

Waiting To Exhale

BY MARYBETH BIZJAK



Dave Adams

Home is a peaceful retreat for this busy couple.

For one Davis couple—two doctors with demanding careers and a young child—life is anything but tranquil.

So when they set out to build a house for their family, they used words like “serene” and “peaceful”

to describe the domestic atmosphere they hoped to create.

Enter Paul Almond and Pam Whitehead, husband-and-wife architects who guided the couple through the two-year design and construction process. “They wanted to be able to step away from the outside world,” explains Whitehead. “They were looking for something pared down and simple,” Almond adds.

No McMansion for this couple. They didn’t want an oversized house that dwarfed its lot, with excessive embellishment and formal spaces they’d never use. The wife had another idea.

“I wanted the house to be beautiful on its own—even if there were no furniture, it would be pretty,” she says.

Almond and Whitehead, whose firm, Sage Architecture, specializes in modern design, came up with a two-story house built in the shape of a capital H, with two parallel “towers” joined by a glass bridge. One tower houses a kitchen, great room and master suite, the other an apartment for the wife’s mother, who lives with the couple, a den and bedrooms for the couple’s young daughter and guests.

It’s a multigenerational house, but there’s plenty of room—and privacy—for everyone.

In the mother’s apartment, a long hallway leads past a bedroom and bath to a large, open space that she calls her “loft,” with a sitting area, a place to dine and, against one wall, a line of cabinets and kitchen appliances. The apartment also has its own private garden and entrance.

Located at the opposite end of the house, the master bedroom is as far away from the hustle and bustle of family life as possible. Because the husband frequently works nights and sleeps during the day, noise is kept at a minimum by sliding panels that close off the bedroom from the rest of the house and by high-quality (and noise-deadening) blown-in insulation. Clerestory windows allow the couple to lie in bed at night and see the stars.

For simplicity's sake, the homeowners used a limited palette of materials throughout the house: aluminum-frame windows, concrete floors, lyptus wood (a eucalyptus hybrid) for the cabinets and interior doors, matte-finish glass tile in the kitchen and baths.

As it turned out, many of their choices were environmentally friendly. "Common-sense greenness," the husband calls it. "We're not green just for the sake of being green," he says. "We do it because it makes sense." Rather than install flooring material on top of the concrete slab, for instance, they used the slab itself as the floor, grinding and polishing it to expose the aggregate, then sealing the surface. The result? A terrazzolike finish that is as beautiful as any flooring product.

The couple furnished the house with simple, modern pieces from Limn and Urbana and purchased all the lighting from Lumens Light + Living. To keep clutter at bay, there's a 200-square-foot utility room behind the kitchen, with floor-to-ceiling closets for storage. "In a modern house, you don't want a lot of stuff around," Almond explains. "All this storage allows the rest of the house to be clutter-free. There's no visual stress in the house."

The glass breezeway connecting the two towers allows for courtyards front and back. "We wanted to carve out nice exterior spaces," says Almond, noting that the 3,600-square-foot house takes up only 25 percent of its lot. (Houses in the neighborhood tend to be large, using up as much as 40 percent of their lots.) Landscape architects Annette and Mike Heacox of Luciole Design Inc. worked with the couple on the exterior design, which was inspired by gardens in the south of France. There's a rectangular lap pool, olive trees, a gravel patio and very little lawn. (Another green decision, says Almond, noting that grass is a water sucker.) "There are a lot of parks around Davis," the wife explains. "We didn't feel we needed a lot of grass in the backyard."

So did the couple achieve what they wanted? Yes. The house, says the wife, is like a piece of art. And both say they can feel the stress of the day drain away when they come home.

"You can exhale when you open the front door," says Whitehead.