

FALL HOME DESIGN

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Above: Aidlin Darling Design's large split-face sandstone-clad Wine Country house is divided into public (vineyard-facing) and private wings tucked deftly into the hillside; left, from poolside in back, the glassy dining room seems like a bridge between the wings divided by a reflecting pool that runs north to south.

# Moonlit Sonata

*Illusory architecture in Glen Ellen's Valley of the Seven Moons*

**T**he meaning of site is not just topography, light and views for architects David Darling and Joshua Aidlin. They spent over half a decade familiarizing themselves with a Glen Ellen vineyard, sometimes camping on its 160 acres, searching for intangible qualities of the land that they could reflect in their design.

Over the years, the architects developed a guest house, a barn and recently, the final piece, a 14,000 square-foot main house overlooking its Valley of the Moons vineyard.

"The owners feel like relatives," says Darling. "Our personal and professional relationships have

overlapped greatly." Such conviviality has allowed the architects and project designer Peter Larsen to "get inside the owners' heads," and finely tune the design for their large two-tiered, three-story house used for weekend getaways and large-scale entertaining. Because the owners had lived on Lake Michigan and have an interest in cartography, the architects incorporated water features and laid the house on a true north axis, making it a compass on the land.

The stone-and-glass structure is planned in two parts: one a vineyard-facing public section, which is set parallel to a raised private wing tucked into the Sonoma hillside. The two wings are separated by a



Facing page: latticed doors shut off the butler's pantry from the living area to the left, the breakfast room to the right and the kitchen beyond. Wood, stone, steel and glass are juxtaposed throughout for a muted palette; above, the kitchen flows seamlessly into the breakfast room, which opens onto the swimming pool and outdoor rooms; left, the formal dining room sits over a reflecting pool flanking the loggia.

reflecting pool that runs north to south. A swimming pool is laid out parallel to the loggia below the bedrooms. Each space is easy to use because of practical connections from the kitchen to family rooms and living spaces, plus criss-crossing passages from public to private wings. For example, the dining area — a space that spans both public and private worlds — bridges the reflecting pool, and an east/west passage from the vineyard through the house leads directly into the cellar dug into the hillside.

Bedrooms, also nestled into the hillside, look out on a stand of trees and a moon garden (filled with white plantings that can reflect moonlight) planned by Marta Fry. Fry's company designed several potageres amid the vineyards as well as a series of intimate, sculptural gardens alongside the house. Lowered ceiling heights in the bedrooms create a hushed mood in contrast to the northeast

public wing, where double-height spaces are majestic and theatrical. "We tried to create graceful overlaps between indoors and outdoors and public and private," says Darling. For the swimming area, they designed an outdoor room with a trellis of galvanized pipes, an outdoor grill and a lawn that is mowed flat like a carpet. A low wall separates it from meadow grasses and the surrounding forest. "It really does feel like a room. All it needs is an easy chair and a television set," says Darling, laughing.

On the whole, despite the gargantuan scale, the modern design — part home, part gallery — is quiet and understated, the way the owners wanted it. That quietude stems in large part from the color palette of earthen grays and sandy stone inside and out. Yet, when you focus on individual sections of the house, the component parts seem architecturally sonorous. For instance, the large scale of the loggia columns alongside the reflect-





Left: the master bath has washbasins of hand-carved limestone and a resin bathtub from Agape; above, the skylit office with vineyard views has – in keeping with her penchant for sculptural wood – a tree photograph by Rodney Graham. Right: the bedroom and other private rooms have lowered ceilings.

ting pool echo architect Louis Kahn's rhythmic construction at the Salk Institute.

"Instead of color, we tried to manipulate materials," says Darling. "We used split-face sandstone so it becomes reflective during the day, and when you view the limestone floors through cutouts in hand-plastered walls inside the loggia, it gives each material an added dimension," he says.

Similarly, a tall stone wall in the driveway becomes a backdrop for bamboo planted in the garden and also reflects more light into the garden.

"This house is definitely not about grandiosity," says Darling. "It is an exercise in texture and light." ♦

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