



h.o.y. ²⁰⁰¹
HOMES OF THE YEAR PART 2
best new residence #3

Architect: Kathleen Hallahan

butterflies not included

Kathleen Hallahan creates a principled home with humble materials

Architect Kathleen Hallahan's clients wanted a flexible home, one that encouraged spontaneity, nurtured family life and opened its doors to friends and neighbors.

They wanted the kitchen/dining room to be the heart of the home, one that connected the other main indoor and outdoor living spaces.

They wanted their home built of humble materials, around a sprawling Torrey pine. And the lady of the house wanted a butterfly garden.

By Wayne Carlson

Photography by Carol Peerce



“an artful composition of parts and materials”
— Juror Steve Florman

A FIRE PIT warms architect Kathleen Hallahan’s updated version of the front porch in this new home in Solana Beach. The residence is the fourth of our 2001 Homes of the Year winners.

The other three were featured in the February issue.

OPPOSITE: The home — built for builder Terrence and Tracy Wardell — was designed around the old Torrey pine tree. Hallahan said her clients wanted the home built of humble materials.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Top-opening family-room window lets in cooling breezes on hot days.



With flair, innovation and a nod to the architectural masters of the past, Hallahan gave her clients all of that — and a *San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles* Home of the Year award, to boot.

The Solana Beach home Hallahan designed for homebuilder Terrence Wardell and his family is the fourth and final winner in our 2001 Homes of the

Year competition. The other three winners were featured in the February issue.

“Very San Diego,” said contest juror A. Lewis Dominy, principal of Dominy + Associates Architects. “I love the home’s nice forms and its simplicity. There’s sort of a Schindleresque throwback feel to it.”

OPPOSITE: Kitchen is the hub of the home. Floors are recycled hardwood; kitchen counters and backsplashes are Indian Madras and black Andes granite respectively. **THIS PAGE:** Cozy dining room adjoins the kitchen. Slate tiles form the fireplace surround.



Dominy's reference was to Los Angeles Modernist architect Rudolph Schindler, who until his death in 1953 explored the relationship of space, light and form in astonishingly inventive homes that helped define the California lifestyle.

Like Schindler, Richard Neutra and other Modernist architects, Hallahan used industrial

materials to stunning effect and brought the outdoors in with walls of glass, clerestory windows, and doors and windows that pivot open from top and side.

Wardell served as the architect's design collaborator; his company, Wardell Builders, Inc., winner of a 1999 *SDH/GL* Homes of the Year





FRENCH DOORS from kitchen lead to back garden and a guest house.

builders' award, was contractor.

The project started as a small remodel, but over time expanded to include the entire house. By the time the final nail was hammered, only the old master bathroom remained intact — reincarnated as a guest bath.

For a sense of family history, Hallahan incorporated pieces of the Wardells' old 1,200-square-foot ranch house into the new 3,200-square-foot, two-story home, reusing glass-panel doors for the bedrooms of daughters Katie, 16, and Molly, 14, and old tiles for stair risers in the music room, family room and main staircase.

Hallahan said Wardell's wife, Tracy Weiss, also was a valuable member of the team. Among other things, she defined the family's lifestyle and helped select materials, such as the striking deep-red Indian Madras granite for the kitchen counter and black Andes granite for the backsplashes.

"Tracy and Terry said preparation and sharing of meals was a treasured time for the family," Hallahan said. "Both of them like to cook, and they didn't want the cook to be left out of family goings-on, so they wanted the kitchen central to everything."

Consequently, Hallahan designed

the kitchen/dining room as the heart and hub of the house, within earshot and eyesight of the other main interior rooms and easily accessible to outdoor living spaces in front and back.

It's a bright, cheery space floored with recycled hardwood from an old General Dynamics plant and warmed by a fireplace made of multiple shades of green quartzite.

Two glass cabinets suspended from the ceiling hover over a counter, while treasured vintages are a step away in the built-in wine rack.

The family cooks like the generous amount of counter space and the second sink.

Beyond the rustic dining table are niches and walls that hold pieces of folk art from the family's travels.

Tucked into a light-filled alcove of the kitchen, sandwiched between cork message boards, is Tracy's "control room" where she coordinates family activities.

Hallahan gave the cook superb views — to the east the pretty back yard shaded by the old Torrey pine, with its kitchen and butterfly gardens, to the south a little bamboo garden, and to the west a panoramic ocean vista stretching to the ocean a half-mile away.

Down two steps is the light-filled family room, with a fireplace nestled into a corner.

"Terry and I wanted the kids to have a place where they could take their friends after dinner," Tracy said. "And Terry and I also wanted a place for us."

So while the kids are in the living/music room with friends, the Wardells might be down the corridor in the family room with views overlooking the street and beyond.

"Terry and Tracy by nature are very warm, social people and very welcoming of family and friends to their home," Hallahan said. "They wanted their home to be inviting, not intimidating."

“They’re not into formal entertaining. They just enjoy spending time with their friends. They wanted spaces that could accommodate that. They wanted rooms that could be opened up or closed off easily, depending on the situation.”

To keep things informal, Hallahan created an open floor plan that flows freely outside to the back garden and the roofless “front porch.”

“From the start Tracy emphasized that they lived in a friendly neighborhood,” Hallahan said. “She said they didn’t want to confine themselves to outdoor living in the back yard. They wanted to be open and friendly with their neighbors in front.”

So Hallahan created a space defined by a low wall of concrete blocks overlooking the street in front, for chairs and a fire pit.

“We all referred to it as the front porch,” the architect said.

This roofless “porch” gives the Wardells “a place to hang out, acting as a catalyst for interaction with neighbors or friends of the daughters who might be cruising by,” Hallahan said.

The fire pit offers the Wardells an additional excuse to linger outside in the evenings to watch the sunset, and then the stars.

The family also asked the architect to design a small granny flat for visiting family and friends. She responded with a detached building that’s an architectural mini-version of the main house.

“The greatest challenge here was to make 620 square feet seem as spacious as possible, as economically as possible,” Hallahan said. She created the illusion of extra room with high ceilings, an open floor plan and oodles of light.

She also framed views of vines on a weathered fence, a small sun-filled entry, and sky and ocean.

Views are even better from the

upper floor of the main residence, reached by stairs treaded with recycled tires and railed with meshed steel.

Sitting in the efficient office atop the stairs, one almost feels that you’re cradled by the branches of the big old Torrey pine outside.

To the west, Hallahan captured magnificent ocean views in the glassed-in master suite, which includes walk-in closets flooded with natural light.

A metal bridge leads to the girls’ bedrooms and a bathroom.

For Hallahan and Wardell, the project was a reunion of sorts.

“When I was in architecture school at UCLA, I worked as a laborer for Terry’s company for several summers,” said Hallahan, who majored in environmental design at San Diego State University. “I had no skills. I just cleaned up at projects and did some digging. I really enjoyed it.”

Working on the builder’s own house “was a wonderful learning experience for me,” she said. “Terry sees so much. He can calculate things so quickly and offer so many alternatives. We threw out countless design variations before deciding on what would work best.”

What worked best on this project was flexibility and unpretentiousness. The space that epitomizes that philosophy is the modest sunken space off the entry, originally planned as the living room.

The room is nothing like the grand, largely unused living rooms in many new oversized homes.

In fact, the space quickly evolved into the family’s much-used music room. A piano anchors one wall and other instruments stand against the walls poised for action.

“It’s an intimate little room, for after-dinner conversations and music,” Hallahan says. “Tracy did not want this room — or any room in the house — to be ostentatious. She wanted something more humble

looking.”

That desire also is reflected in the walls of bare concrete block that mimic the outside retaining walls, the drywall above the concrete, the unpainted wood doors and trellises, and the concrete floors colored a rusty leather.

“We attempted to achieve that humble look with the materials and the size of the spaces,” Hallahan said. “None of the rooms is overly large. Each of the spaces borrows from the others, so they seem much bigger than they actually are. And we picked materials that had inherent strength.”

The Wardells said their architect met all their requests and requirements with flying colors. Speaking of which — has their little garden attracted lots of beautiful butterflies?

“Well, so far I’ve seen one Monarch,” Tracy said with a little shrug and a big smile. ♦

*Reprinted with permission of
San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles*