

# Character Counts

BY ANH-MINH LE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN

*A midcentury architectural gem in Marin County, occupied by a couple of interior designers, is flush with personality.*



ON THE SECOND LEVEL OF RALPH DENNIS AND CHARLES DELISLE'S MILL VALLEY HOME, A PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT LIPPS ENLIVEN'S THE CEDAR STRUCTURE. **OPPOSITE:** THE GLASS FAÇADE AND DOUBLE DOORS AMPLIFY THE INDOOR/OUTDOOR FLOW.



**CLOCKWISE:** IN THE EVENING, THE HOUSE GLOWS LIKE A LANTERN. IN THE DINING AREA, DELISLE'S LINDEN CHANDELIER TAKES PRIDE OF PLACE. EVEN THE BATHROOM, WHICH INCLUDES ORIGINAL FIXTURES, IS POSITIONED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE VIEWS. AN ALCOVE OFF THE LIVING ROOM ENCOURAGES HANGING OUT, AS WELL AS OVERNIGHT GUESTS. A CORNER IS FURNISHED WITH A VICO MAGISTRETTI CHAIR, MARTINO GAMPER STOOL, AND JAPANESE TANSU CABINET.



“THE HOUSE WAS AN EXPERIMENT IN LIVING SMALLER,” SAYS DELISLE.

**N**EARLY 70 YEARS AFTER ITS CONSTRUCTION, THE CEDAR-AND-GLASS DWELLING that Ralph Dennis and Charles Delisle call home remains true to its original intent, with little changes made that would have diminished its architectural integrity.

The décor, though, is another story: It is always in a state of flux. Which is not surprising considering Dennis' and Delisle's occupations. The former is the design director for Steven Volpe Design, while the latter has a namesake interior design practice. “I make furniture and I collect a lot, so I have a tendency to rotate things around the house,” says Delisle, adding: “Ralph rolls with it.”

It has features seen in other residences conceived by the esteemed architect, such as its palette of wood and concrete. There is also minimal interference between the indoors and the outdoors. Set on a hilltop—with landscaping that includes oak and

birch trees, ficuses, sages, salvia, and dwarf manzanita—the property boasts views of Richardson Bay.

Delisle describes the two-story structure as shed-like; its framework harks back to a simpler time. “This house was an experiment in living smaller,” he says of the 1,200 square feet that once accommodated Emmons' family of five. Over the years, as far as its current tenants have been able to determine, it has only hosted a handful of renters—including Ernest Hemingway's son, Jack.

The home's double-height living area, lofted second floor, and nearly all-glass façade give the impression of greater square footage. In lieu of a staircase, a ship's ladder that has practically no footprint joins its two levels.

Standing in his and Dennis' bedroom, located in a corner upstairs, Delisle notes: “This is where, again, you can see that the house is designed around the views.” The space is void of doors, offers views of the garden (and beyond), and is minimally furnished with a low-

slung bed and a round rattan chair by Isamu Kenmochi.

Downstairs, just outside the galley kitchen, sit an Eero Saarinen dining table and a settee upholstered in black denim with a vinyl-printed floral motif that Delisle designed. His brass Linden vertical chandelier, a prototype devised for The Future Perfect, hangs aloft.

Delisle jokingly refers to his home as “the land of the prototypes.” Indeed, his own creations populate the interior. There's the wood and metal bookcase that “was the first piece of furniture I made when I came out to San Francisco [in 1990] and is super sentimental,” he says. And the steel sofa that he designed roughly 20 years ago; its cushions are covered in an Anne Kirk linen-and-wool fabric. Coincidentally, Delisle's orange triangular side tables echo the color of the house's doors and window trim.

An alcove off of the living area, appointed with a queen-sized mattress dressed with an array of vibrant textiles, serves as a guest bedroom and hangout space.

Situated a few feet away, an ornate wicker stool by Heywood-Wakefield is one of several of the company's vintage designs that Delisle owns. “I keep [the rest] in storage and switch them out because they're just so crazy to live with,” he explains. A rug procured in Morocco about a decade ago lies underfoot.

Delisle possesses a number of lightweight, angular Circus stools by Martino Gamper. A grouping can be configured to form a large table; in the living room, a single white one currently resides next to a Vico Magistretti lounge chair. “[The stool] has stayed here for a while because I like it and it just feels right,” says Delisle.

Interior design is often about instinct and intuition, after all. “I like living with objects and figuring out how they feel,” he continues. “It's hard to do that with clients because you can't live in their house and you might have to install things all at once. But here, it's different because there's no reason why we can't move stuff around.”