



Dream house, revisited

SAN FRANCISCO ARCHITECT **JULIE DOWLING** WAS GOING FOR MORE THAN A PLATINUM LEED RATING WHEN CRAFTING HER RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY WEEKEND RETREAT: SHE COVETED THE PUREST EXPRESSION OF ARTFUL MINIMALIST DESIGN.
BY **DIANE DORRANS SAEKS** | PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTHEW MILLMAN



BELOW: Standing on a hilltop knoll covered with drought-tolerant meadow grass, the house is surrounded on three sides by a forest of mature oak, fir, and madrone trees. To take advantage of the most efficient solar orientation and the best views of the Russian River Valley, the back faces true south. The custom aluminum windows and doors are by Fleetwood, and the landscaping is by Dexter Estate Landscapes, St. Helena. RIGHT: Dowling passes by the 76-foot-long lap pool, by Sonoma Pool & Spa, which reflects the home's expansive views. A 10-foot cantilevered overhang offers shade during warm months, while the covered patio makes for easy outdoor dining close to the kitchen. A no-mow, native lawn with high-efficiency irrigation was placed around the pool to serve as a frame and to create a small play area for family and friends.



JULIE DOWLING'S LIGHT-FILLED, MODERNIST PAVILION

on a wooded hillside southwest of Healdsburg serves three purposes. "My goal from the start was to meet the highest criteria for green living, but still stay true to my modern aesthetic," says Dowling, a partner (along with Lorissa Kimm) at San Francisco's Dowling Kimm Studios, the genius firm behind the Solage Calistoga resort and numerous other wine-country properties. She also saw the project as a chance to win over willing but reluctant clients to the green-building cause. "There's a general fear of the unknown with green building," she says. "People ask questions like 'Will it cost more?', 'Will it take longer to build?', 'Are green products as durable as conventional ones?'" Dowling decided the only way to answer these queries with authority was to walk the walk herself, and to do it the official way.

"I'm sure there are many great green homes out there," she says, "but without a certification program like LEED for Homes, it's difficult to quantify what, exactly, has been achieved." The process is



Building blocks

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SITE: The Dowling house was built on an east-west axis, facing pure south to maximize the amount of living space that receives natural daylight, and to give the roof's solar panels optimal exposure to the sun. It's also ideal for the 10-foot cantilevered overhang on the southern front, which guards against sunlight in the summer, when the sun is at its highest point, and allows light to creep up underneath in the winter, when it's at its lowest.

DIY: If you're planning to purchase solar panels, be sure to buy them with antireflective coating. Coated solar cells absorb more sunlight than uncoated ones do.

LANDSCAPING:

Manicured gardens and lawns not only require a lot of water, but they also disturb the continuity of the natural setting. The Dowling landscape includes drought-tolerant regional plants and olive trees, as well as a trim of conventional turf with slow-growing native fescues.

DIY: Most standard nurseries sell plants and grasses that require minimal water and no mowing.

Building blocks



WOOD: To ensure that the home's resources were harvested responsibly and didn't deplete the natural supply, the Dowling architects used Forest Stewardship Council-certified plywood substrate in the floors, with a thin layer of recycled walnut veneer on top. The kitchen cabinets are made with the same substrates and a veneer of Echo Wood, a reconstructed material made from pressed common wood fibers that replicates the look of white oak. **DIY:** Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood is available at many retailers, including Home Depot and Lowe's. Another option is to use reclaimed wood. Heritage Salvage, in Petaluma, offers building materials salvaged from barns, feed warehouses, and local wineries.

WATER: The kitchen and bathrooms were placed close to each other to minimize the distance hot water has to travel. The house also uses a tankless water heater that sends water through a heated coil only when hot water is needed. **DIY:** We'd love to tell you there's an easy way to make your current water heater more environmentally conscious, but in reality, going tankless is your best bet. Luckily, tankless water heaters cost about the same amount as regular ones.



LEFT: The kitchen is completely accessible to the indoor and outdoor dining areas for relaxed socializing. Cabinets made of recycled oak scraps pressed into a rift-sawn pattern, along with white CaesarStone countertops, keep the space feeling airy. Flush stainless-steel cabinet pulls and clean-lined modern Miele appliances, including a completely hidden telescoping cooktop hood, reinforce the streamlined aesthetic. The versatile island is 12 feet long and incorporates a bar for casual dining. The pendant fixtures were designed by George Nelson for Design Within Reach, and the cabinetry is a custom design by Julie Dowling, fabricated by Ken Rose. The teak table and benches are from Design Within Reach, and the outdoor furniture is by West Elm. **BELOW:** Dowling, Platzman, and their daughter, Sofia, stand poolside.



fairly straightforward: You pay \$225 to register with the program and sign up with one of its certified project managers. Then, after the builders and designers have been assembled, everybody reviews a list of LEED requirements that apply to every aspect of the project and can be fulfilled in any number of ways, depending on your aesthetics and budget. The group then awards the project points—you can even earn points if you don't own a car.

"The first question the LEED group asks is 'What size is the house?'" says Dowling. "A smaller house uses fewer materials, consumes less energy, and disturbs the site the least." To get the most out of her 2,200-square-foot interior, she designed a 900-square-foot central great room that includes an open kitchen, a flexible dining area, and a spacious living room. The kitchen opens directly onto the terrace, which holds the outdoor table and benches.

Another LEED-worthy feature is the building's heating and cooling system. "Even when it's 90 or 100 degrees outside, the

PORTRAIT BY JEFFREY BRAVERMAN

BELOW: The open expanse of kitchen and living room at the house's center has panoramic views on the north and south sides. Twelve-foot, floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors on both sides allow efficient air control, and preengineered, Forest Stewardship Council-certified walnut floors give the space warmth. The mohair sofa, chairs, and chaise were custom designed by Dowling Kimm Studios. The hemp pillows were custom designed by Julie Dowling. The dining chairs, by Blu Dot, are from Zinc Details. The concealed solar shades are from the Shade Store. RIGHT: The walnut dining table, by Christophe Delcourt, is surrounded by off-white leather-and-walnut dining chairs. A fiberglass Nelson pendant fixture hovers over matte white ceramic vessels by Berkeley artist Erin McGuiness, from De Sousa Hughes. The oil-on-jute paintings by Austrian artist Alfred Haberpointner, from Addison Fine Arts, hang above a six-foot gas fireplace by Spark Modern Fires.



cross-ventilation and south-facing overhang keep the interior at a very pleasant 70 degrees," Dowling says. "The house has air-conditioning for super-hot summer afternoons, but we seldom use it. At this point, we are giving back to the power grid."

Such simplicity offers both power *and* poetry. The minimalism that helps satisfy LEED requirements is also the design statement, resulting in a proportioned private space that's calm and unpretentious—the perfect summer getaway for Dowling and her husband, Steven Platzman, a leading San Francisco private art dealer, and their young daughter, Sofia. "When my family and I arrive at the house for the weekend, we drop all our farmers' market groceries and take our bags to the bedrooms," Dowling says. "We pour a glass of wine and go and sit on the terrace. It's all very uncluttered, with open spaces, no complication."

The exterior of the house, which sits on a hilltop with expansive views of the Russian River Valley, exudes a similar purity. It was



WINDOWS: The large picture windows and sliding doors of the house are made with Solarban 70XL low-emittance glass, which controls energy from the sun by letting in visible light and blocking most UV and infrared rays. Instead of air, the double-pane glass is filled with argon gas insulation, which helps regulate indoor temperatures. **DIY:** You can heatproof your existing windows by applying a heat-control window film that has the same effects as a preglazed window.

HEAT: The Dowling house's rooms and pool are heated in several earth-friendly ways. A five-kilowatt solar-panel roof system helps offset the power used by the already efficient electric heat pump, which avoids the carbon emissions of natural gas and other heating sources. A Sunbather system of coils, also on the roof, draws water from the swimming pool, warms it as it travels through the system, then sends it back to the pool for clean-conscience swimming. **DIY:** One simple heating improvement is to seal your furnace's supply and return ducts with a mastic liquid sealant: Up to 20 percent of the air that moves through most household heating (and cooling) systems is lost because of leaky ducts.



IRRIGATION: The home's subsol drip irrigation is vastly more water-efficient than typical spray-head sprinklers. The system is controlled by Weather-TRAK, a satellite-guided mechanism that rations water according to diurnal temperature swings, humidity, recent weather, and forecasts. **DIY:** A cheaper alternative is to install a simple rain sensor, which automatically switches the system off at the first sign of rain.

APPLIANCES: The home contains only appliances approved by Energy Star, a government-backed program that awards products that meet energy efficiency guidelines established by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy. A certified refrigerator, for example, uses 20 percent less energy than other varieties do; a dishwasher uses 31 percent less energy (and 33 percent less water); and a washing machine uses 50 percent less energy (and 40 percent less water). **DIY:** The good news: Energy Star appliances cost no more than less efficient ones.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 117



LEFT: Side-by-side bedrooms are shielded by a privacy screen of potted lime trees. Eight-foot pocketed glass panels disappear into the walls, creating a complete indoor-outdoor experience. **BELOW:** The house is wrapped in select quarter-sawn cedar, chosen for its modern yet timeless quality and its ability to blend seamlessly into the landscape. Stainless-steel LED lights on the steps provide illumination at night. The lights are centered on custom colored-concrete pavers evenly spaced on a gravel base, leading to the 12-foot sliding glass front door.



made using quarter-sawn Western red cedar with a simple clear coat. Dowling expects the wood hue to mellow over time, and she has plans to continue what she calls her "experiment in architecture and living."

"Learning to live more lightly on the land is an ongoing process," she says. "We're planning an organic garden, and later we'll plant an organic or even biodynamic vineyard with pinot noir grapes."

One day last fall, friends arrived for an easy-breezy Saturday lunch. Children played on the lawn, and a splash could be heard now and then from the lap pool sitting discreetly behind the house. Everyone wound up going for a hike or on a wine-tasting excursion. "This project is very dear to my heart," Dowling said as she surveyed the scene. "I know I've done my best, and it's a complete thrill to spend time here." If all goes well, the LEED team will be just as satisfied and will certify the project this winter. ■

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