

# The New York Times

Friday, June 30, 2006



David Thompson (top), Michael Weschler for The New York Times



Michael Weschler for The New York Times



Michael Weschler for The New York Times

David Thompson, an architect, replaced a stucco ranch house, with a more open and welcoming example of modernism that makes drivers stop and stare. The house has a cedar porch, above.

## HOUSE PROUD

### Thoroughly Modern but Downright Neighborly

By MICHAEL CANNELL

IT'S a familiar story: A neighborhood's residents band together to beat back a modernist intrusion on a historic district. A lengthy legal wrangle ensues.

Only in this case, it didn't happen quite that way. Yes, some neighbors fussed when David Thompson, a 37-year-old architect with a growing practice, and his wife, Jamie, set out to build an unapologetically modernist home on a prominent corner lot in Larchmont, a neighborhood here filled with meticulously restored Arts and Crafts bungalows.

If the Thompsons' house was a hipster crashing a Victorian tea, it nonetheless was roundly welcomed. Looking out from their gabled dormers and shaded porches, the neighbors liked what they saw. "I was thrilled," said James Pepper, who lives across the street in a 1914 bungalow. "Especially given the alternative. In Los Angeles, it could easily have been a cheesy Mediterranean villa."

It would be hard not to like. The Thompsons' house is modernism at its friendliest, with a porch made of warm bands of cedar and a robust front door hand-built from Douglas fir, echoing the craftsmanship of the neighboring bungalows.

"I wanted it to be a response to the neighborhood, to the people," Mr. Thompson said. "I didn't want it to be that intimidating modern thing."

Not much chance of that. If anything, the house is like an extrovert working the room. The two glass walls of the curtainless living room meet at a corner, without so much as a seam to obstruct the view. Half a dozen times a day, cars stop short so the passengers can admire the house, sometimes flashing a thumbs-up sign.

"I have to keep our bed made at all times," Ms. Thompson said, because her husband often invites strangers in for a tour.

"It's like living in a fishbowl," said Mr. Thompson's father, Richard, who is also an architect. "David and Jamie are perfectly happy to have that kind of openness. They're genuinely friendly, and the house reflects that."

Still, Mr. Thompson anticipated some grumbles from the bungalow purists down the street. He smoothed the way with pre-emptive community outreach, showing the neighbors the plans in advance and posting a rendering at the construction site.

Nor did it hurt that that he had designed it as a family home, not only as a showpiece for Assembledge, his architecture firm.

The couple were not yet married five years ago when Ms. Thompson saw the property during her work as a real-estate broker. A stucco ranch house stood on the site then, with stray cats patrolling the overgrown yard.

"It hadn't been lived in for years," she said. "It looked so ghetto."

But she saw potential behind the red shag carpeting and the bars on the windows. "I thought, this would be so great if David and I were looking." That night, they began to consider the possibilities.

The best bargain, as they say, is often the dumpiest house in a good area. On that premise, the couple bid \$495,000, and it was accepted.

"It was a diamond in the rough," Ms. Thompson said. "We stole it."

They lived in the ranch house for two years, patching the roof and removing interior walls. But as the cosmetic fixes gave way to more serious repairs, like replacing the perimeter walls, they decided to cut their losses and start over. In December 2004, they tore the house down and set out to build Mr. Thompson's two-story, 2,400-square-foot design for \$660,000; the budget was kept in check by adhering to the footprint of the original house, which allowed them to use most of the existing foundation and not have to alter the surrounding grounds.

Before building the new house, though, they married. "We knew that planning a wedding and building a house would be too much," Ms. Thompson said. They now have a 1-year-old daughter, Lila.

Intentionally or not, Mr. Thompson designed a house in the spirit of the one he grew up in, a Cape Cod cottage in the Hollywood Hills, overlooking the Whiskey a Go Go nightclub. His parents remodeled the cottage with playful modernist touches. Richard Thompson painted supergraphics on his son's bedroom wall and built him a loft bed from which he could look out over the twinkling expanse of the city below at night. "It was really creative and fun," Mr. Thompson said, "and it became this place where all my friends came together."

His parents had their own architectural practice (they have since divorced), and they often visited their partner, Mark Hall, who was then living in, and restoring, How House, a home built in 1925 by R. M. Schindler, one of the early masters of California modernism. Mr. Thompson and Mr. Hall's son wandered the grounds, rappelling down the venerable concrete walls with a garden hose.



Michael Weschler for The New York Times

David Thompson's Los Angeles home is a welcoming example of modernism that makes drivers stop and stare. The house has a sunken family room with a sliding glass wall.

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Like the classic California homes of his childhood, the house that Mr. Thompson designed is about the outdoors as much as the indoors. A custom-designed glass wall slides away, leaving one side of the family room open to the backyard, where bleacher-style steps lead up to a lounging area with ipe wood decking laid on top of the garage.

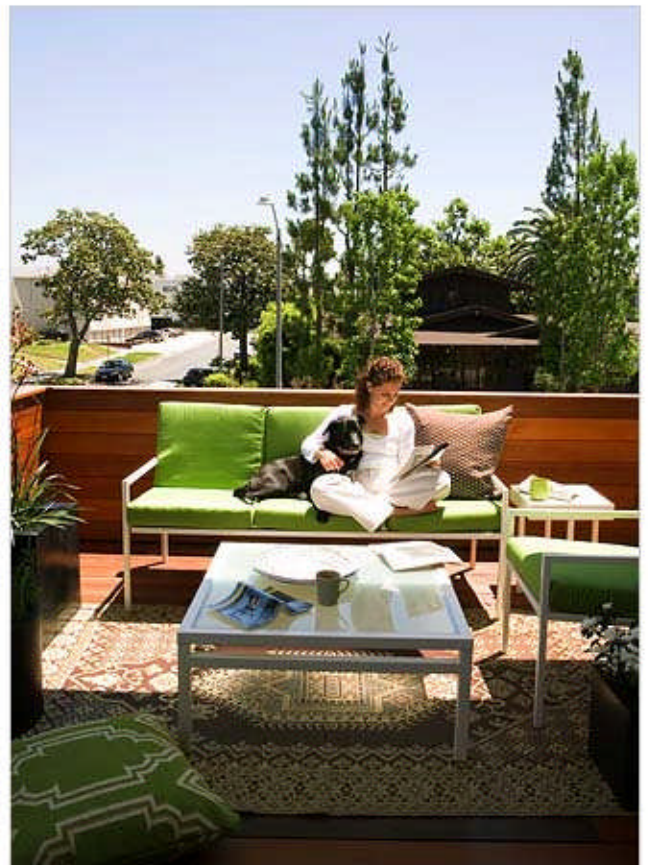
The master bedroom upstairs has two sliding glass doors that meet at a corner. On warm nights the couple pull them back and sit under an eave that overhangs the wraparound porch, watching the sun set over the Santa Monica Mountains.

In April, just before they moved in, Mr. Thompson's father painted green murals in Lila's bedroom, as he had in Mr. Thompson's room 30 years ago.

And like that earlier house, this one has become a gathering place. One night last week, Mr. Thompson came home to find 10 strollers parked on his front porch, and 10 of Lila's playmates, with their babysitters, splashing in an inflatable pool and eating from an impromptu buffet set up in the backyard.



Michael Weschler for The New York Times  
All is quiet on the porch at sundown.



Michael Weschler for The New York Times  
A wraparound porch off the master bedroom.



Michael Weschler for The New York Times

Mr. Thompson's home combines new and old, costly and inexpensive.