

In a contemporary home where the backyard is only a few steps from any room, there's no reason to go on vacation.

BY LYDIA LEE PHOTOGRAPHY BY BERNARD ANDRÉ



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n a brilliantly sunny and warm Labor Day last September, Lisa and Michael Rubenstein hosted a gathering for 20 families in the backyard of their new Hillsborough home. The events included a costumed relay race, a water-balloon toss and a Jell-O eating contest. "It was like an amazing family Olympics," says Lisa. "As they were leaving at the end of the day, kids were saying that this was the greatest party they'd ever been to."

It's the kind of celebration that this house was designed for: With its broad layout and views of a sleek pool set into a seemingly endless carpet of emerald grass, the house has the feeling of a vacation getaway. There's a full complement of resort activities, including a mini-golf green and paddle-tennis court for the kids and a bocce ball court for the adults. Spectators have frontrow seats on the patio, where a Michael Taylor sofa and chairs, upholstered in gray outdoor fabric, invite guests to lounge.


The family's life is centered on the pleasures of socializing indoors and out. "We always have people around," says Lisa, the busy mom of Ben, 8 , and Lily, 6 , and an interior designer whose company is called Real Rooms. "We wanted a place where people could walk in and immediately feel at homewhere you don't have to worry about the kids running around with juice boxes."

Their son Ben, who uses a wheelchair, inspired the Rubensteins to think about a single-story home. After briefly considering shoehorning an elevator into their two-story San Mateo Park home, they began searching for a large level lot where they could have the same square footage on one floor. Once they located the nearly two-acre property, a friend referred them to architect Randy Grange, the principal of TRG Architects. In his 14 years of building large estates up and down the Peninsula, Grange had developed a knack for updating the traditional look of Colonials and Tuscan villas and opening them up to the light and outdoors with

strategically placed windows, oversize French doors and other architectural sleights of hand.

But the Rubensteins' project was quite different. Not only was contemporary architecture a better match for their casual sensibilities ("We asked ourselves, 'What can you build that doesn't look like it's trying to be old?"' says Lisa), the Rubensteins also had a modern-day interest in green building. While they decided to keep their house similar in square footage to other Hillsborough properties $(6,000$ square feet), in part to maintain its resale value, they felt it was important to invest in sustainable materials and alternative energy sourcesincluding one of the area's first geothermal systems. Taking advantage of the stable temperature deep underground, the technology is an extremely efficient and reliable way to heat and cool a house, though it takes a while to pay for itself in mild climates like California.
"Michael was always driving the green innovations," says Lisa about her husband, a Silicon Valley
entrepreneur. His ideas for the house included installing solar panels, sourcing materials within 100 miles, using a gray-water irrigation system for the native landscaping and adding enough electricity to the garage to power their cars in the future. His enthusiasm inspired the team to go further.
"It was a dream project on many fronts: the design, the sustainable aspects, the clients and the level of detail to which they were willing to take everything," says Grange. He began designing a low-slung house that would bring together all the Rubensteins' requirements, as well as win approval from the neighborhood planning commission, whose members were divided over the newcomer in their midst. Ultimately the commission signed off on a distinctively modern structure, clad in the warm hues of FSCcertified ipe wood and lime plaster. "It's a soft, natural contemporary with no hard edges," Grange says.

With hundreds of square feet of patios, the house is

BELOW: One accent wall in the dining room is covered in a metallic floral wallpaper by Romo. RIGHT: The same wallpaper was used in the butler's pantry. BOTTOM: Reclaimed oak floors
in the kitchen offer a rustic counterpoint to glass mosaic tile and mercury glass pendants.




The library (above) and the living room (left) both overlook the backyard, and share a doublesided EcoSmart fireplace. In the library, two mismatched chairs from Todd Hase are covered in lemon yellow. The living room seating was given the same treatment using gray mohair.
truly an indoor/outdoor home, which is what the Rubensteins had in mind. As a guiding concept, they asked Grange to wrap all the living spaces around a central courtyard. "It was one of the tougher things, because there were so many rooms they wanted to look out onto this courtyard," says Grange. "But almost every room does connect to it." In the U-shaped layout, the bedrooms are in the west wing and the family gathering spaces are in the east wing, with the living and dining rooms in between. Grange gave the few rooms that don't open directly onto the courtyard their own outdoor spaces: Lisa's office has a small terrace where she holds meetings, and the kids' play area opens onto an outdoor living room, playfully outfitted with Philippe Starck's Bubble Club sofa and armchairs.

Lisa's love of eclectic design continues through the interiors, the result of a collaborative effort with Leslie Lamarre, the principal interior designer at TRG. Lisa favors modern lighting fixtures such as the Cellula chandelier over the dining room table, and on the white walls are works by Warhol, Rauschenberg and Lichtenstein from the collection that she and Michael have put together over the years. But her vision is less about the rigors of modernism and

more about an unexpected mix. The furniture is a blend of transitional pieces and curvy antiques accented with exuberant notes of Hollywood Regency glam-including a gilded console in the hallway and an overscale damask rug in her office. Even the humblest of spaces, the mudroom, gets a charming treatment: It's wallpapered in a cinnabar trellis pattern and the ornate design has also been carved into the doors of the creampainted cabinets.

The kitchen and baths keep in tune with the modern rhythm, deftly echoing each other with a similar dynamic pattern of tiny Ann Sacks tiles. In the bathrooms, the mosaic is executed in bright ceramic tiles; in the kitchen, it's made up of subtle shades of marble. Ben's spacious bath features a countertop that is open beneath for wheelchair access, as well as grab bars that let him pull himself up easily.

Since they moved in a year ago, the Rubensteins have tested their house's capacity to accommodate everyone and everything: In January, they held a school fundraiser for 125 people, and summer will bring an even bigger 2009 family Olympics back to Hillsborough. "We call it the 'Ruby Resort,"' laughs Lisa. "We always seem to be filling it up."

ABOVE: Architect Randy Grange stands in front of a poolside pavilion topped with a grass roof. Once curtains are added, it will be yet another space for alfresco entertaining. RIGHT: Lisa Rubenstein and her children, Ben and Lily, enjoy their outdoor rooms every day.



