

Right: The tropical influences of Bali can be heavily felt throughout this California residence.

Far right: In addition to the Indonesian influence, the homeowners wanted to emphasize their contemporary art collection.



### Architect Profile

# California Dreamer

Surf, sand, and sunny locales inspire SoCal architect's West Coast designs

BY GWENDOLYN PURDOM

When Carlton Graham starts on a new residential design, the Laguna Beach-based architect asks his clients to give him the project address so that he can visit the site alone. "Before they tell me anything about the site or their ideas, I just want to walk the property myself and see what kind of feeling I get," Graham says. "When I walk around, what strikes me with a clear head, without any of their thoughts?" It's just one way Graham, of firm Graham Architecture, lets the California environment dictate his work. "I

get a lot of clues from the site, the location, the views, the climate, the topography, the terrain, and the colors," he says.

Architecture wasn't originally Graham's ambition—the Austin native wanted to be an artist. But by his college years, the combination of art and business seemed more and more appealing to him. Today, Graham says he taps into that artistic inclination daily within his work: "It's like making real 3-D sculpture that you can walk inside of."

The palette Graham uses has been described as "warm modern," but he says it entirely depends on the all-important setting and the client. For homeowners enamored with their travels to the island province of Bali, Graham incorporated Indonesian-style accents. Design choices for a property perched on a coveted and (almost unheard of in Southern California) beachfront double lot played up the house's rare location.

One client even shared the architect's passion for art,

traveling the world often to add to her extensive collection. So Graham drew up plans for what he calls the "Art House," which includes a ten-foot-wide, seventy-foot-long gallery that stretches the length of the house and skylights overhead that illuminate the client's rotating pieces.

Yet for all its ocean views and sunshine, Graham says not every SoCal influence on his work is a welcome one. With some of the strictest building codes in the country, the state's properties are often **CONTINUED** →

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The design of this Southern California home reflects its environs: cool, sophisticated, and relaxed. Large windows reveal stunning bay views while the interior reflects a natural palette of materials such as limestone and mahogany.

(CONTINUED) tethered to acceptable heights, lot-coverage requirements, and other guidelines. "Because of the density and the earthquakes and the mudslides and all the stuff that we have, so many of the buildings here are generated by the building codes," Graham says. "The building starts to take shape on its own in terms just based on the raw footprint of what can be built on a given property."

Even with these limitations, Graham says he still finds inspiration in his California community every day. The region's distinct indoor/outdoor way of life drives designs that feature massive sliding doors, open living areas, and screenless windows. The ocean's proximity has also fueled entire projects. "Our climate is so mild, so benign, and the bugs are so minimal that it, coupled with these beautiful ocean and mountain views, allows us to design architecture that truly opens itself to nature," Graham says. "That's really what drew me out here." ❖





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