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This Old Skyhaus

A HISTORIC HOME GETS SLICED OPEN WITH SWISS PRECISION.

BY LAUREN MURROW

IN 1949, IT WAS A LONE HOME on a hill, with sweeping views overlooking the Presidio. The first residential project by famed Bay Area architect Joseph Esherick, the house was an instant landmark, bathing in the sun, wind, and fog washing over Pacific Heights. But by the time architect David Darling laid eyes on it, some 60 years later, “all that light and openness that Esherick had showcased was obsolete,” he says.

Bought by a pair of capital managers in 2010, the once ethereal home was dark and cave-like, dwarfed by neighboring four-story mansions. An avid admirer of Esherick’s work, Darling was hired to restore the house to its former glory.

Since it was shrouded on all sides, the challenge was in reconnecting the home to the landscape. After sketching ideas



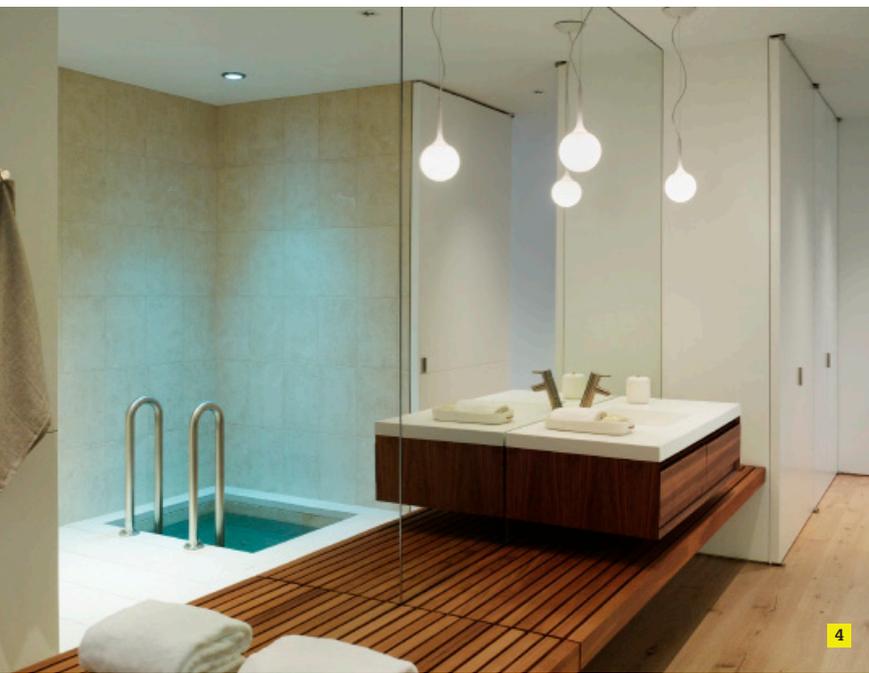
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1. Joseph Esherick’s original facade was left intact, while the rest of the home underwent a major transformation. The new rear facade reconnects the home to the landscape.
2. Refracted light plays off the home’s subdued palette of concrete, wood, glass, and steel. The sculptural screen is designed to resemble a tree stretching toward the sun.
3. The transverse bridge connecting opposite ends of the house was inspired by the atrium bridge at SFMOMA.

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for a green wall, Darling hit upon the concept of an abstract indoor garden—and punched a hole through the center of the house.

The Aidlin Darling Design team brought in concrete indoor-outdoor benches and a tangle of climbing ivy. Then they constructed the ultimate trellis: a 20-foot slatted-pine wall designed to resemble a tree stretching toward the skylight. “It was really hard to define or even describe,” says Darling. “It bridges the gap between sculpture and architecture.” The reclaimed-wood boards were computer modeled, cut from individual stencils, and assembled onsite.

The interior’s former wood-paneled walls were replaced with refracted glass, and a wooden transverse bridge connects opposite ends of the house. As a result, the multistory atrium casts natural light throughout the home, newly rechristened the Skyhaus. (One of the owners is of Swiss descent.) “The screen filters and carves the light as it moves through the space,” says Darling. “Now you can spend the whole day inside without turning on a single bulb.” ■



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4. A secluded ground-level spa includes a sauna and a cold plunge pool.

5. The private outdoor corridor is flanked by a reflecting pool.

6. The galley kitchen is backed by a chalkboard wall. The narrow space is designed to flow from the food prep area into the dining room.

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