



OUTSIDE THE BOX

THE 850-SQUARE-FOOT MOUNTAINTOP RETREAT THAT ARCHITECTS SAM WELLS AND DIANA MARLEY DESIGNED FOR TOM CARLISLE OPENS TO ITS HEALDSBURG, CALIFORNIA, SITE AND GENEROUS OUTDOOR LIVING AREAS WITH MINIMUM FUSS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHARON RISEDORPH/TEXT BY HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP



opposite: Tom Carlisle worked with husband-and-wife architects Sam Wells and Diana Marley to create what Carlisle calls his “precisely detailed jewel box of a house” in Healdsburg, California. **this page:** The structure is positioned on a twenty-eight-acre wooded site along with a lap pool, an arbor and an expansive terrace conducive to outdoor entertaining. The concrete pavers are from Napa Valley Cast Stone.



TO COMPENSATE FOR THE COOL APPEARANCE OF THE EXTERIOR, THE INTERIOR IS WARMED BY BAMBOO FLOORS AND ENGLISH SYCAMORE CABINETS.

Tom Carlisle knows what he's about. The eleven years he spent developing the twenty-acre campus and building for Pixar Animation Studios in Emeryville, California, was an education in planning, architecture and design. Those lessons paid off when it came time to build a house for himself in nearby Healdsburg. After buying twenty-eight acres on a mountaintop overlooking parts of Sonoma and Napa counties, he began his search for an architect.

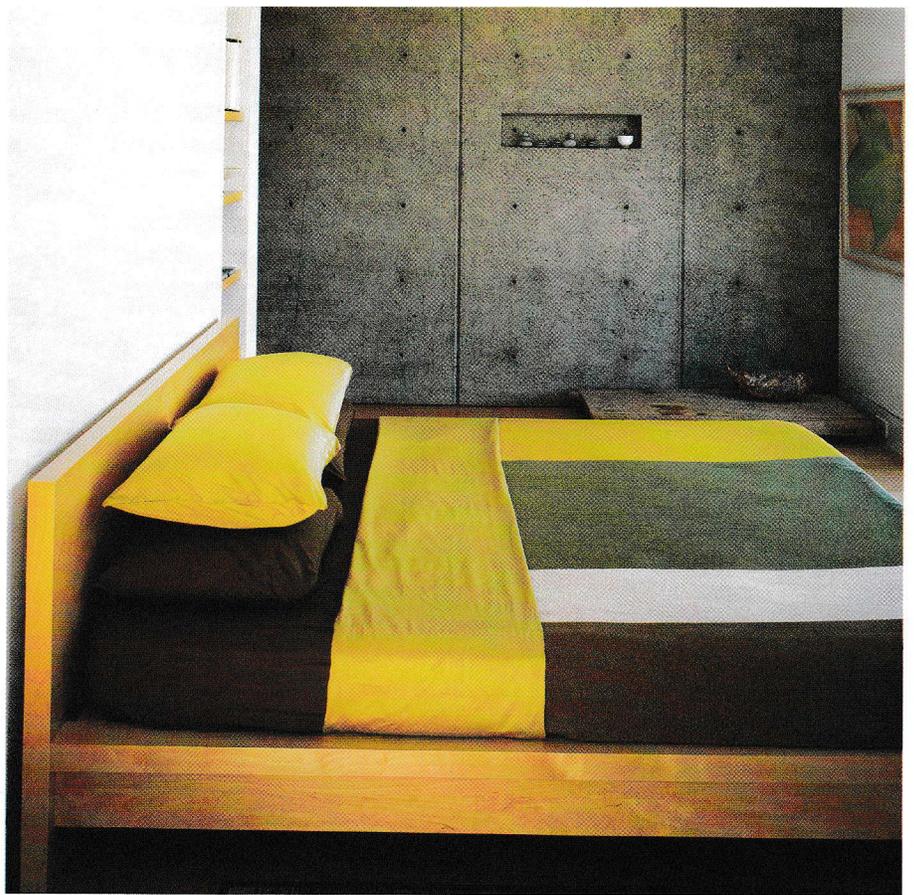
"I wanted to hire someone who was really good in their own right but who would work with me," recalls Carlisle, who was intrigued by the portfolio of Marley + Wells Architects, the Northern California firm of Diana Marley and Sam Wells. The husband-and-wife team had done a diverse array of houses, and Carlisle responded to the clean lines of their projects.

In turn, Wells and Marley embraced the challenge of building on what Wells calls a "thumbnail-shaped lot" at the upper extremity of an old logging road. Carlisle came to them with many ideas for a house that would meld the best aspects of a Zen temple, spa resort and modern design. "I wanted it to feel like an exclusive sanctuary—relaxed and serene," says Carlisle.

Respecting the rural surroundings of Sonoma, the architects and their client conceived a simple 850-square-foot shedlike structure with uncluttered interiors. Inspired by the metal buildings of Australian architect Glenn Murcutt and concerned about the wildfires that can plague the area, Carlisle suggested constructing the house from corrugated steel. "It's a modern machine-age material, and it ties into the agrarian aesthetic of Sonoma County," says Wells, adding, "but what separates this house from an agrarian building is the level of detail—it's more refined."

To get the most out of the steep lot, the architects nestled the house into the hillside and

above: Receding pocket doors offer a seamless integration between the indoor living area and the outdoor dining terrace. The Womb chair is from Knoll, and the elm chair is from The Gardener. **opposite, top:** A Miele coffee system and a GE Monogram oven are set into the kitchen's English sycamore cabinetry. Artemide lights hang above the marble-topped island, and the barstools are from Knoll. **opposite, bottom left:** The arbor, made of red cedar slats and painted steel, faces the pool. "I had hoped to express my love of modern design, Australian minimalism, Japanese austerity and the use of natural materials in building this place," says Carlisle (opposite, bottom right).



supported the east and north sides of the lower level with poured-in-place concrete retaining walls. “The walls allow the ground floor of the house to be built into the earth,” says Wells. “They saved on foundation costs, kept the building low in profile and created a private level that opens to its own little garden from the bedroom.”

Instead of painting or cladding the retaining walls, the architects had them sandblasted and outfitted with discrete niches for the display of Carlisle’s collection of stones, ceramics and photographs. The soft grey texture adds to the atmosphere of the downstairs bedroom and slate-tile bath. An internal staircase leads up to the kitchen and living area on the top floor. “We didn’t waste space on places you pass through,” says Wells. The east and west walls of the kitchen and living area have large glass pocket doors that slide away to a balcony on one side and a terrace, furnished with a table and chairs for alfresco dining, on the other. “Our goal was to take a small building and open it up to the environment as much as possible,” Wells explains.

To compensate for the cool appearance of the exterior, the interior is warmed by bamboo floors, English sycamore cabinets and a kitchen island topped with pale statuary marble. Carlisle, who worked with Marley and Wells on finishes, materials and built-in cabinetry, scouted out most of the decor. For the living area he chose a simple elm chair, a streamlined Ligne Roset sofa and Saarinen’s Womb chair from Knoll.

As part of the architects’ master plan, the house was finished first so that Carlisle could move in while a lap pool and other buildings were added to the compound. An outdoor shower and laundry room anchor an extensive garden, and an arbor built of cedar slats provides a shady outdoor living area by the pool. Carlisle’s passion for Japanese architecture influenced Wells and Marley’s design for the arbor, so named because it was to be covered with vines. Carlisle decided to forgo the plantings after falling in love with the structure’s pure sculptural presence. Furnished with a bed, elm chairs and a barbecue, the arbor provides shelter while remaining open to the breezes. “I wanted the outdoors to be as livable as the indoors,” says Carlisle.

In all, the collaboration produced a house that exceeded his expectations. “It imparts a sense of well-being and serenity to all of my friends, who love to visit me here,” says Carlisle. “And when I’m alone, I feel an overwhelming sense of quiet beauty.” +