

SEE-THROUGH

HOUSES

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INSPIRATIONAL HOMES AND FEATURES IN GLASS

Photography by James Morris



Ocean-going idyll

ARCHITECT: MOORE RUBLE YUDELL

California has an inventive tradition of private house design, forged by an equable climate, enlightened patrons, and architects eager to experiment. The Case Study House Program of the postwar era was a landmark in the evolution of the Californian private house, responding to location and to the individuality of the client. Ironically, it was originally intended to provide affordable modern housing types for low- and middle-income Californians, but—despite the success of the prototypes on an architectural level—American society had no means to provide mass housing, and most Angelenos still preferred tract bungalows. Rich Californians, however, got a new architectural aesthetic of transparent walls and flowing space, through which to express their lifestyles.

Some parallels can be drawn between attitudes to Modernism in the 1930s and developments in architecture in the 1990s, which saw a strong return to the small private villa. Now, with the right client, the private house can offer a level of experimentation and improvisation that might normally be associated with a larger public building. Moore Ruble Yudell is a leading American practice used to the challenges and collaborations of big projects, but the chance to return to a more modest scale and develop a more intimate client relationship proved hard to resist.

On the edge of the Pacific Ocean stands the Yorlin House, a luminous, tranquil oasis that turns its back on the blare and bustle of its surroundings. Designed by Buzz Yudell, John Ruble, and Marc Schoepflein, the house evolved in response to the constraints of its site. On one side, the nearby Pacific Coast Highway carries streams of traffic with attendant noise and distraction. On the other, sandy Pacific beaches provide a stunning and infinitely changing panorama of sand, light, and water.

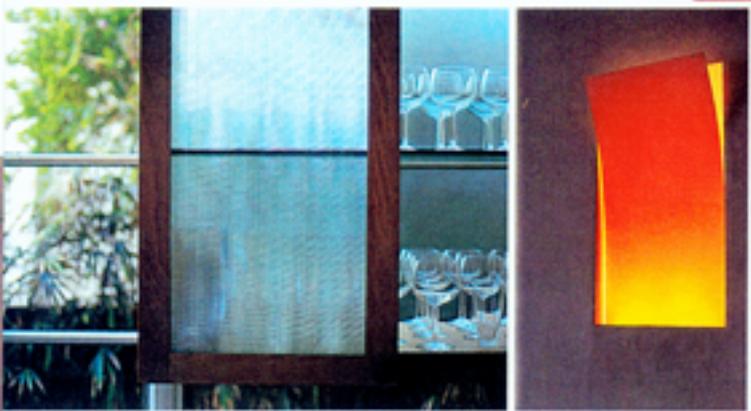
The house forms an oceanside retreat for the owner, her two adult children, and their families. Open only to indirect light on the street side, it presents a largely hermetic face to the highway, in the manner of the traditional Mediterranean patio house, a model often reinterpreted in the California context. This aims to screen off the highway, creating a sheltered and serene inner realm. Animated by light scoops, the roof forms a habitable landscape for spectacular views and protection from breezes.

The structure unfolds as a series of layers that sustain a gentle transition from the intense and oppressive car culture outside. Entry is through a courtyard of native beach grasses over a wooden boardwalk, emphasizing the house's connection with nature and providing shelter and shade. Inside, there



ABOVE Sea and sky are never very far away from the heart of the house.

LEFT Full-height glass walls connect the living spaces with the terraces, while sliding doors easily dissolve the boundaries between inside and outside. Overlooking the sea, the generous terraces evoke the decks of ocean liners. White walls and wooden floors reinforce the robust nautical spirit. A retractable canvas awning screens and diffuses the excesses of the sun's glare.



ABOVE LEFT AND ABOVE
Furniture and fixtures,
including wall lights, have
an understated elegance.

RIGHT A glimpse through to the
kitchen reveals space unfolding
in an informal series of layers,
representing a gradual transition
from the noisy highway on one
side of the house to the calm of
the ocean on the other.

RIGHT, INSET Framed views
enhance a sense of spatial fluidity.
OPPOSITE The stairs at the core
of the house are enclosed at
upper level by panels of glass,
diffusing light into the stairwell.
OPPOSITE, INSET Light casts
abstract, shifting patterns
throughout the interior.

are many different sorts of spaces, from intimate family rooms to more transparent, open social areas that connect through sliding glass walls to an exterior courtyard, a terrace, and the beach beyond. Stairs weave vertically through this layered configuration, imparting color, light, and a sense of openness.

On the lower entrance level, the space is fluidly arranged, with living and dining areas forming an almost continuous volume. More workaday spaces such as the garage and laundry are placed on the highway side, acting as a buffer to the living areas beyond. On the second floor, bedrooms are hung like beads on a necklace off a spinal corridor. Only one bedroom and an exercise room are located on the road side, and the bedroom overlooks the relative seclusion of the entrance courtyard.

On the ocean side the house is permeable and transparent, making the most of the stunning views



Inside are intimate family rooms and more transparent, open social areas, linked by a stairwell enclosed in translucent glass.





BELOW Poised above the ocean, the house is like a ship in full sail. **RIGHT, INSET** Entry is through a secluded courtyard. **FAR RIGHT, INSET** The street side, intended to screen off the constant traffic, both visually and acoustically, is hermetic and impassive, with limited glazing. Its character is reversed on the ocean side, which opens up to the stunning light and views.





and light. Recalling the breezy promenade decks of ocean liners, a generous wooden deck overlooks the sea. A smaller terrace also wraps around the master bedrooms above. The nautical allusions are emphasized in the sleek horizontality of the glass skin and the white wall planes.

Full-height glass walls slide back to connect the living areas with the external terraces, effortlessly dissolving space, while the changing play of light constantly animates the interior. A crisply detailed overhanging roof protects large areas of glass against potential overheating. The stairwell is enclosed by large panels of translucent glass, which filter and diffuse light into the space.

In spite of the urban density of the site, the courtyard typology and the flexibility of the sliding glass walls allow for different sorts of arrangements. The house is capable of accommodating one person or many with equal comfort. Connection to place is expressed by the urban character on the highway, by the marine spirit of the open terraces and decks, and by the varied relationships with carefully framed light and views.

The drama of the site demanded a strong response, and the architects proved more than capable of providing it. Floating above the beach and surf, this magical, light-filled eyrie is an idyllic retreat from the cares and bustle of modern California life.

ABOVE AND RIGHT The breezy terraces and a glazed bedroom eyrie overlook the creamy California surf.

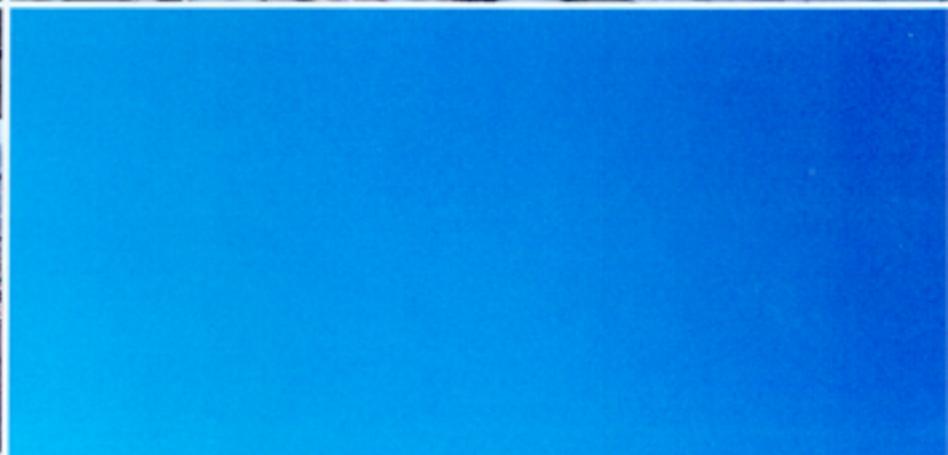
OPPOSITE, MAIN PICTURE Embodying a vigorous architectural response to the drama of the site, the house offers a civilized refuge from which to contemplate nature.

OPPOSITE, ABOVE LEFT Overhanging roofs resembling hat brims give shade to the large areas of glass.

OPPOSITE, ABOVE RIGHT Stunning ocean panoramas are reflected in the transparent skin.

OPPOSITE, INSET Sliding glazed walls separate the living space from the terraces, where the family can sunbathe and eat al fresco.





Dominating the shoreline with its glass walls and long decks, the house is a modern manifestation of the California idyll of sun, sea, sand, and surf.

