

Midcentury Matters

UPDATING A WILLIAM WURSTER HOUSE IN SAN FRANCISCO

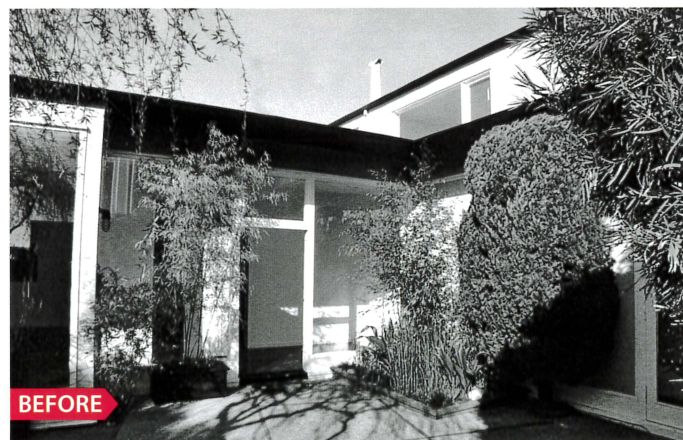
Renovation Architecture by Brooks Walker of Walker Warner Architects

Interior Design by Douglas Durkin/Text by Therese Bissell

After Photography by Matthew Millman



AFTER



BEFORE

ABOVE: Landscape architect Ron Lutsko, Jr., reinforced Wurster's emphasis on integrating indoors and out. Explains Walker, "Wurster's genius is that the house has lots of light and air but is extremely private." OPPOSITE: Works by, from left, Robert Kelly and Donald Feasél are in the master bedroom. "I wouldn't have placed the windows at that height, but we played off them when hanging art," Walker says. Carpet from Stark.

and opening up the floor plan—and strengthening the inside-outside relationship with enhanced glazing and access at the refurbished courtyard.

Although contemporary for the time, the rooms were compartmentalized. The living room was isolated; it now flows from the dining area and better coexists with the courtyard. The former first-floor master suite became the light-filled family and breakfast rooms. On the expanded second floor, the new master suite opens to a translucent-glass-banded terrace and leads to the sitting room, converted from an unneeded bedroom.

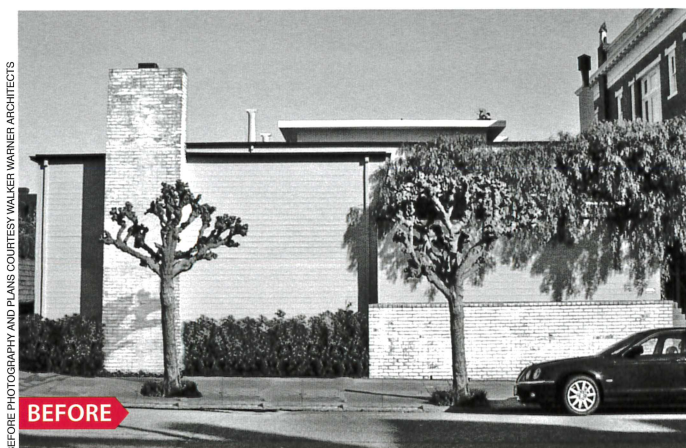
An added third floor contains the library. Now 16 rooms, the house's living area grew by roughly a quarter to just over 5,000 square feet.

Durkin's custom furnishings play off the architecture in form—particularly the modular sofas—in texture and in color. "The clichéd way of dealing with modern space is to fill it with midcentury classics," he notes. "We used very few found pieces; practically everything was drawn and produced for this interior. The idea was to transcend the trend, to impart a sense of timelessness so you can't really place the vintage."

Light cream instead of white



AFTER



BEFORE



BEFORE

TOP: Brooks Walker, of Walker Warner Architects, sensitively updated a 1951 William Wurster house in San Francisco. "We kept the spirit of the building but enhanced it," he says. Approximately 1,030 square feet were added, including a new top floor. LEFT: Light fills the living room, for which, as throughout, interior designer Douglas Durkin, who worked closely with Walker, created clean, modular furnishings. Above the sofa is an oil by John DiPaolo. Manuel Canovas wallcovering. Beauvais carpet.

Docomomo. It sounds like a downtown nightclub or indie music label. It's instead an organization founded for the worldwide documentation and conservation of architectural sites of the Modern movement. If architect Brooks Walker was only vaguely familiar with the group and its mission before he and interior designer Douglas Durkin began remodeling a Modernist building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, by project's end the catchy quasi-acronym—certainly, the challenge it represented in comingling new architecture with old—was a steady backbeat to the work.

The San Francisco house was designed in 1951 by the late William Wurster, who typically conceived the interior spaces for easy living and to connect with the outside, and kept the exterior devoid of elaboration. Docomomo International and the city planning department took particular interest in the renovation and expansion, which also fell under U.S. Department of Interior guidelines for historical preservation, as the building is part of a small



AFTER



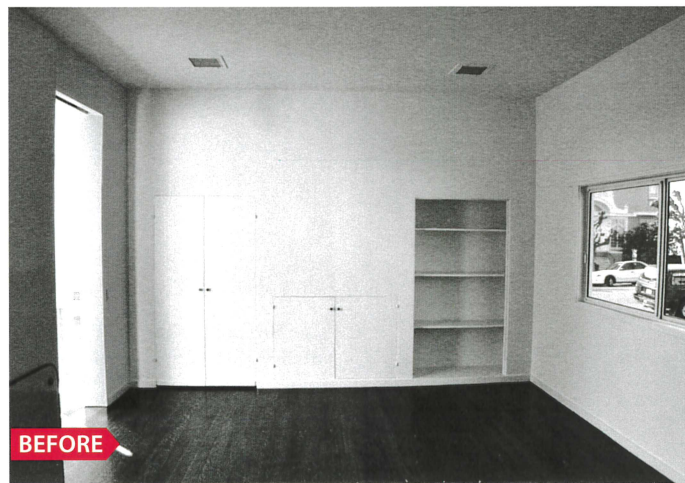
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cluster of midcentury-modern residences within vastly traditional Pacific Heights.

Also interested in the house's fate, even before being tasked with its remodel, was Walker, who grew up uniquely schooled in California architecture of the period. His grandparents had residences by Wurster and fellow Bay Area Modernist Joseph Esherick; his great-grandmother commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design the famed Walker House in Carmel. Further, he often visited Wur-

ster's most acclaimed building, the architecturally reductive, ranch-style prototype Gregory Farmhouse in Santa Cruz, owned by family friends ("We all remember times from childhood—I remember certain spaces just as well").

Completing the "Wurster circle," Durkin came to the project having renovated the interiors of three of the architect's other residences. Greg Elich, Durkin's design director, and Walker Warner Architects project manager Clark Sather



BEFORE



BEFORE

rounded out the design team. As Walker succinctly describes his office's successful collaboration with Durkin's: "In a Modern house, it's all about the details. We didn't want to see a valance, and neither did they."

The larger program was to save the valued elements (delineating new versus existing architecture for preservationists) while gaining desired space and energy efficiency. Functionality for a young family was key: improving the circulation by taking out nonbearing walls

OPPOSITE: The dining area is framed by a floating wall that displays a 2007 photograph by Adam Fuss. "The dining chairs are by Carlo Hauner," notes Durkin. "They're a slightly quirky choice." Hunter leather on seat cushions.

ABOVE: The family room was once the master suite. "The furniture follows the flow of the rooms," says Durkin, who designed the sofas, tables and carpet. "The palette was chosen to contrast the light floors and walls." Beauvais carpet.