How to blend the outdoors and indoors, in ways that'll wow your guests

By BONNIE MCCARTHY APR 06, 2019 | 7:00 AM

Smooth plaster volumes on a stone plinth are fused together on the sloping site with terraced planters incorporating drought tolerant plantings. (Roger Davies)

Earth, sea, wind and sky are as much a part of the homes Los Angeles-based architect Grant Kirkpatrick designs as the wood, steel, glass and stone he uses to build them: Sliding walls erase boundaries between inside and out, floor-to-ceiling windows frame the sunset and cantilevered decks give the impression of soaring.

For Kirkpatrick and his team at KAA Design Group, designing a new home is about rendering a sense of place and lifestyle. “I want to extract the most out of the piece of property that my clients have either paid dearly for or love to death,” said Kirkpatrick. “It is also about mining who they are and how they want to live.”

In order to do that, Kirkpatrick leans on six guiding principles that he calls Reveal, Weave, Sculpt, Delight, Craft and Levitate, a philosophy he recently detailed in his third book, “California Contemporary” (Princeton Architectural Press).

We toured a Manhattan Beach KAA home included in the book to experience Kirkpatrick’s ideals in real life. The aesthetic was apparent from the curb.

Reveal

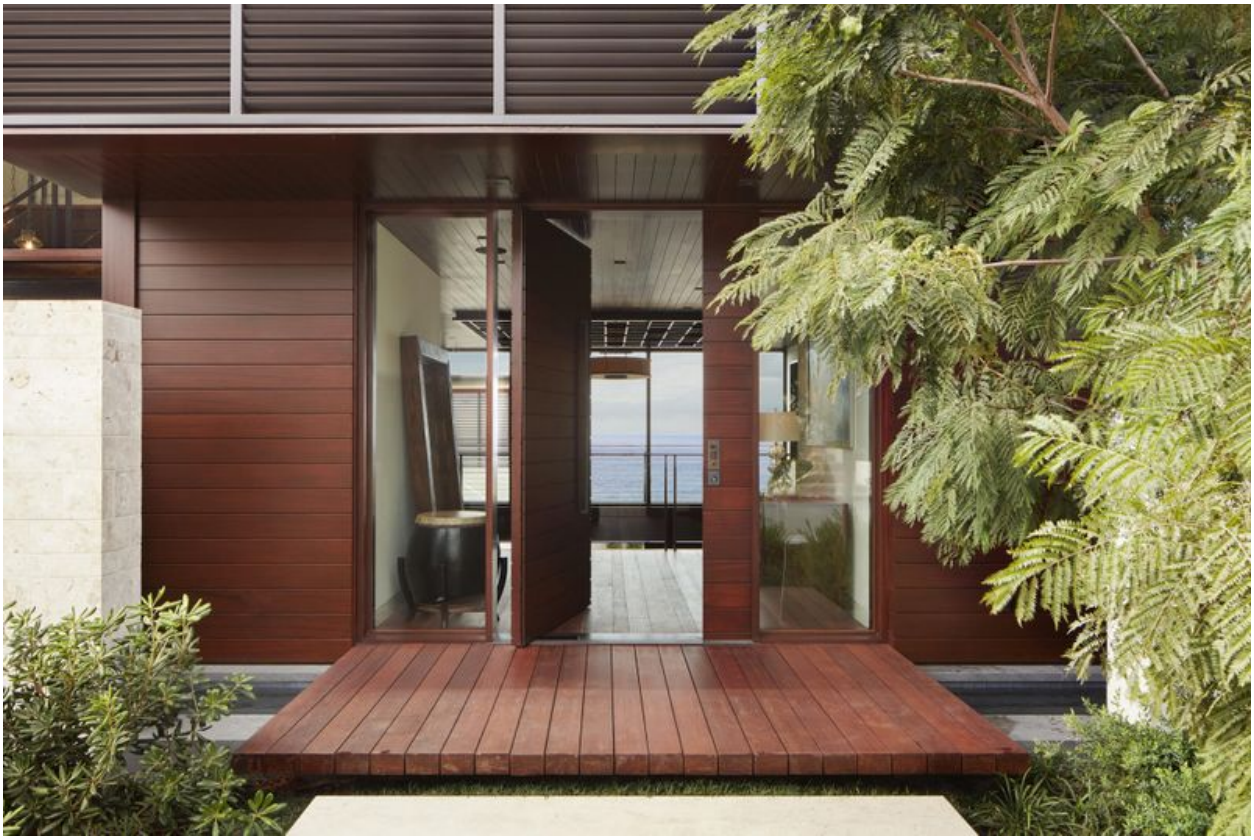
Living on three levels incorporates the upside down plan with dining and living areas on the uppermost floors; floating eaves, decks, and planes of glass enhance the open planning overlooking the pool area below and ocean beyond.
(Roger Davies)

“Reveal is about materials,” Kirkpatrick said, “using materials that have integrity, that create timelessness and connect to nature.”

KAA project manager Todd Paolillo said coquina stone, a natural coral-like material that features fossilized seashells, was used on walls throughout the property, as well as such materials as walnut flooring, stained Douglas fir beams, Ipe wood decking, mahogany siding and doors, and oil-rubbed bronze accent metalwork and hardware.

Coffered ceiling work was inlaid with grass cloth, and a wall in the guest bedroom shimmers with mother of pearl tiling. The four-story home's elevator was upholstered with leather. "People forget that these [small spaces] are opportunities to do something special," said Paolillo, who credited Caroline Burke of Caroline Burke Designs & Associates for the project's skillfully integrated interiors.

Weave



The main entry and koi pond bridge offer a dramatic focal point. The horizontal, mahogany wood siding, metal scrim louvers, and stone joints highlight the distant horizon line of ocean and sky. (Roger Davies)

“Weave is basically the seamless, indoor-outdoor living that is fundamental to our work here in California,” Kirkpatrick said. “Living with that connection to nature makes you feel good.”

For the Manhattan Beach property located in the Sand section of town, this principle is achieved via floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors that disappear into walls in the family room for easy access to the pool, patio and basketball court. An outdoor loggia is appointed with a fireplace and water feature.

In the dining room, a wall of motorized windows slides open to a landscaped atrium. Although street-facing, the dining room is shielded from view by plantings and adjustable louvered screens. Paolillo said, “At night with the lights on, this room glows — it’s like a lantern.”

Sculpt

The kitchen and family areas on the uppermost floor are the hub of this home, which features an expansive deck and ocean views beyond. (Roger Davies)

“Sculpt refers to form, scale and proportion,” said Kirkpatrick. “It’s the notion that our eye finds things pleasing because the scale is right.”

Upon entering the Manhattan Beach home, the eye is immediately drawn across the soaring living room to a stunning view of the sparkling ocean beyond.

“The heart of the house is this double-height atrium,” Paolillo said of the dramatic, open-concept living space (including the living room, kitchen and

home office) that overlooks the family room and at-home bar below. “It’s the core of the house,” said Paolillo.

Delight

Kirkpatrick said the element of delight is essential to his home design and falls somewhere between whimsy and imperfection. “You’re taking the edge off what might otherwise be something that is too serious,” he said.

That means turning a surfboard into a light fixture over the pool table, designing an Instagram-worthy walk-in veggie fridge (just like Yolanda Foster’s on “Housewives of Beverly Hills”) or creating a whimsical Disney-themed game room in the basement — which is what they did here.

Craft

Kirkpatrick said this next principle refers to the idea of creating a finely wrought home using the work of craftspeople and artisans. “Craft is not necessarily a unique idea,” Kirkpatrick said, “but it is very, very important to us and to our clients too. … When a complex object, like a home, is done with pride and finely crafted, it has aspects of longevity and even low maintenance that can last for generations.”

Drawing upon inspiration established by the homeowners, the Manhattan Beach project includes an ornate, hand-carved door from Thailand and hand-carved wooden screens in the main living area re-created to match a door the couple had loved in the Vietnamese hotel where he proposed.

Levitate

The guest bedroom incorporates generous views to gardens and adjacent open spaces. (Roger Davies)

“If you look at this house, the points of levitation are manyfold,” Kirkpatrick said. “As you arrive, you cross a wooden porch in front of the door that is set over a body of water. … There is a sense of levitation, transition; it’s the idea that you’re leaving the outside world and coming to this place of repose and calm as you enter.”

On the opposite side of the house, large, cantilevered terraces overlook the Pacific and exemplify levitation while an extended roofline recalls the wings of a bird. “Whether you are just looking at them or standing on a cantilevered balcony two or three stories up,” he said, “they are all ways to elevate the human spirit.”

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