TAUNTON'S

Inspired house

Outdoor kitchen ideas

5 secrets to make any space seem bigger

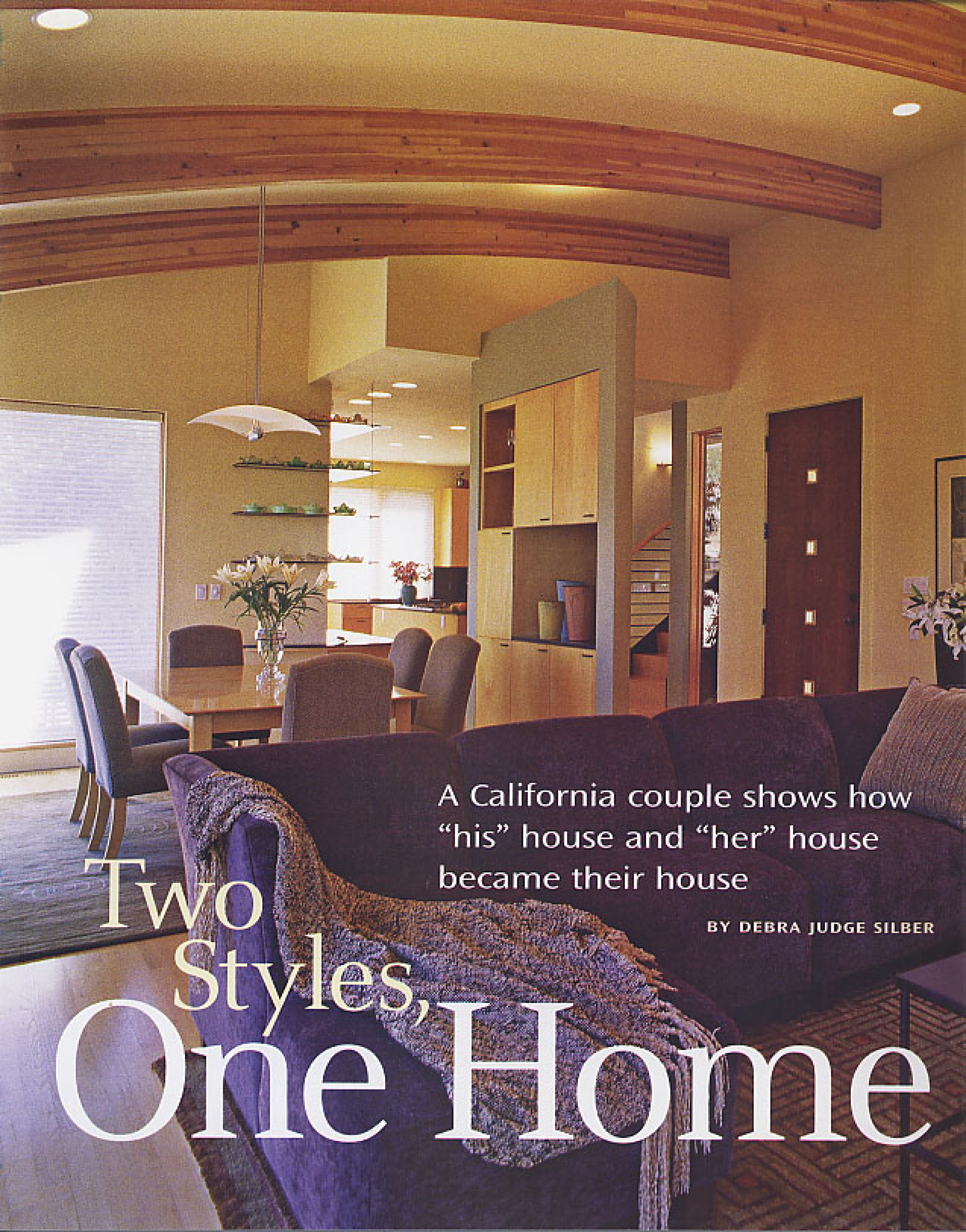
Strategies to save energy

How to store or display the new TVs

Choosing materials for your deck

Unique headboards

AUGUST 2005
NO. 11 $6.99 CAN $8.99
www.inspiredhouse.com



Two Styles, One Home

A California couple shows how "his" house and "her" house became their house

BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

Jan and Jim Lord realized pretty soon after they married that Jim's run-down little bachelor bungalow wasn't going to suit them for very long. But it wasn't until the laundry room roof caved in that they confronted the issue. "Honey," Jim said as he surveyed the mess, "I think we have to build a new house."

It made sense to the Lords, but Jan remembers their friends were aghast. "They said, You're going to get a divorce if you try to build a house together," she recalls. So, heeding their friends' advice, the couple started searching. But every day of house hunting ended with the same conclusion: The place they wanted to live was the place they already were. As ramshackle as the bungalow was, it was in a great location—perched on a hillside 20 miles south of San Francisco, with a view over the East Bay on one side and down a lush canyon on the other. "We decided we'd just rather stay here," Jan says.

But their friends were right about something. They might have agreed on the location, but Jim, a landscape contractor, and Jan, an artist, weren't even close in their idea of the perfect home. Jim's dream house was contemporary, unusual, one-of-a-kind. "I had no interest in some design off the shelf," he says. Jan, on the other hand, had her mind set on a more conventional

***CURVES THAT SOFTEN AND WOOD THAT WARMS** are two of the ways that Jan and Jim Lord brought their divergent tastes together in their new home. The curved wall at the entrance (above) guides visitors into the living room. On the other side of the curve is a flat wall that provides storage cabinets and display shelves in the dining area (left).*

Photos except where noted: Claudio Santini; left, Ken Gutmaker

CORNER WINDOWS *in the living room offer a two-sided view of the East Bay, while a set of miniature windows (right and inset) on the driveway side use whimsy to compensate for their small size. The color palette for the house is drawn from the trees and rocks around it.*

WHAT DO YOU WANT IN A HOUSE?

MOST CLIENTS COME TO US with a list of rooms, a few magazine clippings, and a rough idea of their budget. That's helpful, but we need to know a lot more before we start designing their home. So we ask them to answer nearly 200 questions, which range from the fairly straightforward (How many cars need to fit in the garage?) to personal habits (Do you exercise?) to issues of deeper emotional and psychological content (Do you trust your intuition?).

The answers can be startling, revealing, or intimate, and they always result in a lively exchange. But most important, they expose directions or desires our clients may not even have been aware of, ideas that result in a home that is richer and much better suited to their lives.

—Steven and Cathi House

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

Here are a few of the questions the Houses ask prospective clients. How would your answers influence your home?

- What kind of books do you read?
- Do you like the sun to wake you?
- Describe a smell you love.
- Describe something that feels wonderful to touch.
- Who does the laundry?
- What is your most important piece of furniture?
- Do you prefer to be in the bathroom alone?
- When you envision your ideal home, what image comes to mind?

Inset photo: Ken Gutmaker

abode, perhaps in a traditional French country or Mediterranean style.

After discussing their project with architects Steven and Cathi House, who specialize in contemporary design, the Lords both realized that their plans for a new house didn't have to fit into a predetermined mold. By focusing instead on the elements that were important to them—lots of light, a connection to the outdoors, an uncluttered lifestyle—the Lords and their architects were able to design a house that fit both of them. "It's light, it's open, it's uncluttered," Jim says approvingly. "And there are no other homes like this one."

Asking the right questions

Before designing the Lords' home, the Houses had them fill out an extensive questionnaire that went well beyond standard issues like the number of bathrooms or whether they wanted a formal dining room (see sidebar, facing page). "We learned from Jim and Jan that they wanted their home to be a sanctuary—a private, quiet place where they could be romantic and close when together but have their own separate spaces for work and personal growth," says Steven House. Jan's love of the inland views to the garden and Jim's preference for distant bay and mountain views translated directly into the design through the placement of her studio on the lower level and his office on the top one. And their desire for order resulted in the delicate glass shelves the Houses designed to consolidate their extensive collection of old juice reamers (inset photo, p. 61).

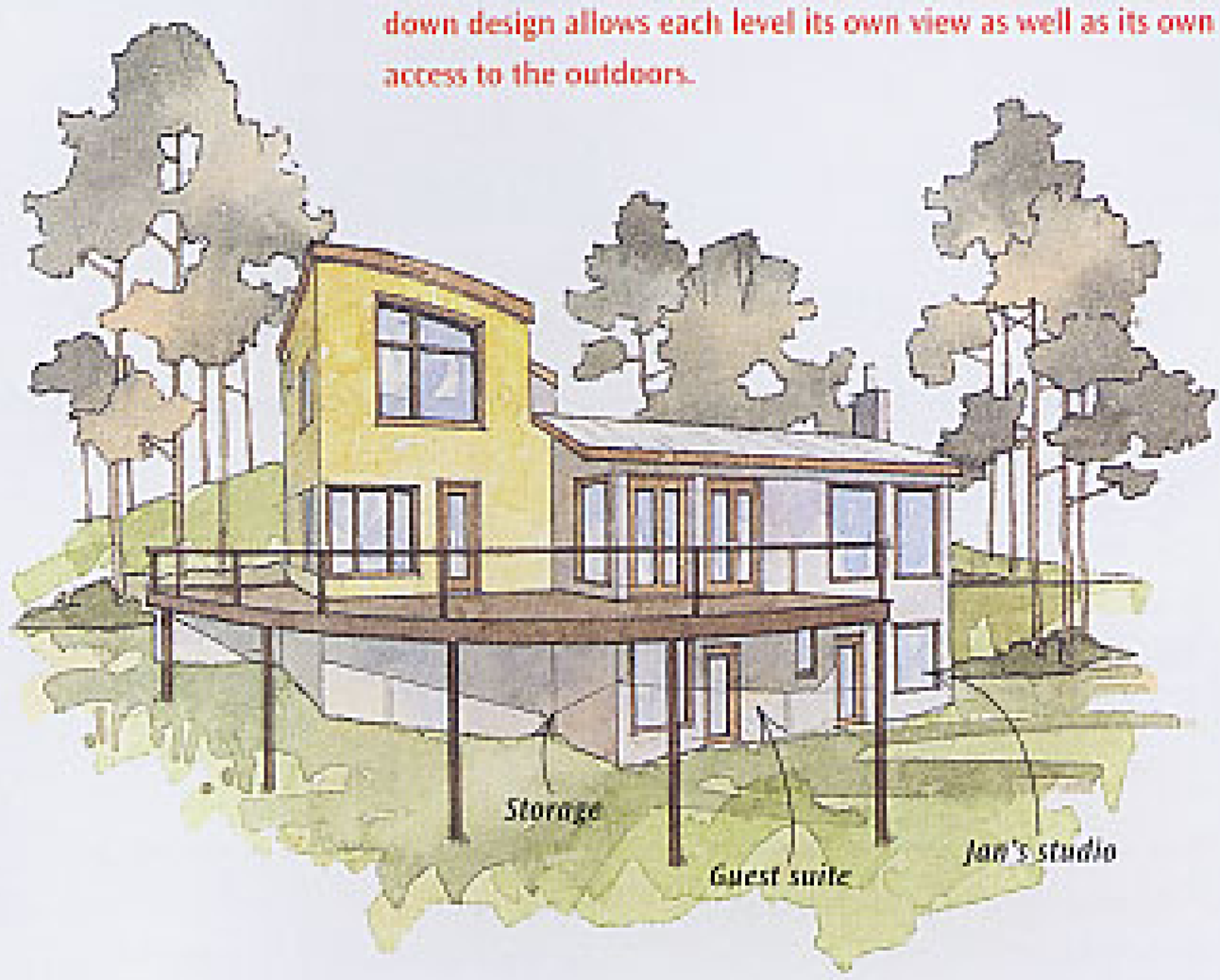
Making a material difference

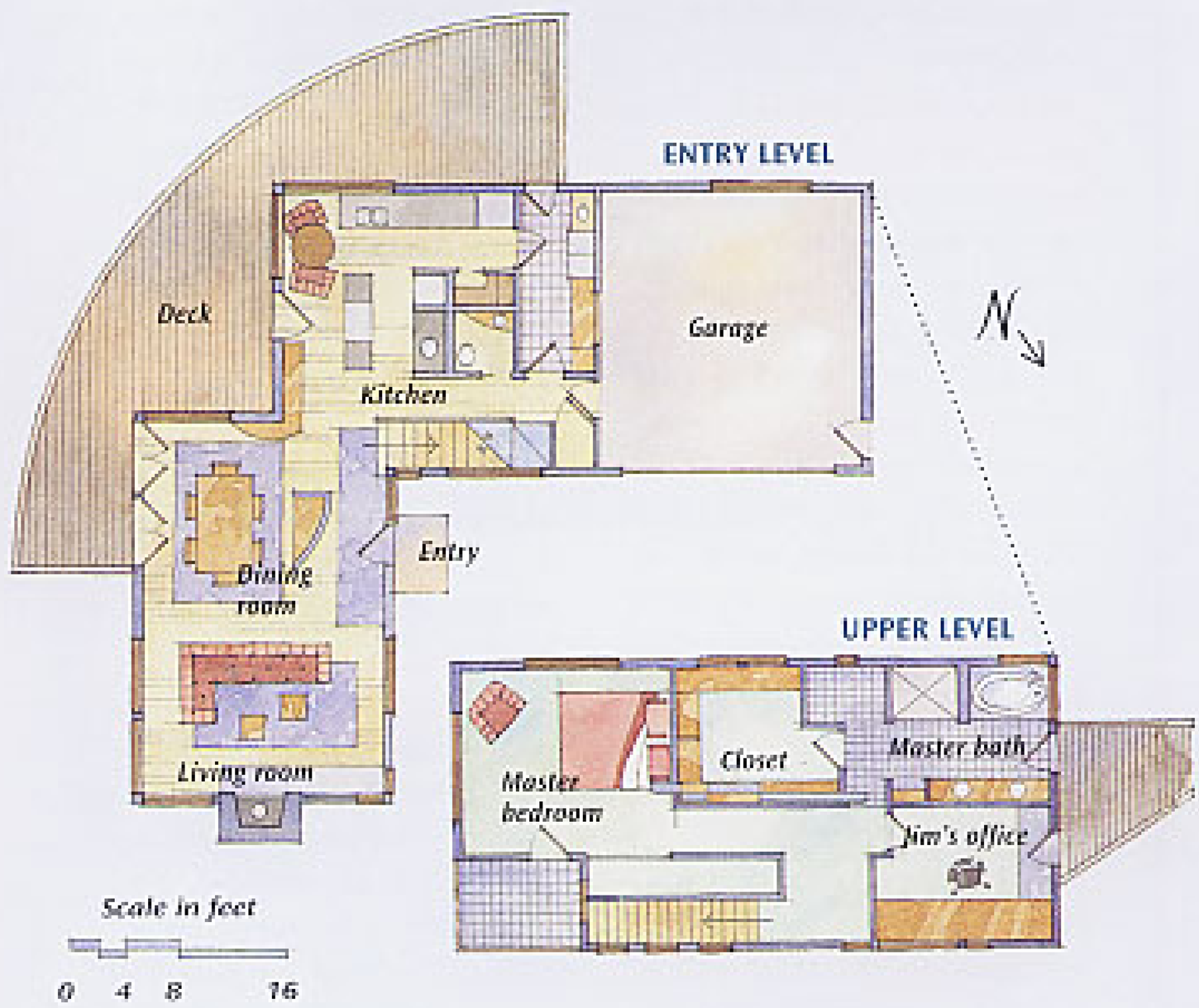
The couple found out early on that bringing their disparate styles together would involve a lot of give and take. But they weren't as far apart as they initially thought. "Jim's got really good taste," Jan says. "That is, when we'd go out shopping for toilets or faucets or whatever, he'd always pick out the one I had in mind."

Top photo: Ken Gutmaker; illustrations, Iain Stewart

RIGHT FOR THE SITE

Keeping in mind how much the Lords loved their bird's-eye view, the Houses designed them an L-shaped home composed of two bilevel rectangles that step down the slope. The stepped-down design allows each level its own view as well as its own access to the outdoors.





***THE OPEN BEDROOM** lets in air and light but also noise.*

DESIGN HINDSIGHT OFFERS INSIGHT

NO MATTER HOW CAREFULLY YOU PLAN, designing a home is a risky business. The Lords and their architects worked diligently to make sure the design reflected as closely as possible their notion of an ideal home. While there's much that they love about the house, there are some things they'd do differently.

What they love

The open views you get from big windows. "One of the first things I do when I get up is look out," says Jim, who loves the openness that comes from being surrounded by large windows.

The outdoor deck that wraps around the downhill side of the house. Jan and Jim spend a lot of time here and like the way it reflects the indoor-outdoor nature, both of the house and of their personalities.

The easy-access kitchen emphasizing drawers rather than cabinets and shelves. "I didn't want to be crawling on my hands and knees to get things, and with drawers, you can just see what's there," says Jan, who played a big role in the kitchen's design.

A luxurious bath. Jan loves almost everything about their master bath, from the light fixtures to the dual shower and the extra-deep tub.

Private spaces for each. Jim has his upstairs office and Jan, her lower-level studio, where each can work in peace. "It's so nice to have your own space," says Jan.

What they learned

Consider window coverings before deciding on oddly shaped windows. As much as they both love the views, the couple wishes they had more control over the sunlight streaming into the house. "We were so caught up in the aesthetic we didn't think about the practicality," Jan says.

Remember shiny surfaces need attention. Jan and Jim love the look of their black marble countertops, but Jan says, "They're hard to keep polished and free of fingerprints."

Submit floor coverings to the foot test. The Indian slate in the bathroom proved appealing to the eye but tough on the sole. "It's pretty rough and bumpy when you're barefoot," Jan says.

Think through the consequences of an open plan. Jan and Jim liked the open look of the bedroom when it was being framed so much that they left it that way. The open room is airy, but, as Jan points out, "The big drawback is that the kitchen is below the bedroom, and Jim's up at 5, so it can be pretty noisy while I'm trying to sleep." —*D.J.S.*

"It's light, it's open and there are no

In some cases, just a change in materials was enough to make Jim's sleek, contemporary style acceptable to Jan. In the living room, for instance, Jim and Steven House suggested metal window frames, which were too industrial looking for Jan. But she didn't mind the same style with wood frames, so that's what they chose.

Sometimes the answer came unexpectedly. The design called for the living room ceiling to be supported with angular trusses, another idea Jan disliked. They were at odds until one day, while meeting with the architects, Jan spotted a book opened to a photograph of Glu-Lam beams, an engineered wood product. "I pointed to the picture and asked if we could do that," Jan says. "And we did."

But there were other materials Jan just couldn't live with. For example, she originally agreed with Steven to have concrete flooring in her painting studio downstairs. In three days, she decided she hated it—it was too industrial, too cold, and made her not want to spend time there. So the Houses suggested covering it with a sage-green carpet embossed with a pattern that looks very much like the leaves of the eucalyptus trees lining the driveway. The Lords ended up choosing it not only for the studio but for the entire second floor as well.

Curves soften the contemporary edge

Composed of two rectangles, the house might have looked—and felt—too angular (see floor plan, p. 59). But the whole effect is softened by the curves the architects worked into the roof, the decks, and even an interior wall at the entry. Jan wasn't sure how she'd like being confronted with a big curved partition the minute she walked in the front door (photo, p. 57), but Cathi House sold her

it's uncluttered,
other homes like this one."
—Jim Lord, homeowner

DRAWERS REPLACE DOORS, *making it easy to get at anything in the kitchen (top). Specially designed glass shelves hold the Lords' old-fashioned juice reamers (inset), which they collect because they both love freshly squeezed orange juice.*

on the idea. "She kept saying, This curved wall is going to make you feel welcome," Jan recalls. "And it does. Instead of stopping you, it guides you into the house."

The design of the house allows rooms to connect without the use of hallways, encouraging movement from one space to another. And without hallways, Jim points out, there's not a lot of wasted space. The couple, who live alone, extended the openness to the point of leaving one bedroom wall open, a design option they'd later reconsider (see sidebar, facing page). But for the most part, having rooms in view and open to one another is just what the Lords wanted in their simple, uncluttered home. "I love sitting in the living room at night, when we have a fire going, and you can see the twinkling city lights through those big windows. It's romantic, and for a contemporary house, it's cozy," Jan says. "Our house is nothing like I envisioned, but I'm happy with it—just the way it is."

Debra Judge Silber is an associate editor.

For more information, see Resources, page 86.

Inset photo: Debra Judge Silber