

In Your Dreams

A photograph of a modern, multi-level wooden house built into a forest. The house is constructed with dark wood and features large windows. It is situated on a hillside, with a stream flowing through the foreground. The stream is surrounded by rocks and fallen leaves. The forest is dense with tall trees and green foliage. The overall scene is serene and natural.

■ Local architects specialize in making a home fit its surroundings . . .

Seeking the invisible house

By **MARY BROWNFIELD**

FOR EVEN the most compatible of couples, the prospect of running a business together can be daunting. But architects Rob Carver and Mary Ann Schicketanz have managed not just to remain together for more than a dozen years, but to see their firm grow from a two-architects-and-a-secretary operation to one with about 20 employees.

What's more, with about 25 projects under way at any given time, Carver + Schicketanz Architects is in sufficient demand to decline projects that don't match its mission of "creating projects that fully integrate the needs of our clients with the nature of their sites."

"If someone comes to us and wants a Tudor or Spanish house in an historic board-and-batt kind of neighborhood, we don't do that," said Schicketanz, who was born in Austria, obtained her structural engineering degree at the Technical University of Stuttgart, Germany, and worked in that country before moving to the states in 1987. "We really strive to integrate — that's our biggest goal.

"Otherwise, you don't really need an architect. There are so many house plans for sale out there right now that are actually quite good," she continued. "If you hire an architect and pay for the service, you should get something like a tailored suit that really fits you — is just your size — and makes the most of your site."

Making buildings fit the properties from which they will

SPECIAL SECTION

ing at the firm, which occupies an airy upper-level office at The Barnyard Shopping Village in Carmel. Carver and Schicketanz live in Big Sur.

"I have a real desire to do invisible houses you can drive by and not even know they're there," said Carver, a New York native who studied architecture at UC Berkeley, bought a Big Sur hideaway in 1974 and obtained his architect's license in 1985. "Especially in a lot of the areas where we work, where there are beautiful examples of nature, a house can be built very nicely and not intrude."

The project list on the company's website includes an impressive array of residential, commercial and community projects. With 75 percent of their work new construction, the style is generally open and modern, and always aware of its

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Architects Rob Carver and Mary Ann Schicketanz design homes to blend with their environments while pleasing their clients. At top, a Carmel Highlands home's covers and colors match those of the hilltop on which it sits. At left and below, a Big Sur home topped with a turf roof vanishes into the hillside while providing a window to the sea. Facing page, the architects' "Turtle House," deep in the redwoods of Garrapata Canyon, is one of their most "invisible" creations.

PHOTOS/COURTESY CARVER + SCHICKETANZ



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roots and locale. The remaining 25 percent constitutes reconstruction, often of historic resources.

"What we tell our young associates is, as a company, we are not striving to be signature architects," Schicketanz commented. "We don't want people to walk down the street and say, 'That's a Carver + Schicketanz house.'" The designs are not "sculptural or recognizable just by what they are," she said, but each is "great for its place." They resist constructing homes that won't jibe.

"My mind goes to people who go to Big Sur and want to do a white house with a red tile roof, which would be appropriate in Italy, where there are white houses with red tile roofs, but not in Big Sur," Carver said.

Modern blending

"We spend a lot of our time basically explaining away the bad image that modern architecture has in a lot of people's heads," Carver said. "They think of these chrome and marble and glass mausoleums where everything's white."

Not so. Two Carver + Schicketanz designs exemplifying the principal architects' philosophy were recently featured in "Dwell" and "California Home + Design" magazines, and word is "Architectural Digest" has expressed interest as well.

"Dwell" describes the Big Sur Coast home of Langka and Zach Treadwell as "an undulating verdigris swoosh in the landscape," with its low profile and turf roof effectively camouflaging the house from the street while its open interior spaces and vast windows provide jaw-dropping ocean views.

A Carmel Highlands home Carver designed about 16 years ago sits on "one of the nicest sites I've ever been on," overlooking Point

Lobos and Carmel Bay.

"It's shaped like the top of the hill, the roof is curved, the colors are right from the palette of the surrounding vegetation, and you can't see it from anywhere," Carver said. "It can see everything, but nobody can really see it."

He designed the home around the owner's extensive collection of African art and placed a courtyard and pool at its center. "It can get a little windy up there, and it turned out to be an amazingly warm part of the house."

The "Turtle House," featured in the home

and design magazine, nestles between towering redwoods deep in Garrapata Canyon, blending with the environment. The home, with a six-sided core and four legs that jut out among the redwoods, rests atop concrete pillars, effectively hovering above the forest floor. A deck is the turtle's "head."

The home also marked a great achievement beyond creating a beautiful living space for their clients, Richard and Sally Taylor. It took almost a decade to find a design and location on the 16-acre property that would be

approved by the multitude of government agencies controlling coastal development.

"That was one of the designs that was very difficult to get approved and a very, very good result once it was built," Carver said. "It's probably our most invisible house."

And after more than 20 years designing buildings in Monterey County, he's well practiced in navigating the permit process.

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Expanses of windows in Langka and Zach Treadwell's Big Sur home showcase the beautiful coastline, while the modern interior is simply crisp as well as comfortable.



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"Basically, this is a no-growth area, so there are many, many rules fabricated to thwart growth, and yet they don't just come out and say you can't do anything," Carver said. "Weaving through the bureaucracy and the hypocrisy is the toughest part of the job."

He sees the web of rules, great demand for

studies and permits, and constant bureaucratic challenges as major contributors to the high cost of building on the Peninsula. One client recently spent \$6,000 to get permission to remove a dangerous pine tree on a Carmel Highlands lot.

The permit process is "very abusive, very expensive and very wasteful of money," he said.

Continues next page

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A forest of old homes

Despite her company's extensive work in Big Sur,



It's three stories from one side, but all three floors have ground-level entrances achieved by excavating the Carmel lot and then replacing much of the earth after the home was built. The effect is "great indoor/outdoor flow," according to architect Rob Carver.

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Schicketanz described one of her favorite projects as a home in a different sort of landscape: historic Pacific Grove at 14th Street and Ocean View. It was also one of the most difficult.

"We needed five variances. We were on a corner lot where if we applied the city setbacks, we would have only had a few feet to build," she said. Deep setbacks on both sides of the corner and a huge heritage tree in the rear, as well as the property's long and thin shape, presented a multitude of challenges.

"It had to really blend in with the scale of the neighborhood and the style of the neighborhood," she said. The city agreed to the variances, and Schicketanz created a design that incorporated the large tree as well as the look of neighboring historic homes.

She also enjoyed creating a school and community center — reminiscent of an ancient "round house" — for a Native American tribe in Auburn.

And they sometimes work for free. Carver, who was a volunteer firefighter for 10 years, donated design work for the Mid

Coast Volunteer Fire Brigade's firehouse on Palo Colorado Road.

He was also a founding member of the nonprofit Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers and played an integral role in restoring the historic Point Sur Light Station.

"I wrote the grant to get the initial \$775,000 because no one had spent any money on this place," he said. "It was like a ship that was rotting, and it was very rewarding to stop the decay and actually reverse it." The work won recognition from state preservationists.

Green scene

While long admirers and proponents of "green" architecture and construction, Carver and Schicketanz said they are thrilled with recent gains in sustainable and recycled resources, as well as technology. They and several C&S employees recently attend

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Pebble Beach reads The Pine Cone

DESIGN

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ed the West Coast Green Conference in San Francisco and strive to design all of their projects to be compatible with the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System, which the USGBCL describes as "the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings."

With constantly increasing demand and more innovative

products being developed, the difference in costs between building sustainably versus building with toxic materials "is basically zero," Carver said.

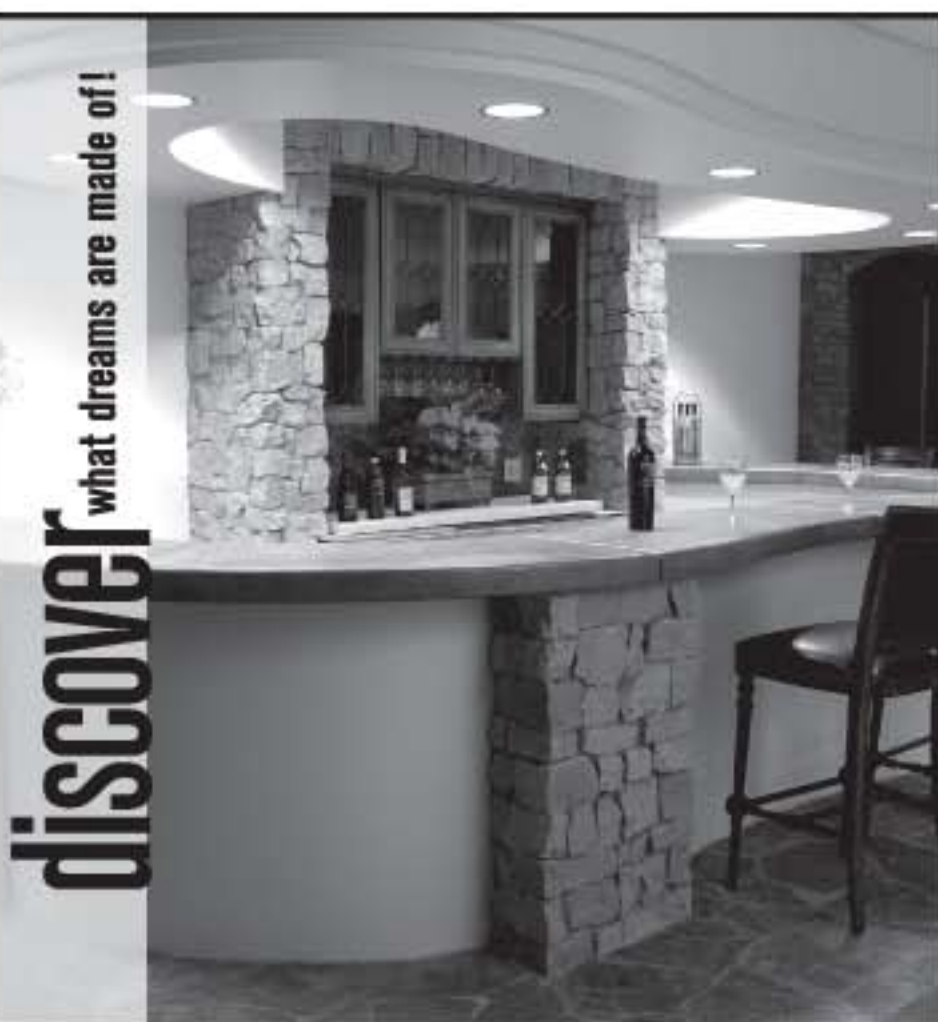
C+S plans often call for salvaged or sustainably forested timber, bamboo (which grows quickly and prolifically), and recycled products, such as denim for insulation and hardware for fixtures. They use sod roofs not only for blending in, but for insulation.

Five or six recent projects utilize solar energy, with some

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The owners of this coastal home spend time enjoying their sunny patio and ocean views, not mowing their turf roof, as it is covered with native grasses that require minimal maintenance.



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ARCHITECTS

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houses completely "off the grid" or putting unused electricity back into the system.

In many ways, the United States lagged behind Europe in developing green practices, according to Schicketanz.

"In Germany, where I worked last, people were doing homes with those guidelines 20 or 30 years ago, partially because energy was so expensive," Schicketanz said.

The architects are gratified to see the increased momentum of green building in the United States.

"We always wanted to operate that way," Schicketanz said. "We are able to make that shift now because we have clients who are willing to go with us and we have products avail-

able to us."

In addition, many students trained in the architectural and design fields gain that sort of knowledge in school, she pointed out.

The evolution of C+S

While they are unquestionably compatible working partners now, it wasn't always easy, according to Carver. The two began collaborating 19 years ago, when she came to help him on a few projects.

"It took a lot of ego modification, ego alignment, and I think we pretty much worked through it, but we're two pretty strong personalities," he said. "We have the same goal and two very different approaches."

He makes a choice after generating and

Continues next page

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exhausting all the possibilities.

"I think Mary Ann is more direct — she picks one and goes for it," he said.

"It was so fascinating to work with Rob, because he came from the exact opposite education that I came from," Schicketanz said. A product of Berkeley, his approach was "free-wheeling and experimental," she said, while hers had the more rigid ethics of the strong Bauhaus tradition.

"It was fun to forget everything I ever learned and work with Rob on these very organic projects," she said, and both are "very analytical."

Over the years, the partnership of Carver and Schicketanz has become a thriving corporation.

With about 20 people on staff, including several from foreign countries, the firm employs architects, job captains, a permit processor, interior designers, interns in various fields, a resident artist and a bookkeeper. Otis, Carver's 9-year-old Rottweiler, is "security," according to his job description on the firm's website, www.carverschicketanz.com.

Their workplace is dynamic, with materials, books, drawings and designs spread about as people work together or alone. There are meeting rooms and roundtables conducive to brainstorming, as well as comfortable places for taking breaks. Carver, the resident DJ, selects tunes from stacks of CDs behind

his desk in the upstairs loft.

He and Schicketanz make a point of regularly meeting with their employees to find out what issues, worries or successes they might want to share. They arrange outings to look at past and current projects, and take everyone on a company vacation each year.

When it comes to hiring, Carver and Schicketanz look not only for diverse skills, talents and backgrounds, but people who

will work well with everyone else. Persistent negativity is most definitely not allowed.

Of premium importance, of course, is a love of the job, which Carver and Schicketanz have in no small measure.

"In terms of the finished product, it's always very satisfying to experience architecture in the flesh," Carver said, "and to create something that didn't exist before that is beautiful and enjoyed by others."



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