

# modern marvel

Judges find plenty to like in this winning Del Mar canyonside aerie

BY THOMAS SHESS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTIN MANN



**Preceding pages:** The hillside Del Mar home of Gunvor and John Rehfeld was creatively redesigned by a talented project team, including the homeowners, to embody the spirit of Prairie-style on the outside and the best of modernist élan inside. Clever angling of copper roof hides solar panels atop garage. Stone is dry-stacked.

**A**T THE TOP OF A TWISTING labyrinth of narrow Del Mar roads, you'll find the newly completed Prairie-style home of Gunvor and John Rehfeld. This remarkable, organically built three-level stone and wood contemporary has been nestled into a canyon and sited perfectly to offer a southwesterly view of the Pacific framed by Torrey pines.

Bucolic as this hillside scene happens to be, it might not have been completed if it were not for the persistence of the design and construction team led by the Rehfelds, who worked with the late architect David Soanes on the original siting, and then developed the project with longtime coastal San Diego builder Jeff Fargo of Four by Four Construction and Jennifer Bolyn, Principal of EOS Architecture.

"What you see here is the fourth attempt to build on this lot," says Harvard MBA John Rehfeld, who is a semi-retired former CEO, business-school professor (Pepperdine and University of San Diego) and CEO coach. "Earlier homeowners never were able to get any plans approved for a new home on this site by City of Del Mar building officials."

But once Bolyn and team went to work, the project was completed in 14 months. Good communication between team members was key. "Because the Rehfelds also own the home next door, where they lived during construction, it was easy to hold weekly staff meetings," says Bolyn. "Early in one of those meetings it was agreed that

**This page:** Great room blurs the traditional lines of living room, dining room and kitchen. Dry-stacked stone columns throughout give a nod to the woody Prairie style. Custom hand-carved fireplace is of Jerusalem limestone.





“Carefully executed and consistently finished with attention to detail.”

— HOY Jury



Craftsman-style kitchen with lustrous walnut cabinetry is adjacent to the dining room set, a family heirloom. Countertops, including a taller island, are granite. Flooring throughout is mahogany.

in order to get this project approved, it had to be more organic and horizontal in scale and the whole package should use earth tones to match the color palette of the surrounding canyon.”

For exterior design inspiration, the team gave a nod to the Prairie style of Frank Lloyd Wright, especially with the use of stacked stone and its linear lines.

Here, Bolyn had an edge. From previous experience working with California’s strict coastal permitting processes, she knew LEED projects with horizontal lines that adhered to Del Mar’s mandate to use only 25 percent of any lot for a structure had the best chance of getting permitted.

And, a bit of Wright mojo didn’t hurt.

The new plans were finally approved and construction began in the summer of 2011. Bolyn says, “With all the initial meetings, I thought the homeowners would be very hands-on; but once I listened to what they wanted, they were willing to trust me implicitly, giving me a free hand to develop the design, make plan adjustments and enhancements on the fly. They both enjoyed the building process. They became fully engaged spectators rather than overseers.”

Today, the residence is situated down the hill below street level. To get to the main entry, a custom driveway was created. Bolyn made the best of the opportunity by replacing monotonous concrete slabs with arched wedges of hand-seeded aggregate in curving waves to draw the eye to the amazing dry-stacked ledge stone of the exterior. The mortarless flat-stone stacks share the spotlight with blue-tinted cedar siding and the home’s copper roof.

Nearby is a stacked-stone silo that makes a sculptural adjective to the over-





The varying heights of the side yard's railing add interest.

all design outside, while being an elevator shaft on the inside.

On the interior, the Italy-trained architect took every opportunity to blur the boundaries between interior and exterior. Yes, the exterior says Prairie style. However once inside, this residence is pure Jennifer Bolyn in its creativity. One look at the custom front door announces that this architect is in command of a modernist tour de force.

From the custom cast-glass front door to the far edge of the rear terrace, the flooring throughout is Peruvian travertine alongside manufactured mahogany. The main level accommodates guest suite, powder room, library niche, kitchen and great room that opens onto a spacious terrace and garden. What steals the show is how Bolyn uses natural light. Italian floor-to-ceiling and casement windows provide graceful transitions between private interior spaces and the outdoors. An aging-in-place residential elevator, with the master bedroom, bath suites and private terrace occupying the top floor, connects the 4,500-square-foot tri-level.

Bolyn was bolder than Wright when it came to ceiling height, coming in at 11 feet compared with Wright's low 7-foot design vocabulary. The full footprint of the main level is duplicated in the subterranean level, which has media room and bar area, home office, wine storage, two bedrooms and two baths.

Asked what she considers her signature design achievement, Bolyn is proud of the custom fireplace in the great room, which is laid in horizontal slabs of imported white Jerusalem stone with a claw chisel finish that is separated by thin cast-glass spacers.

Opposite the fireplace is a custom Design Studio West kitchen. Here is where the mahogany-veneer cabinets and porcelain



Patio furnishings offer a comfortable place to view the Pacific through Torrey pines.

glass blacksplash and stone countertops give the space its Prairie/Arts & Crafts appeal.

Overall craftsmanship is evident in this home. Its meticulous construction comes from the rapport between architect and contractor. This is the eighth project Bolyn has teamed with Four By Four's Jeff Fargo and site supervisor Greg van Leeuwen.

"We can't say enough about the builders," says John Rehfeld. "Jeff and Greg played an important ongoing role in the give and take of the weekly meetings. It was good dialog and decision making between the owners, builder and the architect."

Finally, landscape architect James Benedetti provided the landscape master plans, while designer Lisbet Thoresen

selected colors and textures that complement the home's color palette, especially the bluish-grey-tinted exterior cedar. For example, Arabian lilac with bi-color foliage of soft purple and pale green sets nicely against the green-tinted plaster exterior walls. And, 'Black Bird' euphorbia was picked for its spiky dark-purple foliage to accent the stonework.

To sum up, John Rehfeld points out that, "Most people are frustrated with their building experience but after 15 months we:

"Still like our architect.

"Still like our builder.

"And still like each other!"

What's not to like? ♦



Architect Jennifer Bolyn

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