

America's Top Architects: A California House By Aidlin Darling Design Invites Nature Indoors



Clients with a lifelong interest in agriculture tasked San Francisco's Aidlin Darling Design with this Northern California home.

ABOVE: The main house spans changes in elevation atop girders suspended from concrete piers, earning it the name "Trestle Residence." A detached guest house is located at the far end of the pool.

ADAM ROUSE PHOTOGRAPHY

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Published Oct 11, 2026, 06:30am EDT

ESSENTIALS

Firm Name: Aidlin Darling Design

Principals: Joshua Aidlin, David Darling

Headquarters: San Francisco, California

Recent Accolades: Forbes 2026 list of "America's Top 200 Residential Architects" and "America's Best-in-State Residential Architects"

House Name: Trestle Residence

Location: Northern California

Area and Layout: 7,910 square feet; 7 bedrooms, 9 bathrooms

Photographer: Adam Rouse Photography

Can a house feel rustic and refined at the same time? Fashioned from raw materials such as steel, stone, wood and concrete and nestled into an undulating hillside, this contemporary home in Northern California seems to straddle genres as effortlessly as the landscape.

Designed by Aidlin Darling Design for a couple with an intense interest in agriculture, the 7,910-square-foot house rambles across the rippling terrain, with staggered wings oriented to maximize light, provide shelter from the wind and enhance views of the verdant valley below. “This residence exemplifies an ethos that our practice holds dear—one of reflecting a sense of place unique to its site,” says architect David Darling.

Retractable glass walls transform the public spaces into open-air pavilions that flow seamlessly onto a protected courtyard framed by olive trees and spindly oaks. The living room’s slatted ceiling continues outside as a shady arbor, underscoring the indoor-outdoor connection. Just off the patio, a broad staircase ambles down the swale beneath the suspended entry hall, providing access to the lap pool and detached guest house below.

“The clients’ primary goal was to live in a way that was ecologically sensitive,” Darling says. To minimize site disruption, the house was built on the footprint of previous structures and rests atop steel girders suspended from poured-concrete piers that anchor the house both structurally and visually. “Spaces are grounded and floating at the same time,” Darling adds. Operable windows were designed to provide passive cooling, but a rooftop photovoltaic array supplies power for mechanical cooling when needed. Groundwater is stored in concrete tanks for use in irrigation and fire protection.

In this house, the architecture is the art, with exposed structural elements providing the main source of ornament, save for the textural expanses of board-formed concrete and fieldstone that animate and divide the spaces. Storage is consigned to massive steel and wood cabinets that are integrated into the surroundings, so even the furniture becomes an extension of the architecture. It’s a harmonious union in a home that’s filled with them.



ABOVE: The home's main living areas flow seamlessly out to a courtyard that's sheltered from the wind and equipped with an outdoor fireplace. Stairs lead down to a breezeway passing beneath the suspended portion of the house, affording access to the pool and guest house below.
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ABOVE: The front door is accessed by a boardwalk tucked behind the carport, which was clad in local fieldstone. The architects chose hardy, low-maintenance building materials that would acquire a patina over time.
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ABOVE: The living and dining areas are fitted with retractable glass panels that turn the spaces into open pavilions blessed with panoramic views of the valley below. Clerestories introduce filtered light from above.
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ABOVE: Donald MacDonald Interior Design furnished the living room with monochromatic, low-slung pieces, so as not to distract from the stellar views beyond. The entry bridge is visible at the rear.
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ABOVE: When the retractable doors on either side of the dining area are open, the space feels like a breezeway. The slatted ceiling extends over the courtyard outside, uniting the spaces and offering protection from the sun.
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ABOVE: The minimalist kitchen features parallel islands and cold-rolled steel doors that conceal storage. A steel-framed storage cabinet at left separates the space from the adjacent family room.
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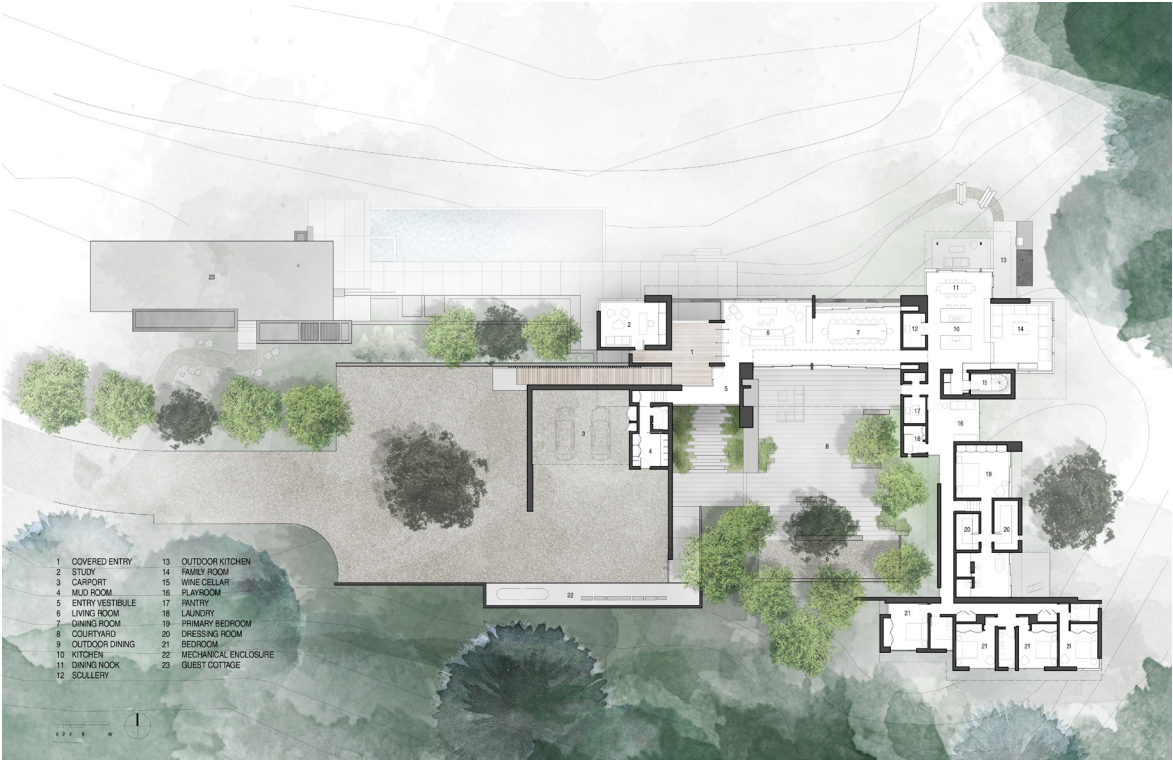
ABOVE: A glass wall wraps one end of the family room adjoining the kitchen; the steel storage cabinet conceals a TV.
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ABOVE: In the primary bathroom, the mirror over the vanity reflects the view. Here, as elsewhere, natural materials supply the interior's color, texture and pattern.
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ABOVE: A view of the dining room with the doors retracted and the courtyard visible beyond. The living room hovers over the breezeway at right.
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