

San Francisco, California

Aidlin Darling Design

aidlindarlingdesign.com

Joshua Aidlin and David Darling, founding partners of San Francisco-based Aidlin Darling Design, view architecture as a multisensory experience, rather than a static art form. It is not just about making buildings, but also about shaping the lives and activities they support. Since they founded their firm in 1998, they have focused on creating spaces that engage all the senses and inspire a connection to place, nature, and humanity. The architects' ethos—supported by the Bay Area's mild climate, community of craftspeople, and pioneering spirit—is rooted in their belief that architecture can be a grounding force.

"When you design for all the senses," says Darling, "you allow people to reconnect to themselves and their environment." The Bay Area is an ideal setting for engaging nature by opening up facades in order to merge indoors and outdoors. Projects such as the Windhover Contemplative Center at Stanford University (p.48) embody their philosophy. Combining art, architecture, and landscape, the center offers students and faculty a space in which to escape daily pressures. The tactility of the materials—wood and rammed earth, and the water in a serene reflecting pool—is enhanced by the scents, sounds, and light that enter the building through generous openings, creating a deeply immersive environment.

Graduates of the University of Cincinnati, Aidlin and Darling began to develop their philosophy when they both moved to the Bay Area. In the evenings, after their day jobs at local offices, the two would build furniture together, using tools that Aidlin had inherited from his father, a sculptor. They explored their mutual fascination with materiality and the physicality of design, experimenting at human scale. This hands-on approach—their first studio was centered around a woodshop—as well as their skepticism about the soulless projects emerging from a growing reliance on digital tools, drove their manifesto.

Today the firm thrives on collaboration with craftspeople and others in the design process. This approach has led to such commissions as the AIA San Francisco and the Center for Architecture + Design (pp. 44–45), where local artisans donated their skills to create exquisitely made elements within the armature of a historic building. A storefront open to the public, the center engages the urban community and aims to inspire people through the power of design.

The architects do use technology, of course—balancing it with traditional craft—but they still sketch and build physical models for all their projects. "We dance this line between the facility of digital tools and the beauty of imperfection," Aidlin explains.

While much of Aidlin Darling's work is local, the firm has expanded its geographic scope, extracting new lessons and insights from diverse climates and communities. The Contemplative Sciences Center at the University of Virginia (a commission the firm won after responding to an open call; pp. 42–43) serves as a physical and psychological bridge between the Academical Village, designed by Thomas Jefferson at the heart of the campus, and the residential halls farther afield. The center opens to gardens and courtyards, creating a cloister of biophilic, healing environments. "One of our strengths is not resting on assumptions about a building type," says Darling. "Our MO is reinventing the wheel." While the Contemplative Center at Stanford hugs the ground—a pavilion nestled into a grove of oaks—the one at UVA rises to four stories, enabling elevated gardens and loggias to catch cross breezes and provide shade in the hot, humid summers.

Context is equally important in the firm's residential work. The House of Earth and Sky (pp. 39–41) is a series of glass pavilions anchored on site by rammed-earth walls made of the very ground from which the structure emerges. The house embraces a central, south-facing garden that unifies its three wings and brings together the three generations who live there. The garden also connects the family to the rhythms and moods of the day as the sun moves across the sky.

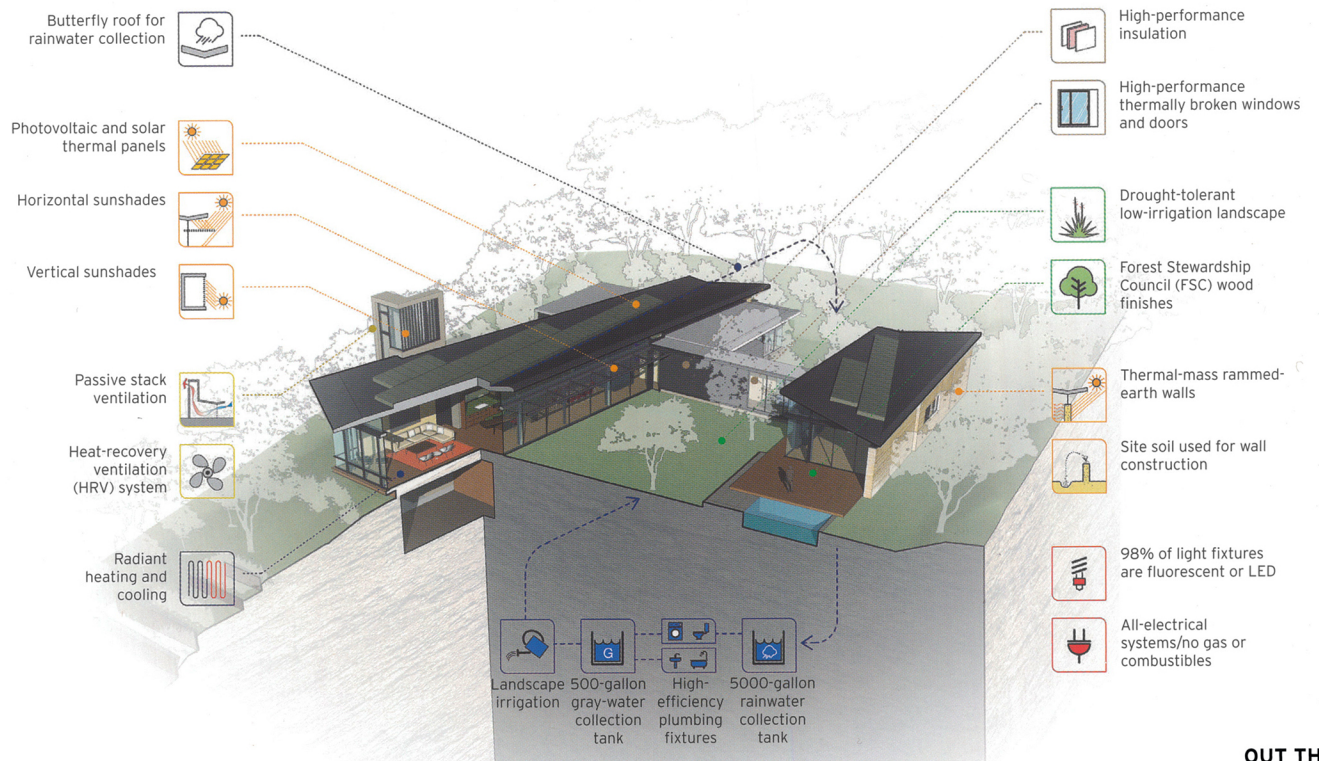
Aidlin and Darling hope to expand their portfolio of public projects, such as museums, libraries, and schools, in order to share more widely their ideas about community-building through human-centered design, and to reveal, in their unique way, how architecture can move the spirit. BB



House of Earth and Sky

Hillsborough, California
Completed 2015

For their environmentalist clients, the architects conceived this house as a diagram for sustainable living, bringing three generations together around a central garden. A cluster of glass pavilions is moored by rammed-earth walls and sheltered by butterfly roofs, which perform multiple functions: capturing rainwater, shading interiors, and concealing solar arrays. The all-electric, net-zero home, which also employs passive cooling and locally sourced materials, embodies the family's vision for a residence that is materially grounded while pointing toward a sustainable future.





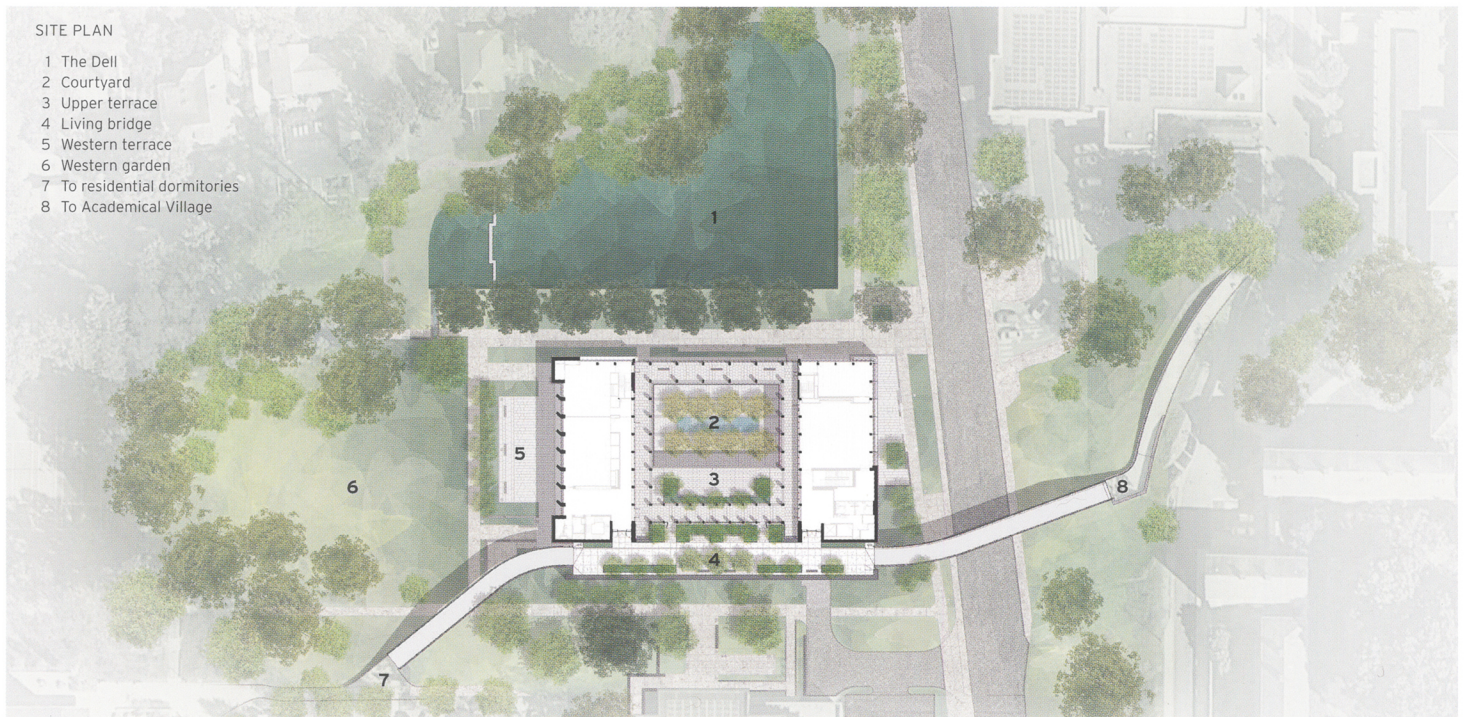
Interiors, softened with wooden floors and cabinetry, open to drought-resistant gardens and a pool (opposite, top, and below). Kitelike roof forms seem to float above walls of glass and rammed earth (left). Opposite, bottom: Sustainable strategies diagram.



UVA Contemplative Sciences Center

Charlottesville, Virginia
Completed 2024

The center functions as both bridge and cloister, linking Jefferson's Academical Village to residential life while framing a sequence of restorative landscapes. The light-filled building, which embraces a central courtyard, organizes two fieldstone-clad lower levels as a porous extension of the adjacent park and water feature, enabling gardens, loggias, and shaded terraces to foster connections with nature. Brick-clad upper floors resonate with the campus's Jeffersonian architecture, housing flexible studios and "sensory spaces." The building supports both large gatherings and solitary retreat, advancing a model of architecture as a catalyst for well-being and mindful learning.

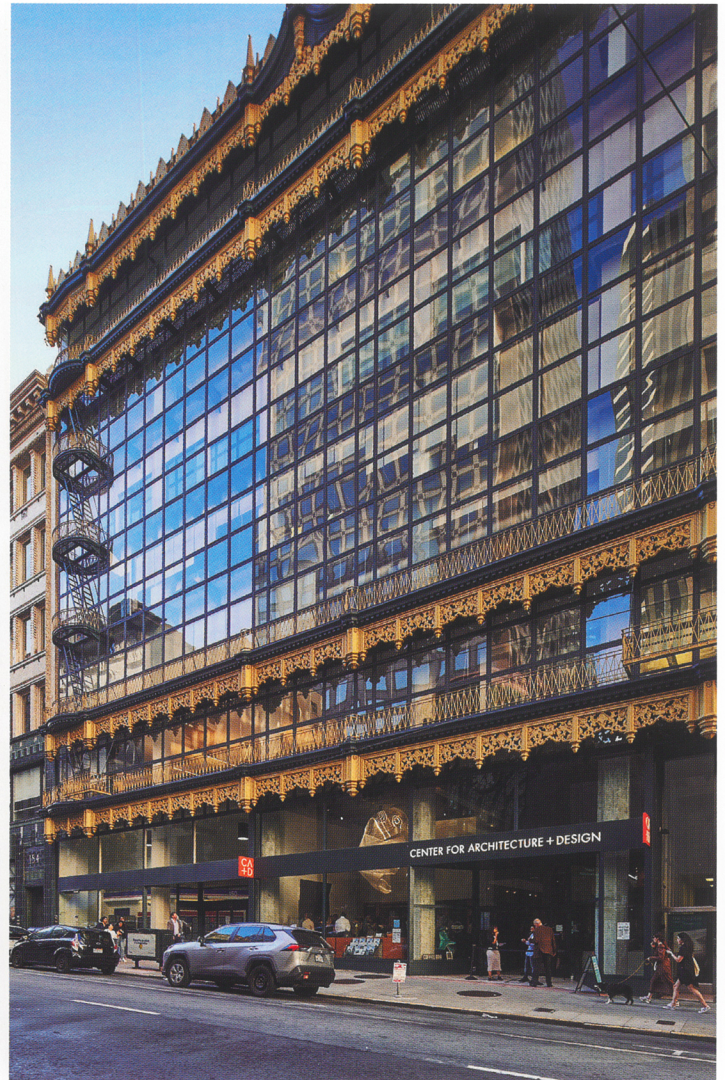




A footbridge connects the academic core with the residential precincts (left). Brick-clad upper levels echo the Jeffersonian campus, while the building nestles beside the adjacent park's prominent water feature (above). Shaded loggias surround a reflecting pool (opposite, bottom).

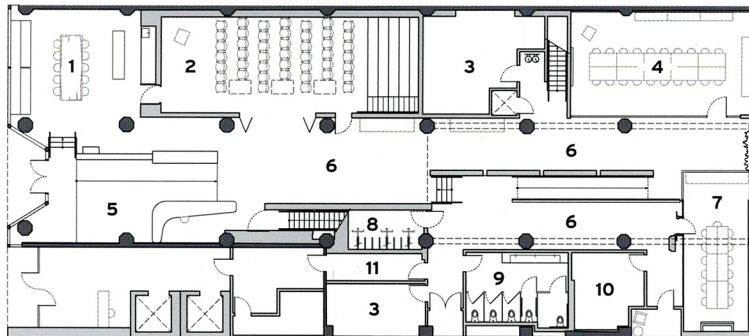
AIA San Francisco and Center for Architecture + Design

San Francisco, California
 Completed 2023



STREET-LEVEL PLAN

- 1 Café
- 2 Lecture hall
- 3 Storage
- 4 Meeting room
- 5 Entry lobby
- 6 Gallery
- 7 Vault meeting room
- 8 Bike storage
- 9 Restroom
- 10 Catering
- 11 Exit passageway



Set within the landmark Hallidie Building, this project transforms a historic storefront into a civic gathering place devoted to design. Working with the two nonprofits that now call it home, the architects created a flexible, community-oriented environment that expands visibility while fostering education and dialogue. The program introduces a café, bookstore, gallery, and lecture hall alongside offices, inviting the public to engage directly with the built environment. Bay Area artisans donated their services, contributing finely crafted elements that underscore both the value of local making and the collective nature of architecture.



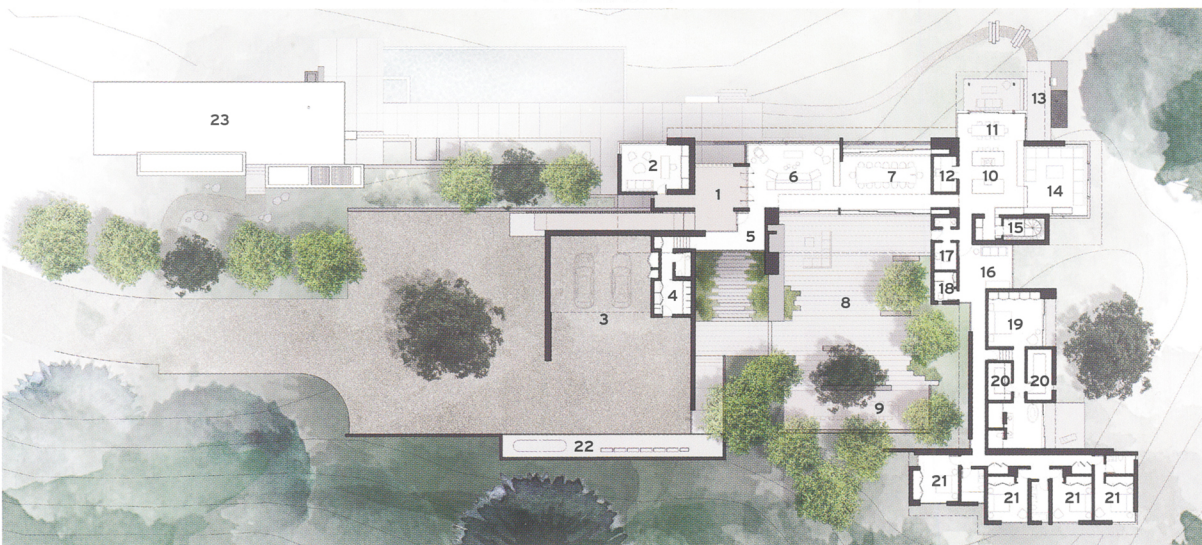
A swooping, poured-in-place concrete reception desk (above and right) grounds the space with its raw, tactile presence—an effect that a flawless prefabricated version could not achieve. At street level of a historic building, the project exposes the existing structure and preserves original artifacts and patina while layering in contemporary interventions (opposite).



Trestle Residence

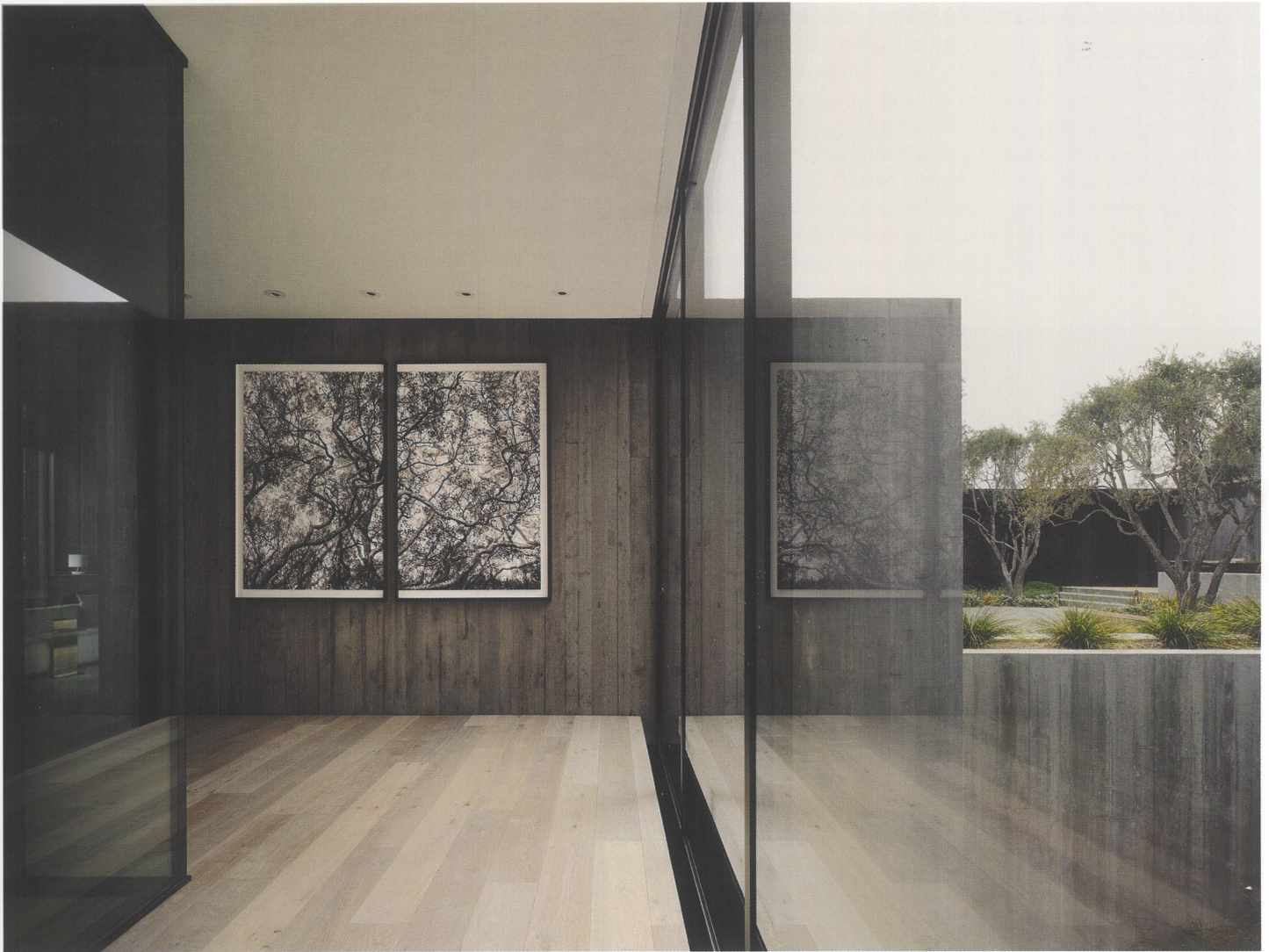
Napa Valley, California
 Completed 2017

Set into a wooded hillside, this 6900-square-foot residence negotiates shifting grades while maintaining a dialogue with the adjoining farm. Built on the pads of earlier structures to minimize site disturbance, it is composed of indoor and covered outdoor spaces that create varied connections to the landscape, while it employs fieldstone, concrete, and steel for durability and fire resistance. The design incorporates passive ventilation through operable windows, thermal mass to moderate heat, and high-performance glazing to admit daylight and frame views. Rooftop photovoltaics supply energy, while a large-scale water-collection system supports domestic, agricultural, and fire-protection needs.



FLOOR PLAN

- 1 Covered entry
- 2 Study
- 3 Carport
- 4 Mudroom
- 5 Entry vestibule
- 6 Living room
- 7 Dining room
- 8 Courtyard
- 9 Outdoor dining
- 10 Kitchen
- 11 Dining nook
- 12 Scullery
- 13 Outdoor kitchen
- 14 Family room
- 15 Wine cellar
- 16 Playroom
- 17 Pantry
- 18 Laundry
- 19 Primary bedroom
- 20 Dressing room
- 21 Bedroom
- 22 Mechanical enclosure
- 23 Guest cottage



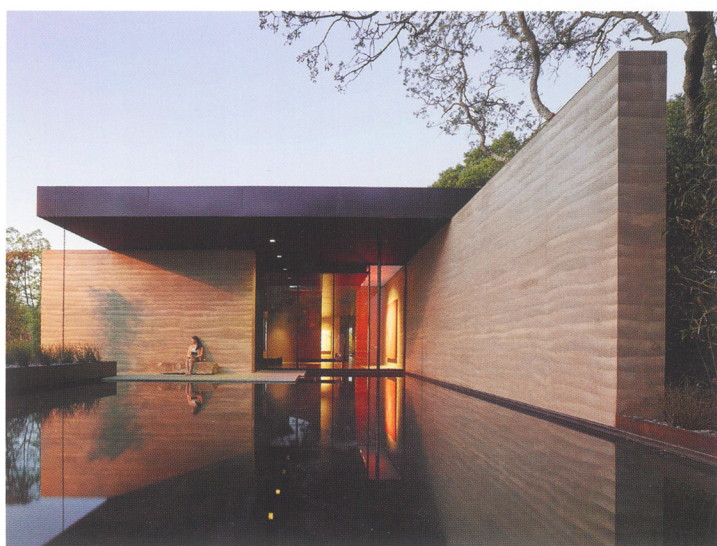
A restrained palette of fieldstone, concrete, and steel requires minimal maintenance and reflects the agrarian setting. Large openings

flood interiors with daylight and frame varied views, strengthening the occupants' connection to the land.

Windhover Contemplative Center

Stanford, California
Completed 2014

Envisioned as a refuge from the intensity of campus life, Stanford University's 4000-square-foot center offers a nondenominational setting for quiet reflection and renewal. Inside, Nathan Oliveira's *Windhover* paintings—abstract meditations inspired by kestrels in flight—are washed with natural light filtered through louvered skylights, while the surrounding space remains intentionally dim. Rammed-earth walls and wooden surfaces establish a serene, tactile environment, complemented by water features and gardens that extend contemplation outdoors. A sheltered entry sequence leads visitors gradually inward, framing both the art and the adjacent oak grove.



Conceived as a fusion of art, architecture, and landscape, the center offers spaces that ease daily stresses while renewing the

spirit. The center's meditative paintings radiate outward, visible to passersby, while interior views open to the surrounding landscape.

The Prow

Seattle, Washington
Completed 2021

Hugging the edge of Expedia Group's 40-acre campus, this 2430-square-foot building offers respite from the corporate bustle while fostering innovation. Set within terraced stone walls descending to Elliott Bay, its lifted roofline evokes both a landform and a wing, referencing the motion of ships, planes, and vehicles that surround the site. Inside, a single room is organized into three seating zones and is crafted from indigenous Pacific Northwest materials: local stone walls and Douglas fir floors and ceilings. Expansive glass walls frame Mount Rainier and the bay, with retractable glazing allowing activity to extend onto a floating deck.

South-facing glazing opens to a deck sheltered by a 50-foot cantilevered roof (right). From the headquarters above, the roof—which mirrors the landscaped ground plane—appears as a geometrically planted landform (right, bottom).

