bay Area view competes with a robust, prevailing west wind and strong afternoon sunlight, but mild temperatures and ocean-washed air would encourage outdoor living, the owner felt, if the architects could solve the wind problem.

The house was designed for an art-loving Danish woman who values her privacy and likes to keep a low profile. She had few but very specific programmatic requests:

- A peaceful, quiet, restful, and restrained mood throughout
- Privacy from the street and neighbors on the north and south
- Balanced indoor natural light
- Resource and energy efficient
- Wheelchair accessibility to the main floor
- Outdoor living

The calmness and dignity of the home has been achieved with understated and simple detailing, a restricted palette of materials and colors, a generosity of scale, a lack of “heroic” or attention-grabbing spatial gestures, the use of high-quality materials throughout, and, adds Helen Degenhardt, AIA, “the very high level of craftsmanship and professionalism of the contractor, Jetton Construction.”

A south-facing, semi-enclosed interior courtyard provides wind protection, warming sunlight, and privacy. The courtyard reads like an extension of all the main spaces that open directly onto it. It's a connection made even stronger by eight-foot-tall sliding doors. The enclosure on the south is low and semitransparent to the sun, and prevents views into the courtyard from the

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Clockwise from top left:  
Simple rectilinear shapes engage the eye from all approaches.

Japanese grace combines with Scandinavian simplicity in a Louis Poulsen chandelier.

Green slate counters are paired with lightly stained flat-sawn ash cabinets.

In the courtyard, a planter box and beam tie the two wings of the house together.



adjacent neighbor. A downspout that includes a recirculation pump does double duty as a fountain, bouncing soft water noises around the court and into the house.

The house is laid out to take advantage of the dramatic Bay view, bringing it through the entrance, through the courtyard, and past the living room. The house is flooded with balanced daylight by a combination of strategies: Transom windows reaching to the ceiling throw light deep into the living room; the courtyard's light-colored walls bounce light into every room

that opens onto it; and skylights "wash" walls at several focal points.

Green energy and resource measures include PV panels, solar hot water, gray water irrigation, and Berkeley's first rain-water catchment system for toilets and laundry. Other measures include highly insulated walls and roof, fiber-cement exterior siding, radiant floor heating, no air conditioning, and a heat recovery fan. Unwanted direct west sun is controlled with exterior motorized sun shades on light sensors and wind overrides. 🌞

AIA East Bay is an architectural community spanning the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Napa, and Solano. Our many programs include education for architects and outreach to the community on vital topics, such as sustainable design, earthquake safety, and architect-related issues that focus on how the Bay Area community benefits from well-informed design and development.  
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