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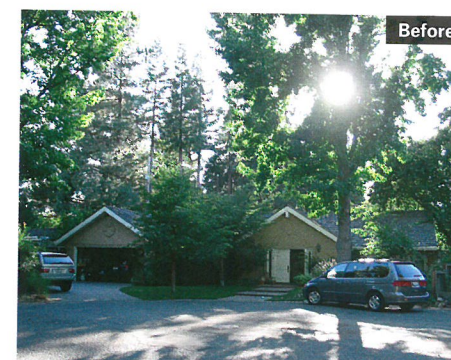
Commanding perspective

A man's home is his castle. It's a saying that resonates with this new house, which explores myriad ways to balance solid concrete forms with lighter, more ephemeral elements

Initially contracted to design a remodel, the designer of this new house says the project escalated until it became clear the only option was to simply start over.

Fu-Tung Cheng of Cheng Design says the owners of the existing house on site required a larger home that simply could not fit into the same footprint. Building anew was a better way to achieve what they wanted, and it did not need to cost much more than a total renovation.

"Their home sat in a neighborhood of houses in a similar traditional style – there



Above left and left: Before and after images tell the story of this transformation by designer Fu-Tung Cheng of Cheng Design. The original, traditionally styled house on the site was removed to make way for a new home with a much more modern aesthetic. The main house features solid concrete walls, poured in situ. The garage wing is stucco, and the cube-like volume near the entry is made from reclaimed wood from vinegar barrels.

Above: A lightweight translucent canopy balances the more austere, solid form of the concrete walls. Bamboo guttering is used for water run-off.



were plenty of quaint gabled rooflines," Cheng says. "But what they wanted – and what was ultimately proposed – was a complete departure. The owners had seen my work with concrete on smaller jobs and loved the modern aesthetic, and we could see there was a potential to do something similar on a much larger scale."

Cheng says that in experimenting with concrete walls, he wanted to move away from the "ordinary". In doing so, he took a very hands-on approach to the house construction.

"We chose to pour the concrete in stages, so it could be manipulated every step of the way. The formwork of each stage was just 4ft high, and was wrapped in shiny Formica, which imparted a great sheen to the concrete. Concrete can appear as a very cold, forbidding surface, but these walls have a blue-black tint and are hyper smooth and inviting to touch."

"Once the concrete was poured into each section, I introduced streaks of amber-colored concrete that could be pushed down into the walls. For added

visual interest at the front of the house, the upper concrete walls were striated to resemble geological strata bands."

Cheng says the resulting walls, which are 14in thick, with 3in of foam insulation, convey a strong sense of substance and permanence. And because they make up the entire wall, there is no need for wall-coverings or veneers.

"We introduced porthole windows to the walls in irregular positions, and added an elliptical-shaped window to the upper level. These apertures highlight the

thickness of the concrete and you get a strong sense of the real mass of the house – it is almost castle like. And it has a solidity that simply cannot be replicated in a house built from wood."

In contrast, a lightweight, translucent canopy defines the entry, which is through a large zinc and brass pivot door.

The concrete side wall extends right into the house, forging a connection between inside and out, and helping to screen the living area from view. An outdoor-indoor fishpond beside the entry,

flows beneath the wall to the inside of the house.

To relieve the austerity of the concrete walls and flooring, another wall beside the entry is covered in Japanese plaster in a rusty brick tone, with a glowing, illuminated yellow shelving niche.

"It was important to keep the interior warm and inviting, and this applied to texture as well as color," says Cheng. "We were constantly looking for materials that would have a tactile finish, to contrast the very smooth concrete."

Facing page, top and lower: A zinc and brass pivot door makes a bold statement at the entry. The water plants in the foreground are emerging from a long fishpond that flows under the wall and into the living room on the other side. To introduce a splash of color, the wall opposite the door has a Japanese plaster finish in a rusty brick shade, with a bright yellow shelving niche.

Above: Solar tubes positioned at irregular intervals in the ceiling bring natural light into the center of the family living area. A large Japanese lantern-style fixture further enlivens the space.



Two suspended ceilings in the main living area feature Japanese plaster mixed with a fine wood fibre. This imparts a textural quality that helps to warm the space, visually. Similarly, a large red paper lantern with twig-like framing, is a bold contrast to the gray concrete.

To bring natural light into the heart of the open-plan living space, Cheng introduced irregularly spaced solar tubes to the ceiling. These mimic the form of the port holes on the exterior walls and serve a similar purpose.

Facing page: Alno cabinetry was specified for the kitchen, along with concrete and stainless steel countertops, and a Cheng Design Zephyr hood featuring Venetian plaster. The backsplash is an Italian porcelain tile with the look of rusted steel.

Top: The master suite reflects a Japanese influence. The artwork at left is by Dave Ward of Sticks 'n Stones.

Above: This stainless steel soaking tub drops down lower than the level of the floor. It is paired with a concrete sink with mosaic-tiled trough.



Above: Cheng introduced a concrete Nemo kitchen island from his own collection. This conical piece incorporates a perforated stainless steel door that conceals garbage bins. The adjoining lightweight table, with its wood top and sculptural steel legs, provides another contrast to the solid form of the concrete.

Facing page: An extra-wide opening at the side of the main living room opens to a private terrace. Clerestory windows above the opening help to create the illusion that the heavy concrete is supported by the lightweight glass.

In the main living room, the focus of attention is the inset fireplace within the massive concrete end wall. Here, the concrete poured for the cantilevered hearth is a soft olive green shade.

Concrete also appears in the kitchen, where it forms a conical island with a 5in-thick countertop, sculpted to create an organic form, and to provide estuary drainage from a cutting board. The solid, anchoring bulk of the island is balanced by the lightweight form of an adjoining wood table top, which has fine steel legs.

Another concrete countertop runs along one wall, while the rest of the work surfaces are stainless steel.

The kitchen features another of Cheng's designs – the rangehood with Zephyr ventilation is from the designer's own collection. All these elements are complemented by a bank of European Alno cabinetry in a light wood veneer.

Other highlights of the living space include extra-wide openings to two terraces, which enhance the connection with the outdoors. One opening is straddled





Above: At the rear the house opens up to a landscaped swimming pool area. The existing pool was refurbished, with the deck forming the coping. A round spa pool was also added. The existing mature trees lend an established look to the house. Rooms on the second level include a study and guest suite.

Right: The original house also opened to the pool. The multi-gabled form of the roof was similar to those of other homes in the neighborhood.



by a massive steel I-beam, with clerestory glazing above. This creates the illusion that the heavy concrete wall is suspended on top of the fine glass, which suggests a contradiction in terms.

“On the outside of the house, we did keep a reference to the original property,” says Cheng. “The swimming pool is essentially the same organic shape, but we added a spa pool, and re-paved and re-landscaped the entire area. There is now a much better flow between the indoor and outdoor living areas.”

Designer: Principal Fu-Tung Cheng; architects J Chan and Ann Kim; designer Frank Lee, Cheng Design (Berkeley, CA)

Landscape designer: Ron Emerson Garden Design
Structural engineer: Calin Smith Engineering & Development Co

Builder: Chuck Hunt, foreman, Carlson Construction, Inc
Concrete subcontractor: Richard Sullivan, Artemio Zavala, FWS Construction

Concrete polishing: Gary Gan, Ganco San Francisco

Geocrete: Cheng Design, Inc

Plaster artisan: Thom Bruce

Metalwork, including canopy: Alan Sklansky

Front entry door: Hans Rau

Cabinet company: Alno

Cabinets: Oak veneer in Moccapine

Countertops: Stainless steel; maple bar top; Geocrete cast concrete Nemo island by Cheng Design in Celadon

Backsplash: Italian porcelain tile in Argento

Hood: Zephyr Cheng Collection Padova with Venetian plaster in aubergine

Cooktop: Gaggenau

Range: Wolf

Dishwasher: Miele

Flooring: Plyboo

Dining room light fixture and bedroom art installation: David Ward, Sticks 'n Stones

Decorative sconces: Studio Technico

Recessed lighting: Elco

Exterior lighting: Shaper Lighting sconces; Lightology LED uplights

Bathroom sink: Ikea Hollviken

Bathroom faucets: Vola

Tub: Custom stainless steel by Cheng Design

Story by Colleen Hawkes

Photography by Matthew Millman

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