



Lara Hedberg-Deam looks like the girl next door, but one needs to take into account that Deam will live next door only if the house is modern. At 44, Dwell magazine, which she founded, is more than a magazine. More even than a publishing house, it is an adjective. In the U.S. one will often say, "It's a Dwell house" when trying to describe a house that is truly modern, a house that has an idea and a story behind it and which conveys a certain way of living. A house with panache.

Such a house, actually, as Laura Deam's—the one that started it all. The March 2011 issue of Dwell celebrated 10 years of Dwell with a cover story featuring Deam in her house, alongside her husband Chris (the architect who designed the last remodel of the house) and their two kids. The cover, which has a folded additional page so that it opens into a

THE HOUSE THAT STARTED A MAGAZINE

Mary Sagi-Maydan met with Lara Hedberg-Deam, the founder of Dwell magazine, to talk about her private home, which has recently been remodeled, about modern architecture, and about design and architecture magazines.

By Mary Sagi-Maydan





that was picked. I wanted to do something to promote good design.”

“The idea to start a magazine came up one day when I was reading a professional magazine aimed at architects. I thought to myself what a pity that there weren’t any magazines that deal with architecture and interior on a deep level yet accessible to nonprofessionals. The consumer magazines that were available at the time pretty much stopped at the level of wall colors, number of bedrooms and bathrooms ... ”

With a business background but absolutely no background in publishing, Deam wrote Dwell’s business plan and met a business consultant who had experience in launching magazines. The prototype that they sent to a selected sample group was received enthusiastically, followed in October 2000 by the first issue of Dwell as we know it. A huge success.

The house itself was also a successful project. “Two minutes away from the neighborhood café” was the secret charm of the house when Hedberg-Deam bought it in 1994. But beyond being close to coffee,

it is difficult to find any charm in the small shabby structure, of which Deam saves a picture in the family photo album: a simple, indistinct teardown sharing a wall with the neighborhood pizzeria. Nothing that remotely reminds one of the beautiful modern house created at the end of two extensive remodels, the first, by Bob Hattfield, which determined the exterior look of the house, and the second designed by her husband, the architect and furniture designer Christopher Deam.

“The good part about modern architecture,” says Hedberg-Deam, “is that it comes out of a program with very strong ideas. When we worked on the first remodel I knew very well what I wanted for the exterior, but I was less clear on the interior. I listened to my realtor who told me that if I was going to spend this much money, I should have 4 bedrooms and 4 baths. I didn’t want two sinks in the master bathroom because it felt presumptuous, but beyond that I went with the realtor’s suggestions, and the house came out to a large extent very generic. I didn’t have a clear idea how I wanted to live. I wanted a family, but I didn’t have one yet. Chris moved in with me and we had twins. The second remodel served to make the house fit our family.”

double spread, features the house in all its glory. The photo shows the dramatic kitchen with a long island, around which the family is gathered. A young family, two beautiful blond kids in a beautiful house. It is almost as if the magazine sells a dream - the American Dream executed to perfection.

The house that started it all is located in Mill Valley - north of San Francisco - surrounded by nature and yet just a block and a half away from downtown. Deam admits that when she bought the original tiny shack in 1994, she fell in love with the location, the nature, the quiet, and the idea that she would be able to walk to get a coffee. The woman, who is often called in the press “the heiress,” indicating the mail-order empire that her parents founded and sold successfully, was planning to paint and make some small changes, and moved into an RV that she placed on the lot until the remodel was completed.

“I found a builder,” she recalls. “I wasn’t planning anything major and the builder didn’t even get a permit. We got a red tag from the city. The inspector told me that I needed an architect so I went about and found one. His name was Bob Hattfield. He lived on my street, three houses down, and was working on a project two houses down,

so he was very familiar with the street, the house and the zoning code. Fortunately for me, he also liked modern.”

At first they brought the house to a level that was livable, and she could abandon the RV, knowing that the next step would include further upgrades and an expansion. That was when she started feeling deep frustration. She had many ideas but wasn’t able to communicate them well to her architect. “I started cutting out images from magazines,” she says, “and showing them to the architect, but the photos were not identical to the final look I wanted, and he was trying to understand, ‘so what exactly do you like in it?’ I felt that I was lacking the vocabulary to explain.”

Deam, who at the time was at a different stage in her life, still single and out of work, did not remain out of vocabulary for too long. She decided to take time off from the remodel and go back to school to study interior design and industrial design. Along with the new degree and acquired sense of the history of modern design came different ambitions: “I saw around me very talented architects that weren’t very busy and couldn’t understand how come they weren’t chosen to design the house next door over the uninspiring architect





Adds Chris: “We met right when the house was finished. It was interesting to live in another architect’s vision for a while. He became the perfect scapegoat for every problem we had—from burning the toast to not picking up our underwear—I mean aren’t architects supposed to solve ALL our problems? But after a certain point, we realized we needed to express our own ideas on how we wanted to live, which were radically different than those of Lara as a single woman. We wanted to carve out space for the individuals—for Lara’s home office, for me to have a place to work, for each of the kids, for a smaller room where we could watch TV and have family time, and for more space to entertain.”

Lara was the one who came up with the bold idea of completely rearranging the floor plan of the house: moving the kitchen to where the kids’ room had been and the family room to where the old kitchen was located. The changes made a lot of sense. They learned that as a family they lived in the backyard and moving the kitchen next to the patio fostered a greater indoor-outdoor connection.

Given the zoning requirements they couldn’t add to the footprint of the house, so the biggest change was achieved by configuring a big

steel and glass wall to transition you outside. Given that the door weighed approximately 2,000 pounds and had special foundation under the pivot point, it required structural engineering to make sure it wouldn’t tear apart the whole building when it opened. To soften the look, Chris designed an adjacent big curved fixed window and chose an acid green powder coating for the aluminum, which helped create a looser feel.

The original house was situated on the steep lot, a little far from the street and high above street level. Deam knew that she wanted to expand down towards the street. Indeed, now the entry to the house is at street level, through a beautifully landscaped front yard offering several parking spots. As you enter, you face a dramatic floating staircase. The original floor (Brazilian cherry) was stained black, which matches the black stained cedar wood of the wall. The treads are hanging off of a black stained wood wall. On the left, the spacious room of 8-year-old Cal and to the right, his twin sister Macy’s bedroom.

Up the stairs, the big open space includes a formal dining-living room followed by the kitchen, made of black stained wood, Carrera marble

slabs, and a long island. The window and large swivel glass door open the entire area to the backyard.

“What I love about the house now is that every space supports a part of our life,” says Chris. “Before, we would say, ‘How in the world are we going to cook for friends out in the backyard?’ Now there’s a place for that and it’s effortless. I love having people in our house. It’s really best when it’s full of friends.”

About dividing the work between herself and her husband, both of whom naturally have strong design ideas, says Deam: “We really fitted the model of homeowner-architect. I was involved in the bigger brush strokes. The kitchen here, the bedroom there. Chris worked on the details. We bought everything together. I have tremendous respect for architects. That’s one of the reasons that I founded Dwell. I have tre-

mendous respect for my husband’s work, which is one of the reasons that I fell in love with him. After 12 years of going together to Milan and seeing great works, we share the same design sensibility. I trusted him completely. I believe in letting architects create.”

The creativity passed along to their kids. “I don’t know what they think about Dwell,” says Deam. “I remember that growing up I had ambivalent feelings about my parents’ business and I assume that it’s the same for my kids, who have mixed feelings, but they truly love design. They come to us about once every three months with ideas on how to change their rooms. Oftentimes we look at each other and say it won’t work, but they convince us to try, and many times it works.” There is no doubt that the house works. And the family members love it full heartedly. No mixed feelings.



חדר משפחה כחלל מזמין וספוג אווירה ביתית, ספון עץ סידאר שנצבע בגוון שחור. קוויו הנקיים, סקיילייט במרכזו ויציאה ממנו לדק, משווים לו מראה מודרני, יוקרתי ולא כבד מידי



MODERN IS MORE THAN A STYLE

A conversation about modern architecture

"Modern is more than a style," says Lara Hedberg-Deam, when trying to analyze the key to Dwell's success. "I think that the other design magazines still look at modern as a style. For us at Dwell, modern is not just a cool style. We care less about large glass openings and flat roofs and focus on 'the interesting' in modern design, the ideas behind the projects, ideas that are unique to the time and era in which we live."

"Modern architecture contributes to our culture and to the definition of who we are as people today. When I founded Dwell I was very interested in the idea of timelessness and yet architecture that speaks to our time. The exploration of this is fascinating to me."

Deam is eloquent. She expresses herself well, but when asked for her opinion on why Americans are so enchanted by French chateaus and Spanish villas, she cannot find the words. "I don't get it," she admits. "I find it very weird that someone would want to pretend that he lives in a different era or another place. You may be in love with your grandmother's kitchen, but with today's appliances and materials, by the time you complete its design, will it even look like your grandma's kitchen that you loved so much when growing up?"

"I love old buildings. We all know to appreciate them when they are well designed and built, but to copy them today? What a waste. We have the privilege of being able to express ourselves through our architecture. We are so lucky to be able to do that. Why would we give up such an opportunity?"