

RD

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN



FOR ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS
OF DISTINCTIVE HOMES

VOL. 2, 2019

Conscious of Context

RD

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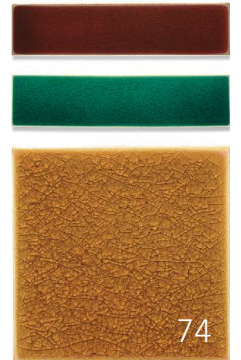
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On the Cover: MC38 Residence by Substance Architecture and Stroub Construction.
Photo: Paul Crosby

CASE STUDY





De Novo

A two-time gut remodel remasters a pedigreed midcentury house.

BY CHERYL WEBER

LOCATION: SAN FRANCISCO

ARCHITECT: SUBSTANCE ARCHITECTURE

BUILDER: STROUB CONSTRUCTION

It must be gratifying to return to the scene of a previous project 15 years later and find that your decisions were solid—and then be offered a chance to take them to the next level. Paul Mankins, FAIA, would know. In 2002 he did a top-to-bottom renovation of this mid-20th-century San Francisco house designed by Aaron Greene, a Frank Lloyd Wright associate who designed the Marin County Civic Center with Wright in the early 1960s. And in 2017 Paul was asked back to do a full refresh.

Significantly for Paul, the house is owned by his twin brother and his brother's husband. When they bought it in the early 2000s, it had sat on the market for six months despite its pedigree and spectacular setting. Perched on a precipitous slope on the northern face of Twin Peaks, the house has a panoramic view of the Golden Gate Bridge to the west, downtown San Francisco, and the Oakland Bay Bridge to the east. "It was not poorly maintained but had been subjected to one bad decision after another," Paul says. "Most people realized they'd have to gut it."



This page: The land for this midcentury house drops off at an almost 45-degree angle, providing unobstructed, full-sweep views from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Oakland Bay Bridge.



At that time, Paul looked at photos of the original house and set about restoring its formal logic. But the second time was the charm. Not only had the couple's tastes evolved since the 2002 remodel, but the trajectory of Bay Area real estate values meant that Paul was given virtually carte blanche to tune it up. "They weren't just looking to pad it around the edges," Paul says. "They wanted it wholesale reconsidered."

Time and Materials

The house is located immediately above the panhandle of Golden Gate Park, where the topography gets challenging and the streets are not part of a grid. It literally sits on stilts because the land drops off at almost a 45-degree angle, and the back of the house is several stories above grade. "Not much of the house is on grade because the land drops off so quickly," Paul says. "Neighbors to the north are probably 100 feet below, so nothing obstructs the view."

It's hard to say what previous owners were thinking when they added bits and pieces over the years, because the house has handsome bones. The roofline defines three distinct zones that carry from front to back on each level. A sky-lit, gabled central roof runs south to north from the entry to a bay at the back. On either side are two flat-roofed boxes, one encased in brick, the other originally in stucco. Those roof planes organize the living spaces. Upstairs, the entry hall is flanked by a powder room, kitchen, and dining area to the left, and the garage and living room to the right. Paul's first remodel opened up the 44-foot-long back wall of the house to create a continuous living area overlooking

"I think we re-imposed a rigor in 2002 that is still viable. What we did before is 15 years old, but it's not a mess."

—Paul Mankins, FAIA

the view. At that time the design team also realized that the window wall and floor plan were organized on a rigorous 4-foot grid and wanted to reinforce it.

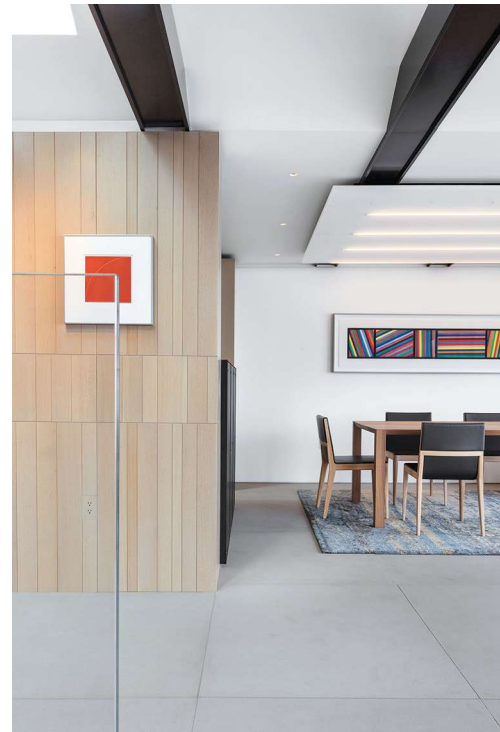
Fifteen years later the house was still in immaculate condition, but the owners wanted an interior that felt warmer. "Earlier we used monolithic black Burlington stone on the floors, plus cherry cabinetry and yellow-gold integrally colored plaster to warm it up," Paul says. "They loved the house but wanted something lighter."

What constitutes success can mean different things at different times. Still, it can feel tricky to destroy your own work and start over. "I think we re-imposed a rigor in 2002 that is still viable," Paul says. "The house was a mess, so you could consider wholesale changes; you knew it wasn't going to get worse. So there was a freedom that came with that. This time when we came back to it, what we did before is 15 years old, but it's not a mess."

In 2002 Paul was a partner at the Des Moines, Iowa, firm Herbert Lewis Kruse Blunck and worked on the project with Matt Rodenkamp, AIA. Soon after the renovation was completed, Paul started Substance Architecture, and Matt joined him two years later. This time around Paul worked with a different project architect, Jessica Terrill, AIA.

This page: The goal for this second remodel was to lighten, refresh, and simplify the palette of materials and to further optimize the living and sleeping spaces.





This page: A new blackened steel fireplace surround contrasts with new, lighter-colored flooring. A brick wall carries through from the exterior on the first level and now to the sleeping level below as well.

“Matt is a spectacularly talented architect, but if the same project architect had been assigned to it, it would have been harder to say, what do I change?” Paul says. “A new one was able to say, I respect what you guys did but I’m listening to the client in a different way and hearing a different set of needs about warmth of material palette. Jessica was able to say, ‘these things clearly worked and we’re going to keep them, but this new set of issues has emerged. How do we keep the best of the last renovation and address some of the new changes?’ We simplified the plan greatly in 2002, and we further simplified it now.”

Clean Sweep

Paul stayed with his brother and brother-in-law for a few days before starting the second redesign. That visit brought to light some functional issues on the lower level containing an office and the bedrooms, where most of the plan changes ended up taking place. Once again, the gut renovation was based on Aaron Greene’s strong organizational logic and led to all-new materials in a limited palette designed to unify the home’s spaces.

On both floors, the design team strengthened the organizational planes on the southeast and southwest by extending

the exterior materials inside. Upstairs, the brick on the garage wraps inside the house along the entry hall/garage wall. Paul had replaced this wallpapered-over brick during the 2002 remodel with new brick, and this time he added it to the south wall of the living area “to get a reading, from the inside, of that block of masonry that makes up the garage.” He also extended the brick along the stairwell and into the master suite downstairs, where it makes a right-hand turn into the bathroom. “It establishes the formal idea that there’s this brick piece that anchors the west side of the house and contains the service functions—garage, master bath, and dressing area,” he says.

The companion west side is wrapped in rift-cut oak that forms a wooden box on two levels—it defines the kitchen and powder room upstairs, and the guest suite downstairs. Millworkers matched the wood to the wood-look porcelain rainscreen chosen for the west-side exterior so that the transition appears seamless. “We found this porcelain material that we figured out how to install as a rainscreen and then had a millwork company match it for the cabinetry and paneling, which they did in a completely convincing way,” Paul says. “We didn’t want the wood to change color outside but not inside. It’s imperceptible that it’s not wood outside.”

In another moment of clarity, the central stairway that made a 90-degree turn into the hallway downstairs was reoriented as a straight run and dematerialized with open treads and a glass enclosure. This move opened the entry hall upstairs; downstairs it created a larger middle room that flows from the front to the window wall in back. “The lower level doesn’t get cave-like because the stair doesn’t block the views,” Paul says. “It’s just a series of planes projected off the wall.” The newfound space is used as an office and lounge, with a desk tucked under the stair—an extension of one of the treads.

Opportunities for shape-shifting also arose with the revelation that the north wall of the garage was not load-bearing. On the lower level, this meant they were able to take down the wall, redeveloping the master as a series of spa-like spaces including a bedroom focused on the view, a luxurious bath, and an elegant dressing room outfitted with art and a Poliform closet system.



This page: The kitchen is transformed from its original integral plaster walls and cherry cabinets to brighter, rift-sawn oak walls and cabinetry and perforated steel screens.





Following the Lines

Surely there aren't many contractors who can say they've gutted the same house twice, but Paul was fortunate to be able to hand off the job to Stroub Construction, the local builder who executed the first renovation. "We only saw the house three times when it was under construction," Paul says. "There was a high level of precision and we knew they could do it. In a house that is not brand new and sags in multiple directions, they were very good at figuring out how to compromise."

"There's a complexity to the way Paul works in that all the details relate throughout the house; it's a finely woven fabric," agrees Mike Cummings, who was the project manager for both renovations. For example, mortar joints in the brick line up from the basement to the top floor, where they align with the exterior brick.

"If there's a seam, I can assure you it's lining up with something else," says company owner Steve Stroub. "The brick corner at the living room fireplace was what laid out the entire building. It created a point on the lower level that gives you a dimension for a brick-wrapped column and relates to the width of the opening at the master bedroom and partition walls downstairs."

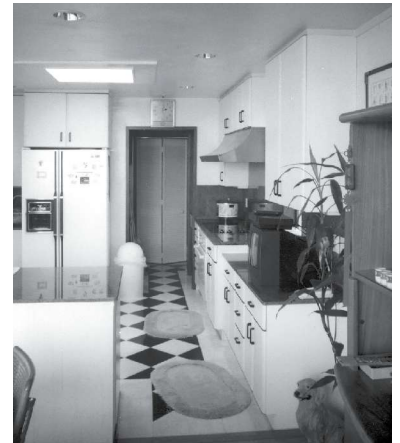
The detailing sometimes created a structural puzzle. Embedded into the load-bearing stairwell wall is a 12-foot-by-6-foot tubular steel beam with a piece of steel welded to it to create the cantilever. A cold-rolled steel trim piece covers the structural components, and the stair treads are wrapped in Caesarstone. The structural system had to be virtually immovable because if there was any give at all, the treads might have cracked, Cummings says.

The stairwell's 3/4-inch glass was another test of skill and strength, requiring about eight men to carry into the house. It forms a guardrail around the stairwell opening at the entryway and down along the stairs. The enormous, sloping stairway section, made of two pieces of glass with a seam in the middle, hangs from through-bolts drilled into the first-floor joists and rests on a small point on the lower-level floor.

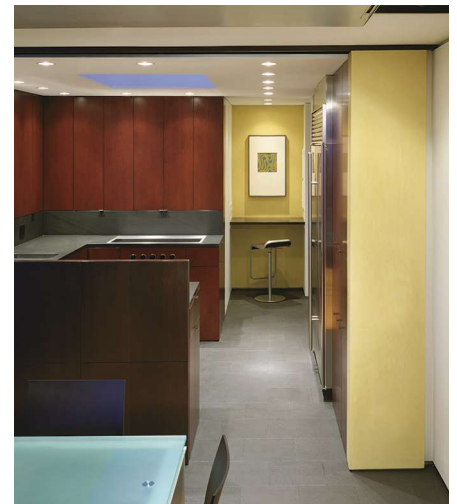
Visual tricks were part of the playbook, too. The wall design at the bottom of the stairs echoes the entry treatment on the floor directly above, where translucent glass

This page: The biggest changes happened on the lower level. The stair was reoriented as a straight run and rebuilt as an open system, bringing more light and space into a new central lounge area. The brick wall from upstairs now wraps the same quadrant downstairs as does the rift-sawn oak wall, reinforcing the design language and plan logic.

THE ORIGINAL HOUSE



THE 2002 REMODEL





This page: The team discovered the bedroom wall was not load bearing. Removing it allowed them to create a series of spa-like spaces. A leather partition/headboard wraps seismic X-bracing.

panels flank the dark, perforated steel front door. Downstairs, a Robert Mangold print hangs on a black middle panel, with etched mirrors on either side that look like translucent glass. They reflect daylight coming in from the north window wall.

If the ability to remove the bedroom wall was transformative, seismic requirements also inspired the master suite's axial layout. The bed sits against a shear wall containing a thin steel seismic frame. Its large X-brace was incorporated into the bed's headboard, which is covered in leather that folds back like lapels along the X. The design opens a line of sight and sunlight into the master bath behind it, where a column of water, on axis with the X-brace, fills the oval tub from the ceiling. Beyond is the closet/dressing room, with its luxe rug and inviting ottoman. "Hidden in one corner of the closet is a stacking washer/dryer, so the clothes don't really go anywhere," Paul says.



MC38 Residence

San Francisco

ARCHITECT: Principal-in-charge: Paul Mankins, FAIA; project architect, Jessica Terrill, AIA, Substance Architecture, Des Moines, Iowa

EXPEDITER: Acanthus Architecture & Design, San Francisco

BUILDER: Steve Stroub, owner; Mike Cummings, project manager; Jordan Guthrie, construction supervisor, Stroub Construction, Sausalito, Calif.

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Monte Stott & Associates, San Francisco; IMEG, Des Moines

SITE SIZE: .25 acres

PROJECT SIZE: 2,800 square feet

CONSTRUCTION COST: Withheld

PHOTOGRAPHER: Paul Crosby (2018), Farshid Assassi (2002)

KEY PRODUCTS

CLADDING: Marazzi Treverk Tile

COOKTOP/OVEN: Gaggenau

COUNTERTOPS: Caesarstone

DECKING: Cali Bamboo, Slate Bamdeck

DISHWASHER: Gaggenau

FAUCETS: KWC, Ava (kitchen), DXV (coffee bar); Grohe, Vola (baths)

FIREPLACE: Spark Modern Fires

FLOORING: Rieder, Fibre C

GARAGE DOOR: Northwest Door, Conceptual Metalworks

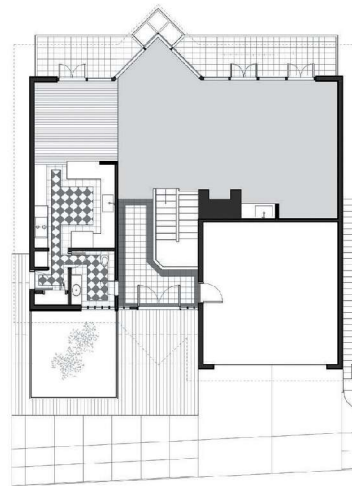
HOME THEATER COMPONENTS: Inca Corporation

KITCHEN CABINETRY HARDWARE: Mockett

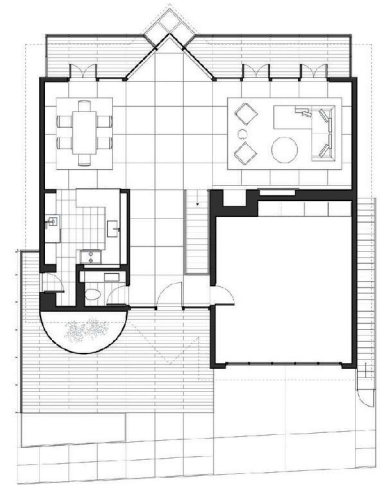
LIGHTING: Lutron (controls); Vibia, Delray (interior), Bega (exterior)

REFRIGERATOR: Sub-Zero

TUB: Blu Bathworks (master), Kohler (ceiling mount bath spout)



UPPER LEVEL BEFORE



UPPER LEVEL AFTER



LOWER LEVEL BEFORE



LOWER LEVEL AFTER





Reorienting and rebuilding the stair and opening a former partition wall connects the new lounge area fully to the stunning view and the natural light it brings with it. The blackened steel panels reappear as the fireplace wall on the main level.

Redo, Reinterpreted

There were fewer problems to resolve upstairs, but it too has a new level of purity and polish, with just a handful of materials employed in a consistent way. Four-by-4-foot cement tiles tie the flooring together on both levels and incorporate heat registers. “The registers in front of the windows are laser-cut concrete tiles backed with a stainless steel plate because the tiles are fairly thin,” says Steve.

Perforated metal panels partially screen the kitchen from the dining area. Here and in the living room, floating 3form resin panels embedded with LED lights define the seating areas in this large room, as do the Driscoll Robbins custom rugs. “We had to get approval to hang the panels because they do weigh quite a bit,” Mike says. “We tapped finish screws into the steel strut and had to make sure they lined up; the fasteners are structural and part of the design.” And the kitchen’s perforated metal panels reappear around the fireplace, which

consists of the original firebox with a linear flame inserted.

Outside, the semi-circular planter was updated with perforated metal; Paul also replaced the entry decking and garage door and added the porcelain rainscreen. “The rainscreen was hung on a steel structural system; we had one of our best tile setters do it,” Mike says. And photovoltaic panels—set at a lower angle than would be ideal so you can’t see them from the street—generate most of the house’s electricity.

In that spirit, the result is not just a repackaging of the previous renovation but a truer expression of what the original was after. The way Paul sees it, the house has become more like itself. “There are certain funny plan things that I think, why didn’t we do that last time?” he says. “But there were things we did before that are still valid, and we reinterpreted those. The character of the house is radically different, so much lighter. It’s a better house now, to be honest. They’ll live with this for the next 20 years.” 