

RISING ABOVE

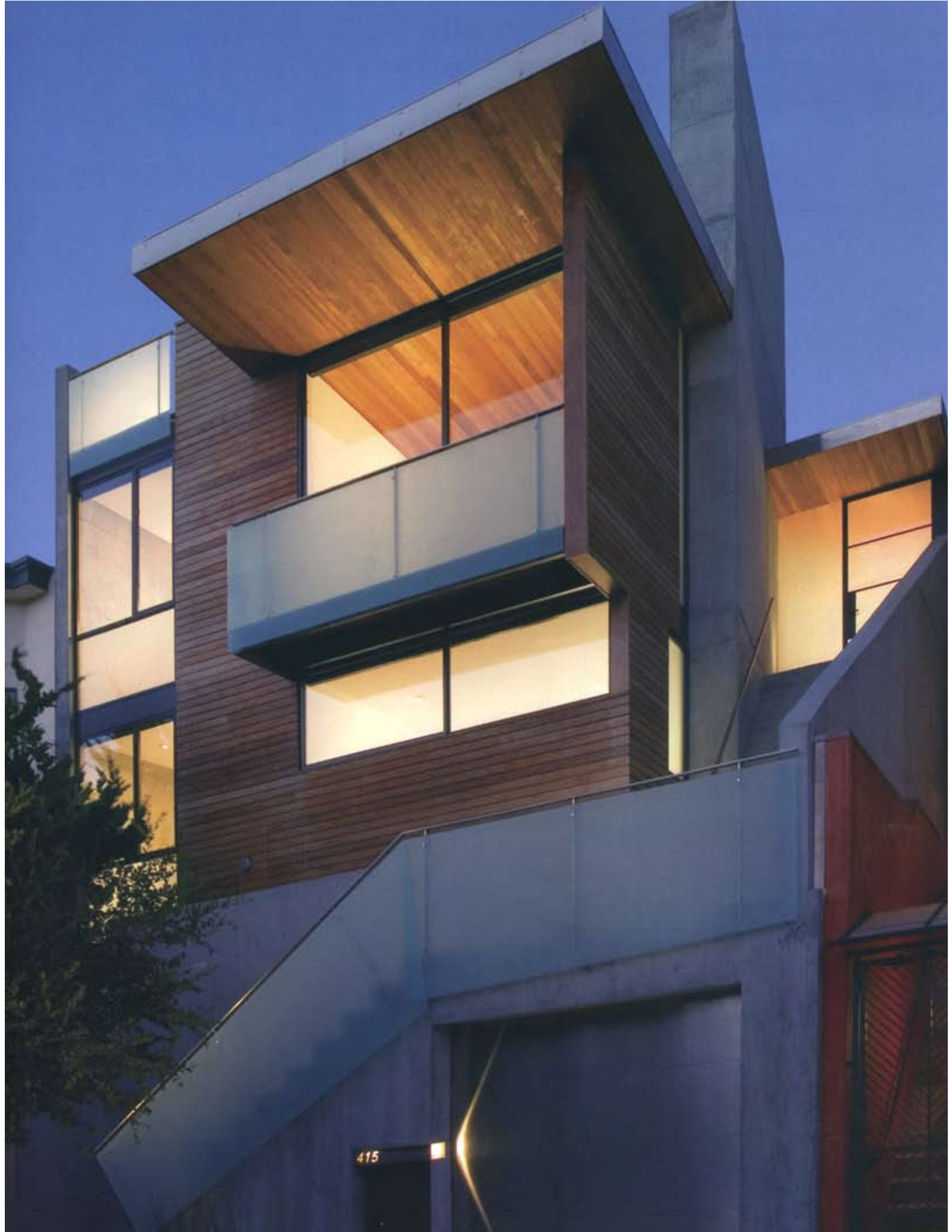


High in the hills of an old-world San Francisco neighborhood, architect Alex Terry's home is the epitome of modern

STORY BY KRISTINE M. CARBER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN KAPLAN

NOE VALLEY MAY NOT BE THE FIRST PLACE THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE, BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT YOU'LL FIND WHEN YOU VISIT ALEX TERRY'S HILLSIDE HOME. THE PROJECT EARNED THE BERKELEY-BASED ARCHITECT AND HIS ARCHITECT-BROTHER, IVAN, A MERIT AWARD FROM THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS, EAST BAY, FOR ITS INNOVATIVE AND WELL-CRAFTED DESIGN. "CONTEMPORARY IS OUR AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY, AND SINCE IT WAS MY HOUSE, WE WANTED TO DO WHAT WE LIKED," SAYS TERRY. HE SHARES THE HOME WITH HIS WIFE, COLLEEN, AND THEIR 20-MONTH-OLD DAUGHTER, SOFIA.

The structure was built in 1907 and set into a steep uphill site. "It had been 'butchered' with additions and was not up to code," says Terry. "We tried to salvage what we could, but the framing was essentially rebuilt." Today the 2,100-square-foot house has an open-plan living space with four bedrooms, three bathrooms, and a decidedly Japanesque feel—a modern ambience with a nod to the neighborhood's decidedly old-world atmosphere.



“Wood is more economical,” says Terry, “but with concrete you get a clean, refined look. It also has a certain character that stucco and other materials don’t.”



Concrete was essential to the design and is found in walls and the concrete-enclosed yard. “It’s a great material to work with because it’s low maintenance and lasts forever,” says Terry. “Wood is more economical, but with concrete you get a clean, refined look. It also has a certain character that stucco and other materials don’t.” Concrete also proved to be a natural fire block in a neighborhood dense with wooden houses.

When rebuilding the structure, the brothers raised it five feet for a better view of the hills and to enhance the indoor-outdoor connection. “By raising the house, we helped level the yard, which otherwise would be accessible only from downstairs,” Terry says. “It’s wonderful to let Sofia play outside and be able to watch her from the kitchen.” An added bonus is access to an old shed restored as a garden room-cum-office/study. “Colleen and I like to come here and watch the sun set or just hang out.”

The kitchen is another favorite destination since the couple likes to cook. They used stainless steel, in a solid 1/4-inch-thick slab, for counters and the island. “The slab serves as a work surface but is very linear, so it retains the clean, open effect,” says Terry. Floors are black basalt, and cabinets are Italian cherrywood to carry through the sleek, minimalist component.

Around the corner from the kitchen is the master bedroom, which also opens to the garden. Terry converted one wall into a closet with sliding, sandblasted glass doors to keep the room airy and to balance “scoops” of light from gaps between the wall and the roof. The adjoining master bath continues the gaps to maximize light in a minimal space. Above the stand-alone shower is a skylight. “My wife wanted a tub in the bath,







so I created one out of stainless steel," says Terry. "It looks like an oversize trough, but with a Japanese flavor." Counters are cherrywood topped with thick glass, a signature touch also found in the custom furnishings designed by Alex and Ivan, including a glass-topped table in the dining area and a steel table in the living room.

The pair chose wood for the facade and interior. "Our installer recommended cumaru for the floor, which looks like mahogany but without the expense," Alex says. "We wanted a tropical wood, and cumaru is extremely hard, so it doesn't dent—which is great when you have kids and toys." He also used ipe panel strips on walls. "It's less expensive than redwood and far superior in quality," Terry says. "Let it silver and wash it once a year, and it looks great." Plus, it's farm grown and environmentally friendly. The ceilings are cedar.

On the lower level are two guest bedrooms, one of which serves as a media room with a full "bleed" of windows looking out to the front yard. The second bedroom has its own entrance and bath so guests can come and go as they please; the room could easily be converted to an in-law unit if necessary. The laundry room and storage are also on the lower level, as are the water heater and furnace. "We chose radiant heating, which is easier to install and has a nicer heat than forced air," says Terry.

Terry wanted a lot of light, so skylights were added in the living area. Another prominent source of light comes from cantilevered stairs to the roof. Terry kept them narrow and transparent by using sandblasted panels, so each step seems to flow from one to the next. "They appear to float," he says. "You can see through, under, and behind them. Sophia loves to sit [on them] because she can peer through the metal railing to the rooms below." The stairwell opens up to a sunny roof terrace, which looks out over charming Noe Valley—and is another of this home's modern spaces that has been carefully designed to blend into its old-world surroundings. ★