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A Sensuous Modernist

Richard Landry's New Contemporary Homes Are A Feast For The Senses

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERHARD PFEIFFER

The tall entrance of the Berberian Residence adds a sense of drama and grandeur to the home. Architect Richard Landry researched classic Modernist houses when designing the home: The use of horizontal brick evokes the Prairie Houses of Frank Lloyd Wright, while the floor-to-ceiling glass walls and the floating staircase are reminiscent of Richard Neutra, the influential California Modernist.



RIGHT The blocky forms of the Modern Villa were partly inspired by early 10th Century architects like Adolf Loos. Using historical elements as a point of departure, Landry has created a lively façade that seems to be in motion. In the foreground, a footbridge across a reflecting pools leads to another water feature accented by gas-fed flames.

BELOW The open staircase of the Modern Villa provides a dramatic view of several levels of the home at a single glance. The low ceiling of the entrance foyer (middle left) prepares the visitor for a dramatic shift in scale when entering the house.



Architect Richard Landry smiles when an interviewer asks him whether he thinks his latest Modernist homes are “cinematic.” In the eyes of one observer, at least, his latest contemporary designs have something of the swoosh and romance of the silver screen. Granted, it’s a subjective view, one can imagine Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse dancing in the living room of the Berberian residence, as if the bold, masculine design of the house came from the imagination of a top MGM designer.

Even if you can’t imagine people dancing, Landry and his design team are clearly enjoying themselves with the freedom that comes with designing in the Modernist mode.

Three new houses—the Berberian Residence, the KFA house and the mysteriously named Modern Villa—are bravura displays of architectural know-how. They are also displays of the kind of freedom that only a disciplined architect with a deep grounding in historical styles can demonstrate.

“There are no real rules,” Landry says of his recent Modernist work. “You can create your own architectural language.”

For Landry, a master of a dozen styles and equally at home in 17th Century France as in 21st Century Malibu, the kind of untrammled freedom offered by contemporary design is not always something he can use. “A Classical floor plan is organized in a certain way,” he says. In contemporary work, “we must search to organize our plans and facades in a way that is beautiful and flows well.”

Landry is definitely not one of the austere, no-fun Modernists who want their clients to sit in empty white shells. “Our clients don’t want ‘museum space,’” he says. In fact, the freedom of Modernism gives Landry the liberty to explore fine materials with various colors and textures. In the Berberian house, the architect opted for Pennsylvania



TOP The hillside location of the KFA House allows the architect to locate pool, spa and an outdoor sitting area on a series of a descending terraces.

ABOVE Designing in a contemporary style means freedom from traditional rules, according to architect Landry, who supplied the KFA House with several fanciful stone towers. A cut away wall makes the tower visible at ground level.

limestone which is greenish blue in color. For the KFA House, which has a very different mood and color scheme, the architect chose Arizona limestone with a brownish reddish hue. This house actually has walls of four different types of stone, trimmed in a walnut veneer that brings warmth to the interior.


And because every client is unique, every Landry project is different. The homes, in a sense, could be viewed as personal portraits of the owners.

"Every house we do is different from all the others," he says. "When a client approaches me with a request for a Modern home, I approach with no preconceived notions."

"We start to talk about spaces and forms. Do they like glass? Columns? Angles? Do they want the house to have an openness to the outdoors?"

And cinematic or not, Landry is definitely able to deliver some visual drama when the design program calls for it. In the KFA house is a sculptural staircase and an open stairwell that brings natural light to three vertical levels of the home. An equally jaw-dropping touch is a fountain in the KFA house that combines water and fire.

In Landry's sensuous, playful concept of Modernism, sculptural forms add both whimsy and interest, such as the towers in the Berberian house, that pop up along the wall that lines the porte cochere.

In Landry's hands, the stereotypical hard edges of Modernism can soften into flowing lines. "Curving lines make the house seem a little more feminine, as opposed to the masculine feeling of straight, rigid lines," he says. "We like to combine the two, making one play off the other," he says. With Landry at the drawing board, we can be sure that straight and curved elements will work together for a satisfying architectural whole. His designs may even remind you of an elegant dance in an old-time movie musical. Or not. One thing is certain: Landry will always surprise, and always keep the imaginative world and taste of his clients uppermost in his mind. 



A “floating” spiral staircase in the KFA House is a flamboyant centerpiece that surprises visitors with its structural boldness. The curving shape of the staircase provides an open space for a hanging sculpture.