



a little house on a hill

The owners of this Hawaiian jewel went to the L.A. firm Koning Eizenberg thinking they wanted a tiny rustic cottage. They wound up with a piece of art they can relish—and bask in.

No house should ever be *on* any hill,” wrote Frank Lloyd Wright. “It should be *of* the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together, each the happier for the other.”

If ever there were a house that perfectly exemplifies Wright’s dictum of organic unity between slope and shelter, between habitat and environment, it’s the one that the Los Angeles–based firm of Koning Eizenberg designed for a young retired couple who moved to the Big Island of Hawaii from L.A. Set on a tip of the North Kahala coast so windswept that the trees grow at an angle, the house seems from every vantage to be part of the surrounding grassy landscape (a former sugar cane field, it’s now a dairy pasture).

The couple, who met on a trip to Tibet, found Koning Eizenberg through a friend who taught at the school

attended by the architects’ children. “We loved the idea that it was a married team,” says the wife, a third-generation Japanese-American who was born in Iowa. “It turned out we had a lot in common. We visited some of the projects they had designed and their own home, and then we started to meet with them. We met a lot.” And the project evolved away from their first thoughts.

“Our original concept was a very simple cottage, small and rustic, but that blossomed into this lovely art piece,” she continues, visibly thrilled with the result.

To hold down building costs, the materials were kept modest: A plywood ceiling hovers over concrete and prefab-parquet floors. High-tech translucent Kalwall hangs between copper pillars (right).

Photographs by Grey Crawford. Written by Michael Lassell.



This is a story of people who didn't go seeking architecture, but wound up getting it," says Julie Eizenberg. "In fact, this is sometimes the best kind of client. If they're open-minded, they can wind up with a lot more than they ever knew they wanted for the same amount of money."

The house is really rather modest. At just over 2,000 square feet, the two-bedroom plan is deployed along a long corridor of burnished concrete that loves bare feet. It stretches from the open kitchen/dining area at the entrance, past the living room to an office, guest room and master suite (which has a dressing area, bath and tiny meditation room). The rooms are furnished with an unstudied mix of modern pieces and Asian antiques. "Everything we bring in," the wife explains, "tries to respect the simplicity and openness of the house."

The modest living room shares a fireplace with the dining/kitchen area: The dividing wall also houses a desk in the kitchen and the living room's home-entertainment center. The back wall leads fluidly out to the patio, with its stunning view of the neighboring island of Maui. A windbreak wall of native lava rock holds the outdoor grill, and a canopy of steel and translucent plastic provides protection from sun and bluster.

Surprisingly, the sleek doors and windows are stock items: relatively inexpensive aluminum-framed pieces (prefinished in black) that were mounted between wood pillars painted to match. The pillars give the wall its confident weight, while the rest seems to disappear into the distance.

A central fireplace sits between the dining/kitchen area and the living room, which is kept purposefully simple with modern Italian pieces on an antique Japanese mat (the textile draped over the red chair is an obi sash tie-dyed by the homeowner's mother).





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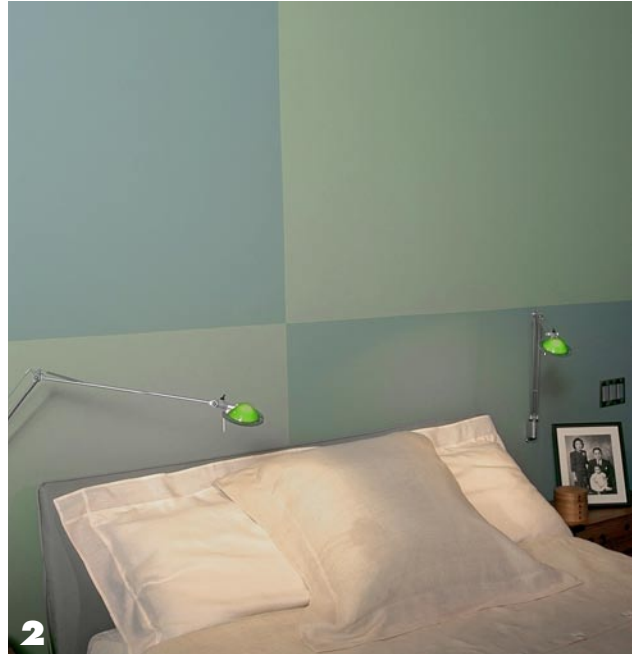
One of the singular features of the design is the rolling sweep of the plywood ceiling. “We wanted to tuck the house into the hill,” reports Eizenberg, “and that roofline was one of the ways to do it.” Is it meant to represent a wave? “We don’t really think in literal terms,” she says. “If it’s a wave for you, great, but we don’t mean it to be one thing or another.”

A refrigerator/cooktop wall in the kitchen—clad in maple—blocks the entry from the dining room; a shorter wall holds storage designed by Tim Andreas, the project architect. Hank Koning provided natural light wherever possible, including a skylight slot over the entry. Behind the industrial-looking sliding door (at left in top picture) is an ample pantry.

Eizenberg herself likes the serenity of the place. “Whether you live in the country or the city,” she says, “you still want to live with ease and grace.”

Meanwhile, the homeowners are thrilled. The husband has become an avid gardener and now raises roses and orchids. “From the kitchen,” reports the wife, “I can look out the front of the house and the back at the same time; and I can see the sky, the grass, the sun—and lots of rainbows. The surface of the ocean has a lot to do with the mood of the house at any given moment; sometimes it’s very calm, other times the wind churns it up. The outdoors is really part of our living area. It’s living inside a piece of art, but it’s very comfortable and feels like home.”

The dramatic sweep of the ceiling line is most evident on the interior walls. The refrigerator wall of the kitchen hides the entryway (lit by a skylight); the pantry is behind a sliding barn door. A purple Giorgetti armchair joins Eames chairs at the dining table.



Details

1 Entry to the house is through a Japanese-inspired garden by local landscape maestro David Tamura. The plantings on the property were chosen for their beauty, to help with windbreak and to better root the house to the land. Instead of downspouts, the architects used heavy chains; rainwater flows down the links into the pond system.

2 The checkerboard, here in the master bedroom, is a recurring Koning Eizenberg motif—inspired by classical Japanese architecture. Using checkerboards, says Julie Eizenberg, helps solve problems of foreground and background as well as scale. It's a way to make a strong visual impact without adding another material. Behind the headboard wall: a walk-in closet.

3 The “back” patio is a seamless extension of the living room. The lava wall provides privacy, protects from sometimes fierce wind and sun, and anchors the outdoor grill. It also in-

tionally cuts into the sweeping panoramic vista. “The view is so amazing,” says Eizenberg, “it just seemed too much to ask that you take it in all at once.”

4 One of the strokes of site-specific architectural ingenuity is the low-slung shadow-box window in the master bedroom, which sits in a wall, painted a soft gray, that virtually disappears. A huge plate glass window would have been prohibitively expensive, given the wind factor on the hill. The best view—of the neighboring island of Maui—is from the bed.

Opposite The master bath stretches along the axis of the house and ends in this appealing spa tub and a shower that's big enough to contain its own splashes without a door. The glass tiles are from Mexico. “They just have so much more depth than standard ceramic tiles,” says Eizenberg. **MI**

See Resources, last pages.

