

california

HOME+DESIGN

STATE OF THE ART

INSIDE FIVE COLLECTORS' HOUSES

THE BEAUTY OF EVERYDAY OBJECTS

SCULPTURAL WAYS TO LIGHT UP A ROOM

Designer Betsy Burnham perfects the art of display in a Brentwood bungalow.



To connect the areas in front of the house to the side yard, Thueme (left) designed an aboveground tunnel as a passageway for the couple's daughter—and his own dog, Mei Ling.

Leaning 70 dizzying feet above the Pacific Ocean, landscape architect Randy Thueme gazes westward and says, "It's precarious to build on the California coast."

Famous for its mixture of windswept forest and crashing waves, the Carmel coastline is particularly intimidating. The land still beckons, however, drawing those with an eye for an untamed aesthetic. One such intrepid couple, clients of Thueme's, found their nirvana along such a stretch of coastline south of Carmel. When they first glimpsed the property, the couple were taken by the scenery but not by the undistinguished teardown occupying the site.

The landscape immediately struck the couple as a natural work of art, and they strove to match its beauty as they embarked on the design of a new house and grounds. "My wife and I love art and architecture," says the owner, who, with his wife, sits on the board of the San Jose Museum of Art and the National Committee of New York's Whitney Museum. "We needed to be respectful of the site," says the wife. "We wanted to come up with something that would not only be sensitive to the site but also make its own statement."

The project ultimately involved nearly a dozen designers, led by the late renowned Bay Area architect Gary Garmann, who "had his heart and soul in every inch of the project," according to the couple. From the beginning, they realized the project would take time. "This was our sculpture," the husband says. "We wanted to do it right."

As a key member of the team, Thueme received a directive to work within the confines of the site, which suited him just fine. "I like working on tight sites," he says. "I like complicated projects." The land's elevation drops 20 feet from front to back, with seaside cliffs and a steep drainage ravine limiting the building's footprint. Thueme's challenge was to create a sculptural landscape with spaces for entertaining, play areas for the couple's eight-year-old daughter and opportunities for the family to display their sculpture—all while maintaining the site's organic aesthetic.

The inland side of the house wraps around a spacious patio. Adjacent to the front door, the owners hung a bronze Peter Shelton sculpture in the shape of a T-shirt. The front door itself is an art



WEATHERING HEIGHTS

IN BUILDING THEIR CARMEL DREAM HOME, AN ART-COLLECTING COUPLE FOCUSED ON CREATING A SCULPTURAL LANDSCAPE TO MATCH THE DRAMA OF THE SURROUNDINGS.

BY TAYLOR BOWLES PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN



The spa pool—with its dramatic views of the coast—is tiled in the blues and greens of the landscape, save for one thin strip of metallic gold.

piece, designed by Sam Hernandez from wood and pierced with hundreds of glass studs. When the sun sets over the Pacific, light glows beckoningly through the translucent rods.

A heated spa pool—larger than a hot tub and smaller than a lap pool—is located on one side of the house. A favorite red rug owned by the couple inspired the spa's custom Bisazza glass-tile pattern. The surrounding trees and the ocean, however, provided the color palette. "If we had used red tiles, the spa would have looked like a bowl of tomato soup," says the wife. Another early idea had been to tile the entire pool in gold; instead, a lateral gold-tile stripe offers a subtle touch of glamour.

The view from the spa encompasses the crashing Pacific and a Balinese orb-shaped lantern. Ensconced in the nearby bamboo, the lantern is also lined up with the view from the guest-room window. "Art outside is perceived just as much from the inside of the house," says the wife.

RIGHT: The Balinese orb-shaped lantern glows in the evening through a stand of bamboo. BELOW RIGHT: Bay Area artist Nathan Oliveira's bronze sculpture. BELOW: Thueme created a small meditative viewing platform, enclosed to adhere to building codes.

A sinewy sculpture by Bay Area artist Nathan Oliveira (a friend of Garmann's and a former Stanford professor) is also visible from the spa. "We thought the sculpture was rather mystical, and by placing the figure out toward the ocean, we achieved a lovely juxtaposition of space—a human element interposing with the natural setting of the ocean," says the husband.





Thueme was inspired by the work of sculptor Donald Judd when he created the Cor-Ten gate at the base of the driveway.

Between the house and ocean, Thueme's work is rugged and organic. "I wanted the house to feel like it was plopped down in the sand dunes," he says. Native grass *Carex pansa* was used for ground cover, and boulders extracted during the building stage serve as seats around a fire pit created by artist Dennis Luedeman. Jutting beyond the cliff's edge is a cantilevered boardwalk, which provides a vertiginous lookout point. "We're right here on the edge of the continent, 70 feet above the beach," Thueme says. "I wanted to bring people out to the cliff and have them experience that drama."

Of course, drama and danger are frequent bedfellows—and to keep the latter at bay, the project team collaborated on the design of a meandering link fence. Custom made in Germany of thin-gauge stainless steel netting and mounted on sandblasted stainless posts, the fence looks like an interpretation of a teetering East Coast grape-stake fence, "which meanders engagingly through the long beach grass," in the words of the clients. The result is as artistic as it is childproof.

RIGHT: Peter Shelton's T-shirt sculpture marks the entry patio. BELOW: Bright pots of succulents and a dining area make the patio ideal for year-round entertaining in a climate that's not always hospitable to ocean-front lounging.

The art in and around the home, however stirring, often takes a backseat to Mother Nature's most impressive work—and the family never tires of the capricious canvas. Says the wife, "Every hour it's a different landscape out there." ■

