

Offset House

construction in 2018

image credit: Alan Tse

New Construction of a single family home in the Rancho Rinconada neighborhood of Cupertino, south of the new Apple headquarter. The houses from the previous generations of blue collar residents were built with no defined characteristics or distinct architectural language. While zoning guidelines on setback and building height requirements are strictly enforced, local Planning Department welcomes fresh design approaches and modern designs. The lots within this 1 mile radius area are now getting swept by a new wave of tech engineers, a group who appreciates modern clean lines over gabled structure with pillars and trims.

Our design process began with a study of the affordability and feasibility of the incoming residents relative to the building area zoning guidelines allow for. Assuming that many will not be searching for a multi-million dollar build out after the purchase of the land for their first home, the design of this project must be tailored for this assessment in order for us to set roots in this area. Current construction cost is then measured with the maximum building area to determine the key size for this building. Zoning guidelines allows for only 45% building area of the lot, which is seems inadequate for a small family. With the Apple campus opening up soon for the staff, duration of the permitting process will be a critical decision factor also. We therefore arrived at this conclusion - design a house meeting all zoning guidelines to streamline the permitting process, provide an architectural response to the typical interpretation of the zoning guidelines, limit the design within the standard square footage construction cost for the Bay Area with conventional building systems, and maximize usability of the lot.

Evident through out the neighborhood, the combination of side set back and build-able area restrictions typically results in symmetrical building form with under-utilized spaces on both sides of the lot. We therefore offset the footprint of the building from the North to gain a sizable side yard with maximized norther light exposure for the family of 4. A central courtyard is inserted on the South side to offset the narrow remainder of the lot area. This courtyard offsets the length of the house longitudinally, creating an exterior program that synchronizes all adjacent living spaces. All private rooms are housed on the second floor, in the offset mass hovering over the side yard down below. The study area on the second floor is strategically placed above the courtyard, creating a sectional offset between the two multi-purposeful spaces. The smooth plaster exterior offset itself from the vertical wood siding to reinforce the sectional offsets of the form. This resulted simplistic form is then further enhanced with an offset detail between the two stories where their intersection lands at one plane rather than the full thickness of the floor. The organization of the programs are offset from each other by pivoting off of the courtyard, both in plans and sections. The interior design and material placement will further this same design concept of offsets.

The design of this single family residence is another example of designing with one simple idea.