



Carlton Graham, Founding Principal  
of Graham Architecture.  
Photo by Tony Florez.

# The Anthropology of [Organic] Architecture

by Michelle Armstrong

Architect *Carlton Graham* discusses his philosophy on urban ecology and hybrid design, as well as the practice of achieving warm and modern living for the everyday.

It's not about style, or even square footage. Beyond the basics of form and function, architecture according to Carlton Graham, a Laguna-based architect and founding principal of Graham Architecture, blends the abstract expressions of our individual lifestyles with the principles and constructs found in nature. Design, as practiced by Graham, most reflects the psychology and sociology of how families and individuals live; a concept echoed by the words of Sir Winston Churchill in 1943 before the House of Commons, "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us." This, is the anthropology of organic architecture.

"As an architect, my goal is to keep the design simple — focusing on materials, detailing and craftsmanship which create a lasting impression," notes Graham. "In bringing together the basic elements of scale, proportion, air and natural light, good design can resonate within the everyday, regardless of your budget. We are affected by our environment and our surroundings; so why not let our lifestyle be reflected within the design of our home — an influence that naturally shapes our lives?"

Graham's philosophy, framed by the work of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright and supported by the very nature of organic design, explores the relationship between architecture, lifestyle and

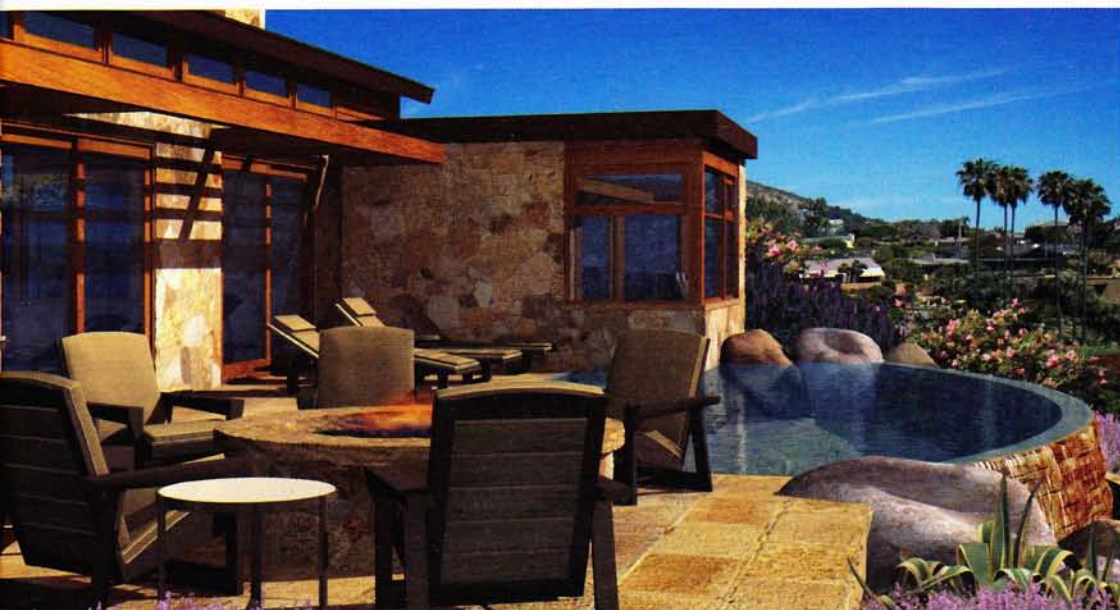
social responsibility; dually noted for a sensitivity to human life and an interdependence with the surrounding landscape. In promoting an obvious connection to nature, the architect acculturates a warm and modern palate through the extensive use of wood, stone and glass; a concept guided by the musings of a client's lifestyle, as well as the simplicity and harmony of seamless living — indoors and out.

"I've found [that] people are truly connecting to [organic design]. It's all about the environment and the relationship between the dwelling and the landscape. We live in such a beautiful place, that it only makes sense to find inspiration in nature." →



### Organic Design in Irvine Cove

In the spirit of Graham's organic philosophy, this private residence, a recent project by the architect, captures a seamless flow of architectural design with nature. The casual beach house in Irvine Cove rests on two premier oceanfront lots and offers a compound "featuring several buildings, all connected by courtyards, gardens and pathways," says Graham. Sitting above the Pacific, the residence "uses natural materials, sod roofs and is low profile which achieves a harmony with the site." Graham notes, "The project is currently under construction by Gallo Builders. As a premier Laguna builder known for exceptional quality and custom-based projects, Gallo Builders really brought my vision to life; they understand both the integrity of a design and its relationship to the budget. And as an architect, it makes my job that much easier and enjoyable."



As designed by Graham - samples from the architect's portfolio.  
All Architectural Photos Courtesy of Graham Architecture





## Hybrid Design - Blending Lifestyle and Location

Inspired by the pages of Architectural Digest, and captured by the progression of architectural design throughout its construction, the artist turned architect was first exposed to the craft at an early age. "My father hired an architect and built a custom home," says Graham. "I so enjoyed the trips to the jobsite to check the progress. The construction phase continues to be my favorite part of the process; this is where the design comes alive, in partnering with exceptional builders and craftsman. [After all], great design doesn't happen in a vacuum."

With much of his youth embedded in the Hawaiian Islands and in the hill country of Central Texas, Graham's signature style is a true reflection of his formative years — both in lifestyle and location.

The climate and cultures of Hawaii exposed Graham to the appeal and escape of tropical modernism; with strong influences from "Asia, Bali and Indonesia, the warmth of the experience is best captured with the use of cooper, stone, mahogany, wooden beams and lots of texture." He continues, "Hawaii for me was a profound influence. Making a connection based on locality is very personal and emotional [and even spiritual at times]. The climate, the colors, the landscape and geography, as well as the

local culture breathe good design."

While studying architectural design at The University of Texas, Graham was greatly influenced by the organic nature of the local lifestyle; the region is known for the abundance of raw natural stone, the simplicity of a causal-rustic elegance, and the surroundings of an active community — socially, politically and environmentally. "Austin really characterizes big doors and windows, open gardens and courtyards, and a seamless flow of indoor-outdoor living. It's simple, honest, good design."

As a self proclaimed modernist, more abstract in nature, of course, Graham most identifies with the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, Rudolph Schindler, Jim Olson and the abstract expressions of Rothko as inspiration. Combined with the experiences of his youth, Graham's design is an impressive display of organic evolution, an interconnected and interdependent way of living. "I love the idea that we are influenced by our environment, and we are forever changed. Let your home be a reflection of your lifestyle. Ask yourself 'what's most important to me?' and let that be your guide rather than a defined style," according to Graham. "It's not about being trendy. Good design is timeless and has longevity." ❖

### Tropical Modernism in Bayshores

Hosting panoramic views of the Newport Bay, this custom residence, currently under construction in Newport's private Bayshores community, spans 7,000 sq. feet of living and entertaining. Inspired by Balinese architecture, the design of the home integrates natural stone, the warmth and drama of mahogany detail, with the boldness of a copper roof. Holding an 'H' shape footprint. "The home offers a strong symmetry, with the main axes culminating on the Bay," notes Graham. "Low pitched roofs and broad wood overhangs, multiple outdoor courtyards with water features, lush tropical plantings and [custom] lighting will weave together the landscape with the indoor living spaces."

Graham Architecture  
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