

INTERIOR DESIGN

\$8.95

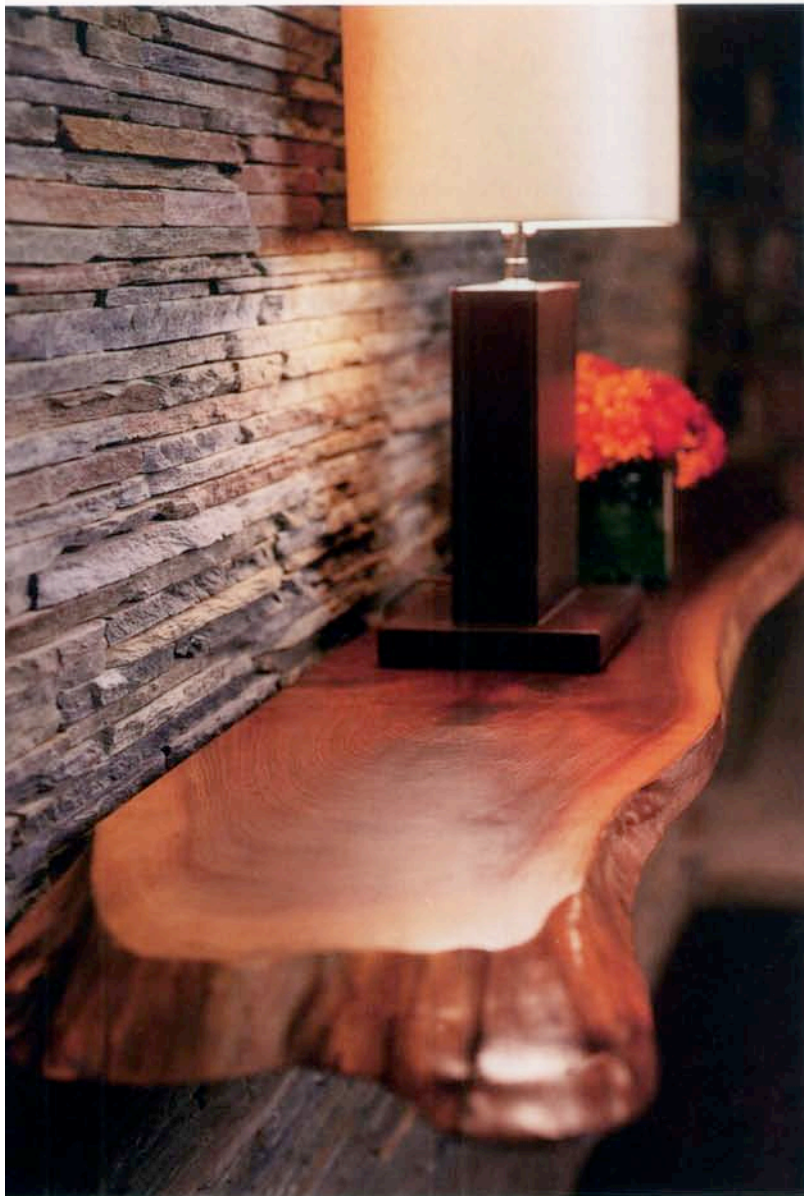
MARCH 2002

In California



Clean Slate

With slabs of walnut and tons of dry-stacked stone,
Dufner Heighes stays true to a California ranch



EAST COAST ARCHITECTS may have sprinted toward post-modernism in the 1980s, but the ranch style remained deeply entrenched in California's Central Valley. Left-over Spanish mission elements from the 1960s and before—wide eaves, rough stucco walls, and wood plank ceilings—are still extremely popular in rural Bakersfield, where André Radandt and his wife, Lisa, farm carrots and mill them into the “baby” nuggets sold by the bag in supermarkets across the U.S. Attracted by authentic, solid bones and a lush site on the Kern River, the couple bought a 1986 house. Unfortunately, salmon-pink paint and black lacquer distracted from the honesty of the architecture. And 1980s elements seemed especially ill-suited in an oil-patch town known mostly for its serious cowboy-music scene and agriculture. (Eighty percent of the nation's carrots originate in the region.)

It was a natural decision to strip away the flamboyance, and the Radandts started by ripping out a platform bed built over concealed fluorescent lighting in the master suite. Then they consulted several Los Angeles designers. Ultimately, though, the couple decided to give a big break to Dufner Heighes, the young New York firm of architects Gregory Dufner, who was Lisa Radandt's childhood neighbor, and Daniel Heighes Wismer.

Dufner and Wismer suggested a dramatic new layout and expansion. A cathedral ceiling over the central living areas of the house would remain. But the garage, kitchen, dining room, guest room, and guest bath would be razed, since new rooflines were needed to marry the proposed garage addition. “The entire east wing was in a Dumpster,” André Radandt says, recalling his shock. “I remember standing on the slab, looking at the sky.” →

Left: In the foyer of a house in Bakersfield, California, Dufner Heighes installed a free-form walnut shelf from George Nakashima Woodworker. The leather-covered lamp has a parchment shade.

Opposite: Leather-upholstered mahogany armchairs encircle the walnut dining table.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN ELLIS





Natural materials invest the remodeled shell with the rugged masculinity that André Radandt had admired in Montana lodges. Thick wood beams from the original building were preserved. Peruvian walnut flooring was laid by a subcontractor who had helped rehabilitate a residence for Brad Pitt. Another woodworker famous for celebrity clients supplied entry doors of dark, solid walnut.

Dufner and Wismer personally traveled to Pennsylvania to select a log for the free-form slab shelf just inside the front door. As a quartet of masons worked painstakingly over the course of a year, stacked slate inched up walls both inside and outside the house. More than 130 tons of slate from Kashmir were trucked in for foundations, piers, fireplaces, and the large slabs underfoot, which cool interiors through Bakersfield's 110-degree summer days. (Computerized window scrims unspool automatically in warm weather, too.)

In a masterstroke, Dufner Heighes located guest quarters in a new freestanding building strategically sited to block the neighbors while offering views of the sparkling Kern River. The building's wide roof overhangs and exterior stone-veneer detailing echo the forms of the main house. Inside, visitors find a beamed wooden ceiling sheltering Christian Liaigre armchairs and antler lamps. Beige and soft grays tie in with the principal living areas.

Midway through their work, the architects prepared a foot-square Foamcor mailing box of samples for each room. Keyed to a floor plan on the lid, finishes and color chips were nested inside to "give an idea of the palette and textures," Dufner explains. About half of the initial selections FedEx-ed to Bakersfield made the final cut. "André didn't like stripes, and Lisa didn't like orange," Dufner says. →

Above, left: Behind the table, 6-inch Peruvian walnut flooring planks wrap the divider.

Left: Hans Wegner chairs pull up to the oak table.

Opposite, top: The slate entry bridges a new koi pond, surfaced entirely in glass mosaic tiles.

Opposite, bottom: Armchairs flank an upholstered bench with saddle stitching in the living room.





- 1 PLAYROOM
- 2 GYM
- 3 GUEST HOUSE
- 4 DINING AREA
- 5 KITCHEN
- 6 LIVING ROOM
- 7 FAMILY ROOM
- 8 MASTER BEDROOM
- 9 BEDROOM

The Radandt also made several trips to Manhattan to consult with upholsterers on the style and firmness of sofas and sectionals. Subsequently, E-mailing images to Bakersfield proved invaluable as the architects refined the furnishings plan long-distance.

"André spent money on brand-name pieces that keep their value because of the pedigree," says Wismer. In the breakfast area, he and Dufner introduced a signature sideboard by British cult designer Spencer Fung. "We have been following Fung since his furniture became available in the U.S.," Wismer adds. The sideboard's zebrano wood exhibits the same dark tones as the flooring but is lighter overall, and this particular piece was commissioned in a nonstandard length to fit beneath a Kiki Smith painting of a deer.

Some of the furniture arrived in California before construction was complete, and shipments found a temporary home at the family carrot-processing plant. The ascetic George Nakashima Woodworker dining table, built from a massive walnut slab reinforced with bow ties, attracted particular speculation at the loading dock. Now installed in the elegant dining area, the table exemplifies a modesty that has allowed minimalist New York architects to substantially update the house without compromising its ranch-style authenticity. "André kept asking us when we were going to do the fluff and puff," Dufner says. "We don't do fluff and puff." —Craig Kellogg

Above: Waxed linen cloaks the foot- and headboard in the guest house, designed from the ground up by Dufner Heighes.

Opposite: Slate veneer is stacked, without grout, to the 18-foot peak of the cathedral ceiling in the living room. The mohair armchairs and ottoman are custom designs by the architects.

PROJECT TEAM: KIM SLY.

TABLE LAMP (FOYER): AERO STUDIOS THROUGH TROY. DINING CHAIRS: CHRISTIAN LIAIGRE; EDELMAN LEATHER (UPHOLSTERY). PENDANT LIGHT: SALON MODERNE. WOOL RUG (FABRICATION): STARK CARPET. SIDEBBOARD: SPENCER FUNG. KITCHEN TABLE: E15. CABINETS: POGGENPOHL. FITTINGS: DORNBRACHT. ALUMINUM BAR STOOLS: EMECO. REFRIGERATOR, FREEZER: SUB-ZERO. MOSAIC TILE: BISAZZA. WAXED LINEN (GUEST HOUSE): ROGERS & GOFFIGON. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: MILO BROOKS.

