

natural bamboo floor in the kitchen and breakfast room provides a warm contrast to the stainless-steel sinks and precast concrete counters. The breakfast room's ample table, banquettes and benches are white oak.



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hen contractor Judith Thompson and her partner, investment manager Cindy Brooks, came upon their dream home two years ago, a 3,300-square-foot house on a pine-shaded hillside, it was one step from a tear-down. Built in the 1950s as a classic California ranch with expansive views of the northern scoop of San Francisco Bay, it had suffered five remodelings. By the time

Thompson and Brooks saw it, the pretty-in-pink pastiche of country clichés was a candidate for a thorough modernization.

“We loved the privacy of the acre-and-a-half lot,” recalls Thompson, “and we certainly knew we were facing a major renovation. We just didn’t quite anticipate its extent.” They planned to open the house to the views, add guest quarters, build a new kitchen and append a spacious bed-and-bath suite. After a 13-month renovation, the clean-lined, updated ranch-style house had doubled in size.

Thompson and Brooks are no novices in the world of home renovation. Thompson Brooks Inc., their remodeling and general construction company, was founded in 1990 and now specializes in projects in the over \$1 million budget range. Currently one of the fastest-growing companies in the United States, it’s also among



Concrete

For their own home on a Bay Area hillside, **Solutions** two contractors called in designer Fu-Tung Cheng.

the largest remodeling firms owned by women in the country.

For the house they share with their daughter, Zoe, the women engaged Berkeley designer Fu-Tung Cheng to plan a spacious new kitchen and breakfast room. They had appreciated the cool, calm intelligence of his plans and admired the dramatic and sensual concrete countertops that have become his specialty.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GREY CRAWFORD. PRODUCED AND WRITTEN BY DIANE DORRANS SAEKS.

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oon after the Thompson/Brooks construction team began initial work on the renovation, they discovered, beneath the pink plaster, a nightmare of dry rot, substandard construction and out-of-date wiring. Instead of bulldozing the house, which a foreman strongly recommended, they decided to work with the original floor plan and use it as the palimpsest for a more spacious light-filled home.

“For my clients,” says Thompson, “I always suggest preserving at least a suggestion of the original interiors. We wanted the house to have a sense of history and to maintain its connection with the land. We left some walls and kept the essence of the old house.”

With the plan of attack settled, they began to sketch out the kitchen. “We wanted a practical scheme with lots of rich detail,” Thompson notes, “and we’d admired the simplicity and naturalness of Fu-Tung’s designs, so it seemed obvious to approach him.”

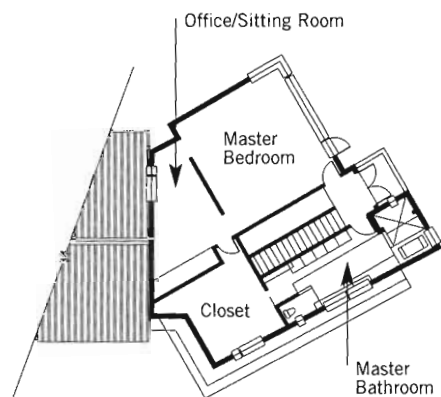
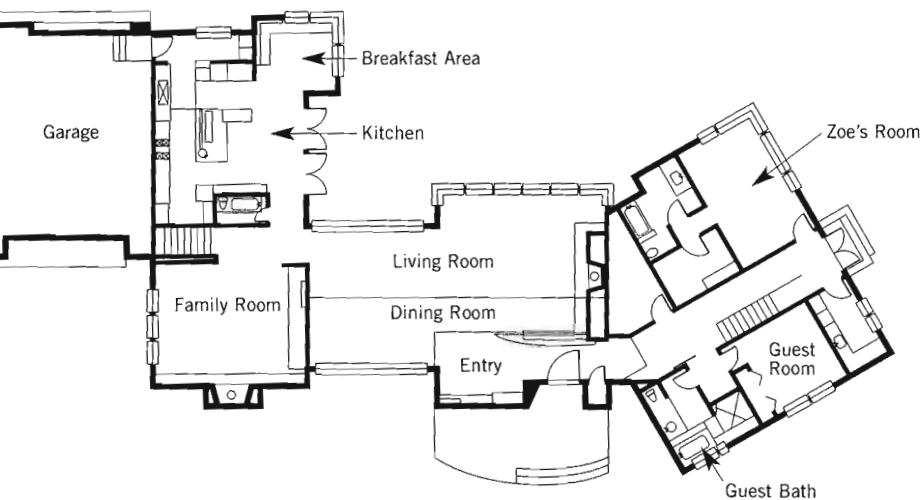
Cheng, and designer Cathleen Quandt, orchestrated a complex array of materials and fixtures, many of them custom crafted. For the back wall of the kitchen Quandt selected parchment-colored, crackle-glazed tiles. They are a stylistic contrast to a pair of stainless-steel sinks and a precast indigo-charcoal concrete counter embedded with fossil ammonites and chunks of turquoise stones. A cutting-board counter of poplar, the bamboo floor and an integral-color plaster arch over the kitchen work area all serve as rich counterpoints to the kitchen’s harder, sleeker surfaces.

WHAT THE PROS KNOW ABOUT CONCRETE COUNTERS

Concrete is an extremely durable and malleable material that is especially versatile for use as custom countertops, says Berkeley designer Fu-Tung Cheng, author of the recent *Concrete Countertops* from Taunton Press. Precast concrete counters are as tough as slab marble or granite, and will likely cost as much, but they can be embossed, textured or embedded with decorative shells or stones, even computer chips, and can be set in a variety of classic or complex shapes to fit around sinks or specialized work areas.

Concrete happily accepts integral color (pigment added to the mix before setting) in virtually any color. Finished with a penetrating natural sealer and handbuffed with wax, concrete has a satin-smooth finish and is cool and sensual to the touch.





In the kitchen (above), a stainless-steel drying rack is suspended above the sinks. The Fisher & Paykel dishwasher has two drawers for large or small loads. A steel-framed, aluminum-and-fiberglass bifold door (right) swings open and locks into the end of the custom stereo cabinet. Opposite: Fu-Tung Cheng, Judith Thompson and Cindy Brooks on the terrace. Landscaping is by local legend Topher Delaney.





Thompson and Brooks were so pleased with Cheng's superbly calibrated plan for the kitchen and breakfast room that they engaged him and Quandt to plan a series of guest bathrooms and a new bedroom/bathroom suite.

"We wanted to create a spalike feeling, free of clutter and confusion," notes Quandt. A narrow palette of materials and colors enhances the serene mood that carries from one bathroom to the others. Brushed-stainless-steel counters contrast with honey-colored hemlock cabinetry. In one guest bathroom, celadon glass wall tiles gleam as a backdrop to a handcrafted bronze washbasin.

Walls were washed with plaster and kept free of cabinets. The

bathrooms overlook a wooded hillside, so Cheng focused the Zen views with simple aluminum-framed windows. He installed luxurious custom-crafted, 24-inch-deep stainless-steel soaking tubs.

"The key to using steel in an interior," says Quandt, "is to balance it with other textures." She and Cheng added texture with benches of Brazilian hardwood and stone floors (with radiant heat).

"This is not the house we originally envisioned," says Thompson. "It's much more. We love modernism and the intellectual purity of its approach, but we've warmed the house with beautiful woods and handcrafted surfaces."

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See Resources, last pages.

Cheng's plan called for bathtubs, sinks and countertops of custom-crafted stainless steel. In the master bath (this page and opposite, far left), a sculptural light tower is crafted in aluminum-framed fiberglass with the added texture of honeycomb aluminum. Opposite, near left: The guest bath on the floor below features a round bronze washbasin against a wall of celadon glass tiles. Tubs are insulated to maintain warmth.

