

Natural Selection

After spending years looking for their dream house, this Los Angeles-based family found their dream site on the side of a hill overlooking the serene San Fernando Valley.

BY SAMANTHA BROOKS // PHOTOGRAPHED BY PAUL VU

Architect Peter Gluck of Gluck+ created this 7,500-square-foot home on a challenging hillside location in Los Angeles. Inspired by the region's midcentury Case Study houses, he chose subdued building materials and included expanses of glass and a low-maintenance succulent garden.



Anyone who has house hunted in Los Angeles—or watched an episode of *Selling Sunset*—knows that buying real estate in Southern California is no easy feat. Especially in the hills. “When we found this piece of land, it wasn’t for sale. It wasn’t even a buildable lot,” says homeowner Will Gluck. “It took us a year and a half just to convince the previous landowner to sell it to us, another two years to get the permits to build it, and then five more years to construct the home. It’s very complicated to build on a site like this, and the Mulholland review board really took their time. They were actually worried that because our initial plan called for a flat roof, that people would end up dancing on it.”

The foundation alone required 70 pylons, each 3 feet in diameter, that extend 30 feet into the ground. Above ground, the structure had to withstand certain lateral loads to accommodate earthquake safety. But while the homeowner concedes that the initial back and forth with the review board and inherent hillside building site were challenges, the actual design process was swift and simple. Will’s father, Peter Gluck, is a New York-based architect and founder of Gluck+ (gluckplus.com)—known for modern architect-led

design builds—and knew his son’s family’s needs from the get-go. “It was obvious that this would become a party house,” says Peter. “The house has two main lots, one with the private house that was designed so that when the kids are off in college it wouldn’t feel empty and would work especially well for entertaining.”

Much like a New York loft, the main floor, occupying 2,000 of the home’s 8,500 square feet, is a loftlike space, with just one column that connects to the roof, while the lower level contains the bedrooms, family room, screening room (Will is a director, responsible for films like *Easy A* and the forthcoming *Peter Rabbit 2*), and entrance to the garage, which also houses a small gym. “The upper level has the entrance, which is quite understated. Most people want something big and impressive, but there’s no expression of grandeur here. It feels like you’re walking into a relatively small glass pavilion,” says Peter.

Upon entering through the red door, you’re led to the kitchen and main living area, where furniture has all been designed by Peter to accommodate the family of four comfortably in their day-to-day lives, as well as expand should they wish to entertain. For instance, the kitchen countertop extends for 20

feet, making it an ideal space for eating daily meals, as well as acting as a serving area during larger gatherings.

“My wife does a lot of cooking, and the kids like to bake,” says Will. “The layout of the kitchen is such that there is a back-of-service kitchen area with a second oven and fridge, as well as a 1-foot-deep pantry so that you can see everything.”

Peter points out that one of the most eye-catching features in the home was also one of the more challenging ones. “It’s a true floating roof, so that nothing touches it but the lights. Even the speakers are hidden. The only place it touches is one sculptural element in the kitchen,” he says. “In order to create such a sleek effect, though, we had to lower the line of the roof a bit more than normal, which caused some challenges in accommodating the refrigerator.

As Will puts it, “the fridges wouldn’t fit. They were 1 ½ inches too high.” The solution? Peter’s team removed the compressors and moved them outside. “It’s even better now, though, because there’s absolutely no noise coming from them.”

The Sub-Zero refrigerators are complemented by a Wolf range, Wolf steam oven, Bosch built-in coffee maker and

From top: Wood-paneled doors conceal a powder room; during different times of day, light casts a rotating pattern of shadows against the staircase’s white wall, acting as artwork; homeowner Will Gluck’s office space is located just behind the kitchen, on the main level.

Miele dishwasher. The maple cabinetry is free of handles, and the countertops are a simple melamine. “I have an aversion to marble in kitchens,” says Peter. “One thing I see people do when they design a house is go to the marble yard, pick out a giant slab for the kitchen, and then that becomes the focus of the whole house.”

The simple and sleek aesthetic continues downstairs, where a light-filled staircase pours into the playroom. There’s also a mudroom for shoes and

supplies that connects to the garage, as well as the kids’ rooms, Will’s wife’s office and a gallery area that leads to the primary bedroom. “Every room has glass looking out to the view, and when you’re outside, above the lower level, you can see the skylight next to the pool that sheds light downstairs,” says Will.

With so many windows and light-filled spaces, it might seem like the home would become an energy magnet, but the house actually produces more electricity than it uses,

so nothing is ever taken from the grid. Additionally, a cistern captures water to help with the landscaping.

Although there aren’t a lot of walls for hanging art, the family managed to create several special moments. In the gallery space, they took an ombre rug and trimmed it to fit hanging vertically on the wall. “People love to come over and ‘draw’ designs on it,” says Will. “There were even a few really dull moments during the pandemic where I found myself vacuuming

it.” Elsewhere, works by artist and family friend George Byrne are hung, as well as a piece by Harlem-based artist James de la Vega. But some of the most compelling visuals in the home come from nature. Light shining down on the staircase creates an ever-changing pattern of shadows on the wall, while outside, a cactus garden is its own masterpiece.

“We were skeptical of the cactus garden, being from the East Coast and all,” says Will. “But my dad was really inspired by the Case

Study houses in the area and wanted to reference that era.” Elsewhere, the outdoor areas include a swimming pool, a grass area and a hiking trail that extends down the hill for nearly half a mile.

“The first thing we wanted people to think when they saw the house was ‘Wow, how did they do that?’ Not ‘How much did this cost?’” says Peter. “In the end, we created a wonderful expression of contemporary living with something that relates not just to the view, but to the weather and the amazing light.” ■



From top: The main level is entirely open for free-flowing space that merges with the outdoors and takes in the views of the San Fernando Valley below. Designed for entertaining, the custom furniture can be arranged and rearranged depending on the number of guests and function of the event; materials in the kitchen were meant to be clean and subdued. Maple cabinetry features a supermatte acrylic resin surface free of handles, and the countertops are a simple Corian. Opposite page: In the lower-level gallery space, a piece by photographer and family friend George Byrne is placed across from an ombre rug hung on the wall like artwork.