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Settled on top of a rocky Californian coastal cliff at Laguna Beach, this striking residence is the fulfilment of the owner's every wish: a relaxing beach house for the entire family with a view of the Pacific Ocean.

The owner wanted a comfortable home from which to enjoy the view and natural environment, together with family and friends. The mild coastal climate allows for a seamless transition from interior to exterior spaces. The Rockledge design consists of a main house and a free-standing guesthouse arranged around a series of interconnected courtyards. Local drought-resistant vegetation is the interface between the various outdoor areas. Hidden sliding doors and continuity in materials, both indoor and outdoor, help blur the distinction between interior and exterior.

Materials and design were the result of a desire to reflect the origin of colours and textures of the original site. Indoor and outdoor living were orchestrated by a balance between privacy, common areas, and intimacy. Art by Guy and Laddie John Dill, Odu Noger, and Edward Lentsch lend an ambience of meditation to Rockledge - a place where the ocean and heavens become one.

The great hall is a large, open surface. Variations in floor height help define the rooms and facilitate shifts in material. Large sliding doors open the room to the breathtaking outside world and blur the line between interior and exterior spaces. Suspended above the Pacific Ocean, the bedroom expresses an intimate connection with the textures and colours of the coastline

ROCKLEDGE

BY HORST ARCHITECTS AND ARIA DESIGN





through its simplicity and materials. The natural wood floor is reminiscent of driftwood, and the suede bed platform floats above it. Frameless windows and a custom-carved side table serve to frame the gorgeous view. Minimal furnishing does not detract from the wide panorama view across the ocean. In the bathroom, a flowing floorplan combines luxury with functionality and a spa-like ambiance. Lighting is strategically placed to highlight unique aspects of the room, such as a glass tile wall and the centrally positioned bathtub.

Imagicasa spoke with Horst and Arianna Noppenberger, the driving force behind Horst Architects and Aria Design. The couple's complementary careers enhance and emphasize each other. They work together on several projects, including Rockledge — he as the cutting-edge architect known for his modernistic buildings, she as a highly regarded interior designer with contemporary European flair.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SIGNATURE LOOK AND STYLE?

Horst: "Though we try to avoid the majesty related to one single style, our work is at home among works by architects from the middle of the previous century, such as Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra. We approach every project as if it is the precise answer to all aspects of a plan, including the cultural, functional and aesthetic demands of our customers. Our goal is to create a design that combines solid technical knowledge and expertise with fantasy. This approach supersedes limitations of style and energizes every project with a sense of individuality and timelessness. Regarding our signature look, we are attracted to minimalism, which we see as a response to commercial vulgarity and commercialization of culture. Our work is known for blurring the distinction between interior and exterior spaces. There is a mindful aspect to our work which is achieved through simplicity and reticence."

WHAT ARE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN YOUR FIELD?

Horst: "Working along the coastline of California, particularly Laguna Beach where we are located, we are often confronted with aesthetic constraints imposed by Design Review Boards. Generally speaking, these committees are composed of members from the general public who, though well-meaning, do not have the professional background or solid understanding of art and design which is necessary to promote meaningful and original projects. For this reason, it is one of our biggest challenges to navigate the treacherous waters of this Design Review process by proposing projects that allow intact design integrity. While we are successful in gaining approval for our work, various projects did not survive the procedure unscathed. It is very easy for these committees to turn to the lowest common denominator of the accepted vernacular, instead of embracing something that is new and original."



WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO NEW ASSIGNMENTS? HOW DOES THE DESIGN PROCESS WORK?

Horst: "Most of the projects start with a preliminary meeting with the customer about their goals for the project, how they like to live, and how they interact with friends and family. Many of our customers come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, which we like to address in a non-literal interpretation within the context of the modern home. We spend time on the building site to understand limitations, possibilities, and the conceptual approach.

The first design concepts are made with pen and paper, because I have always felt this is an effective way to capture the intuitive aspects of the design process. Generally speaking, I offer the customer a number of broad concepts. Sometimes we invest in one of these for further development, and sometimes we synthesize components from various concepts to form a cohesive unit."

Arianna: "We are highly spatially oriented and study the architectural options very carefully. We identify every opportunity for improvement. Placement or removal of walls, opening windows, connecting them with the outdoors, natural light, minimizing the circulation area, etcetera. We develop a 3D model of the interior spaces as a design tool. Once the interior spaces are properly set up, we focus on the selection of building materials and the construction design of focal points such as fireplaces, staircases, fretwork, lighting, and so forth. Then we make extremely detailed drawings as guidelines for the actual construction. We select all of the furniture, carpets, accessories and art."

HOW DOES THE TEAM PLAN AND IMPLEMENT EACH PROJECT?

Horst: "As soon as the schematic design is complete, I assign one of our staff members to the position of Project Manager. This person takes my conceptual designs and turns the project into a three-dimensional rendering

on using SketchUp. As the design evolves, we start using more advanced software to address subtleties of design and material. The project manager continues to work with me through each of the following phases of the project, including construction supervision. This extreme involvement with the process is also an efficient method for each staff member to develop a range of useful skills."

WHEN DID YOU DISCOVER YOUR TALENT FOR ARCHITECTURE?

Horst: "In my first year of high school, I had a little crush on my geometry teacher, a young attractive woman in her twenties. Near the end of the year I had gained enough confidence to approach her after school and express my gratitude. She asked me what I planned to study in the future, and I did not really know what to say. She told me I was good at geometry, and suggested architecture. Next year, I signed up for a class in architecture and discovered that architecture

was at the intersection of so many things I loved, such as geometry, history, art, science, music and culture.”

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUALITY OF A HOUSE?

Horst: “The best projects offer a setting for a wide range of experiences, linked together to form a cohesive entity, reflecting customary rituals and individual living patterns.”

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE BUILDING IN THE WORLD, AND WHY?

Horst: “I am attracted to the Lovell Beach House designed by Rudolph Schindler in Newport Beach in the early 1920s. Schindler came from Vienna to work on the Hollyhock House in Barnsdall Park in Los Angeles with Frank Lloyd Wright. This was one of Schindler’s first independent projects, and he really paved the way for the modern art and design that would soon sweep along the California coast.

Schindler’s daring designs, still intact to this day, are determined by five raised concrete panels (the first time this method of construction was used in the USA) that formed the organizing system for interior and exterior spaces; the structure in an oceanfront environment is often subject to turbulent winds and weather.”

WHO DO YOU ADMIRE?

Horst: “I admire people who inspire me and provide me with a moral compass. I draw inspiration from literature, including my favourite authors E. Scott Fitzgerald, Milan Kundera, and Simon Mawer. For example, Simon Mawer’s “The Glass Room” is based on Villa Tugendhat in Brno in the Czech Republic, designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. It made me understand how much meaning a work of architecture can add to a person’s life.”

CAN YOU TELL ME A BIT MORE ABOUT THE ROCKLEDGE PROJECT?

Horst: “The Rockledge project has a deep personal history for me. When I moved from London to California in 1984, I started to work for Fred Briggs, a well-known local modern architect from the USC School of Architecture who arrived at the same time as the Case Study Houses. My first project with Fred was to help him design a new house, which happened to be right here. Flash forward thirty years, and a customer for whom I had designed a house earlier, buys the



Rockledge building and asks us to perform extensive innovation and additions to the structure. As we started the project, we discovered the original construction documents I had set up under tutelage of Fred Briggs. Fred had recently passed away, and the plans we completed together brought back a whole constellation of moments we shared.”

HOW DID THE LOCATION INFLUENCE YOUR DESIGN?

Horst: “The site is situated on a rocky cliff along the Pacific Ocean. As a result, it is often subject to a wide range of natural forces such as storms and tides. As a vacation home for a family that spends most of its time in the Midwest, the assignment was to create a house that invites both indoor and outdoor living, but still offers protection against this volatile landscape.”

WHICH MATERIALS DID YOU USE, AND WHY?

Horst: “We used limestone to ground the structure to the site. It provides substance and a permanent connection to the earth. The limestone has a deep brushed finish, which helps it integrated with the natural textures of local stone around the site. We decided for white, integrated plastering to optimize the dance between light and shadow, a reminder at the same time of the white structures along the Mediterranean Sea. Exposed steel beams create a pure expression of the architectural construction and vast openings for optimal enjoyment of the view.”

Arianna: “The materials selected bring to mind the textures and colours of the southern California coastline. The objective was to allow the structure to ground itself in the natural environment. Continuity of materials used in the indoor and outdoor spaces dissolves the transition between interior and exterior. The colour palette consists of sand, mocha, and cream-colored limestone for the floors, and grey flamed buxial limestone for the walls. Brushed, smoked and white oiled oak floors remind us of driftwood. We used melted aluminium panels for the walls of the women’s bathroom, lit by LED acrylic panels. This material is not commonly used in interiors, but I was intrigued by it. It reminds me of the light that glows between seaweed when you look up from a dive in the ocean. In the second, smaller, bathroom, I used 3D aluminium tiles that shine like the surface of the ocean.”



TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT THE LIGHT?

Horst: “Laguna Beach started as an artist’s colony in the late 1800s. Many of these original artists were Europeans who attended colleges on the east coast. They were attracted to this area along the coast because of its light and textures, which they had never seen before. The white surfaces of Rockledge invite a play with light that is reflected by the water.”

WHAT ABOUT THE LINES?

Horst: “The lines of the structure are determined by a sense of liquidity, continuous areas wrapped and floating above the limestone walls. The idea is to make a connection with the site, surrounded by a landscape that is in constant motion.”

TELL ME ABOUT THE COLOURS?

Horst: “The colours and materials were selected to make a connection with the site. Limestone walls are similar in colour to the

San Onofre Bescia rock formations that dominate this coast. The wood has a weathered finish, just like the driftwood that lies on the beach below.”

WHAT IS THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THIS PROJECT?

Horst: “The project was the renovation and extension of an existing structure with which I have a personal and professional history. Keeping this in the back of our minds, we wanted to philosophically retain the charac-

ter and certain features of the existing house, out of respect for the work and relationship I enjoyed with Fred Briggs.

Following this principle, we started to look for possibilities for thoughtful integration of the new program for the customer, by basically opening up the structure for a seamless merging of interior and exterior. In order to achieve this openness, we removed a great many of the interior walls. We brought huge steel frames into the existing structure so

that we could open the interior to the ocean. The boundary between indoor and outdoor spaces is dissolved by glass sliding walls that draw back into concealed recesses, and by the integration of indoor and outdoor materials.

This projects is proof that it is possible to adhere to the strict demands of the customer, while at the same time engaging in an intense and robust dialogue about location, original structure, and new additions.”

“THE WHITE SURFACES OF ROCKLEDGE INVITE A PLAY WITH LIGHT THAT IS REFLECTED BY THE WATER.”