

## California living: Los Altos couple update ranch house

Written by Carolyn Snyder - Special to the Town Crier

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photos by Elliott Burr/Town Crier  
Los Altos residents Fran and Bruce Dougherty remodeled their home to showcase wood and light.

It's apparent that Fran and Bruce Dougherty love this area and have a passion for California-style living.

p> "The people here are so nice and the area is so beautiful," said Fran, who wanted their new Los Altos home to blend into the neighborhood of more ranch-style houses while capitalizing on the view from their property.

So the Doughertys built a "ranch house updated today." They wanted a house with a lot of wood and light – a "simple" house that would bring the outdoors in. And it is simply sensational from an architectural standpoint.

The modest one-story house, with its cedar siding and dark framing, blends into the wooded site and mature landscaping. Inside, materials are traditional but the openness of the floor plan is contemporary.

"These two contrasting effects are complementary and help bridge the history of the neighborhood with today's lifestyle," said architect Tanvi Buch of Los Altos. "Many details are reminiscent of Craftsman style, yet it also has Asian touches, which the Doughertys wanted."

Bruce calls it a "Japanese-American modern ranch." The tops of the door and window casements, for example, resemble torii gates. And the flat, dark exterior trim gives it the look of a Japanese country house.

"We went through all styles of houses – Tuscan, Mediterranean, two-story – as we moved around the country," Fran said. "So we were ready for something simple that we could do all kinds of things in."

The couple lived in Colorado, Minnesota and Ohio before moving to Los Gatos in 1986, where they lived until moving to Los Altos in early 2007.

"We had our first extensive remodel/build experience there by taking two-thirds of a

2,000-square-foot ranch down to the subfloor and rebuilding," Bruce said.

They decided to move to Los Altos to be nearer to their family and because Bruce had begun selling real estate in this area after retiring from a career in high-tech. (Fran is a former schoolteacher.) They bought a 1950s ranch-style home and lived in it for a year to get the feel of the site, the orientation to the sun.

One day, Bruce happened by the house Buch was building for herself in Los Altos (feature in the Jan. 30, 2008, Town Crier) and liked it so much he later knocked on the door. The rest, as they say, is history.

Rather than remodel, the Doughertys scrapped the old house. Fran remembers the day in April of last year.

"We had just moved out and went by to see what was going on and the house had been leveled. I said to Bruce, 'It looks like we're doing it.'"

They moved in last April and the house was finished around them. Dean Di Benedetto of San Jose served as project manager.

The entrance to the house, rather than opening on the street, faces a lush hillside. The back of the property has a fence screening it from a well-traveled road so that all the Doughertys see is a vista of distant foothills.

The double front doors, featuring horizontal wood panels and vertical clear-glass panes, open to an obstructed view through the living room to the backyard, where a pool reflects the sky and trees. An austere stamped-concrete deck adds a Japanese aesthetic to the pool.

A pool house with shower, concealed behind a glass-brick wall, was constructed in a former utility area.

The beamed ceiling in the living room soars to 13 feet at its highest point, with collar beams running horizontally.

There's a game that's played in the living room. Look at the granite floor-to-ceiling fireplace wall and see how many figures can be discerned from the occlusions. It's like modern art, only centuries old, or a Rorschach test. It took a five-man crew two days to install the slabs that appear as a seamless piece of granite nearly 8 feet wide by 13 feet high.

Large undivided glass windows and double glass sliders open the room to the outdoors. Adjacent to the comfortable sitting area in front of the fireplace is the dining area, distinguished by hanging art-glass pendant lights over an heirloom oval rosewood table. Along one wall, Asian artifacts and family treasures are displayed in built-in cabinetry.

Cabinetry and detailing throughout the house is Douglas fir, a warm, visible-grain wood

used in Japanese houses. The floors are polished Santos mahogany.

The kitchen/great room is the pièce de résistance with its clerestory windows, collar-beamed ceiling and five-sided island (the angle matches the angled front wall of the room). The island houses a freezer, storage space, shelves for Fran's cookbooks and a Viking gas cooktop.

Kitchen countertop surfaces are green-ocean granite with a leather treatment – an unpolished, rich finish that emphasizes the striations in the stone. Backsplashes, something called "Falling Water," resemble a mini brick wall.

The end wall features a modular built-in unit for books, TV and the like. Its horizontal lines are continued on the same plane throughout the house.

A cherrywood harvest table in the great room can seat 10 people – a good thing, because two of their three children and their spouses live in Palo Alto, and the Doughertys frequently have a houseful.

Daughter Melissa, whose husband, Andrew Zeif, is an attorney, was Fran's "design consultant" and helped with every step of the project. They have two children.

Son Dirk and his wife, Keiko Sato, have three children.

The Doughertys' other son, Bret, and his wife, Jaydee Cabral, live in New Zealand, where he is a family practitioner. They have two children.

The four-bedroom, 3 1/2-bath house is 3,500 square feet of flowing space.

One of the bedrooms, which Bruce uses as an office, is separated by a pocket door from the master suite. So it's like an addendum but can be closed off. The large walk-in closet in the master suite has a 10-foot ceiling with built-in storage space to the top.

Fran had wanted a simple house to display favorite "things," and the bedroom is a good example. A pair of tonsu chests blends perfectly with the contemporary furnishings. In the pantry, she has used an old cupboard from her family's ranch in Hanford, and in the laundry room is a washboard from her mother's playhouse.

The architectural style provides the perfect background for their eclectic furnishings. Even the grand piano seems right at home in the living room.

And, everywhere you turn, there are original oil paintings of California scenes, a testament to their love of where they live.

## 1 Comment

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"Brain"  
by **Mad**

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