

# RURAL MODERN



# Living in a Sweet Spot

Walker Warner Architects

Brooks Walker and Greg Warner occupy a sweet spot in the design world. Their clients are fortunate enough to afford to build what they design, without demanding ostentation or crassness. Their practice spreads throughout the West Coast and the Hawaiian Islands and centers itself around a tasteful style they describe as “Warm Modernism” with vernacular references. Talking about their work is like describing a good wine—a bit ironic since designing wineries in the Napa and Sonoma Valleys happens to be one of their firm’s specialties. Warner jokingly says that they are fortunate enough to design “unaffordable housing.” But their houses are more than pleasure palaces for the wealthy. They are refined, elegant statements about a regional Modernism that is pervasive in California and other

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parts of the West Coast. Using regional materials, combined with a sophisticated compendium of vernacular forms, they create buildings that are both inviting and challenging. Warner likes to think of their work as “legacy houses” that will stand up to the test of time and serve generations of owners. Their work may reference the farmhouse on the hill, but quickly leaves that trope and ventures into some uncharted and intriguing design territory that is both tactile and visually exciting.

Greg Warner grew up in Waimea, a ranching town located on the Big Island of Hawaii. He went to a prep school there that was designed by the distinguished Hawaiian architect Vladimir Ossipoff. Each Sunday night he would sit in the school’s Modernist, poured-in-place concrete chapel and contemplate the building’s awesome power. This left a hidden but lasting impression, one that he would get to revisit later in his career. It was many years later that he would discover the completed works of Ossipoff and gain a full appreciation for his influence on architecture in Hawaii.

At the University of Oregon, he fell into the architecture program almost as an afterthought, hoping it would be a good fit, considering that he enjoyed fine art and drawing and felt architecture might be a good outlet for his creative side. There he met Brooks Walker. They shared classes and were friends, but their later partnership was still to come.

Brooks Walker is a California native son whose family has had a long involvement in progressive architecture. He grew up visiting houses that were designed by Wurster and Wright in the 1930s. His uncle is a well-known San Francisco architect with a sterling list of clients, and appreciation for art and design was part of the family’s DNA. It was only natural for Brooks to study architecture. Working from a regionalist perspective, the philosophy at the University of Oregon School of Architecture was to create

sustainable buildings with a respect for “place.” Walker returned to San Francisco and began work with his uncle. Following an opportunity to design and build a house for his sister, he left that firm. At the same time, Warner was working for a small firm in the Bay Area and was ready to move on.

Over a kitchen table powwow the firm was formed—Walker had the work and Warner had a T-square. Walker Warner Architects quickly built a solid reputation as young architects with good taste and sophisticated designs.

Warner says that as the firm has matured, they have become more focused on doing the type of architecture their firm has become known for over the last 20 years. They have been fortunate to find sophisticated clients who have come to them looking for unpretentious, well-thought-out design that pushes the envelope in creative ways. Just recently, while working on a project in Hawaii, Warner visited his old prep school and was reminded why he chose his profession and the tacit influences of his Hawaiian upbringing. Ossipoff’s Mid-Century Modern buildings spoke to him in ways he could just now comprehend, simple unpretentious architecture that spoke to both time and place in an elegant way. If only Vladimir Ossipoff could have known that his work inspired the next generation of great architects.



### Woodside House

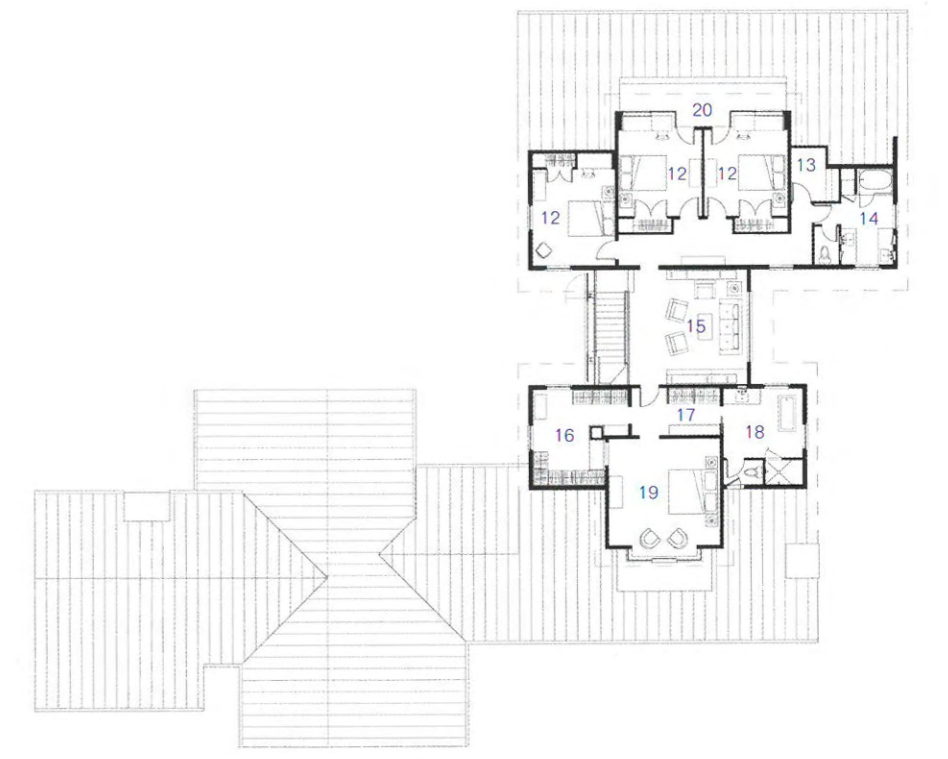
Woodside House is an agrarian enclave located between two urban centers in northern California. The rolling green hills and horse farms look more like Kentucky than California. The owners of this house wanted a modern building that respected the area's rural nature. Warner's concept for this project began as an exploration of separate buildings arranged on the site to create a variety of complementary indoor/outdoor spaces along with varied living experiences. Given the rural context of the town, Warner referenced regional agrarian compounds and barn forms for inspiration as well as functionality.

All of the compound's component buildings share a common language of strong asymmetrical lines and a material palette of stone, wood, glass, and steel to create a balanced feeling throughout. Warner chose stone to evoke rusticity, linking the structures to the past, while the random patterned cedar planks, along with zinc roofing, reference the rural vernacular farm buildings in the region. The inclusion of exposed steel and large expanses of glass give the residence a contrasting, contemporary feel.

The barn, located at the front of the property, serves as a symbolic entry reinforcing the rural character of the surrounding context. An open passageway leading through the barn dramatically frames the stone entry façade of the residence beyond. Upon entering the courtyard, which is loosely formed by the three structures, the intent of the initial concepts is revealed. Building façades complement each other while maintaining independently strong connections to the property and surround.

Photography by Matthew Millman





- 1 Entry
- 2 Living
- 3 Dining
- 4 Butler's pantry
- 5 Kitchen
- 6 Family room
- 7 Office
- 8 Side entry
- 9 Stair hall
- 10 Mudroom
- 11 Au pair suite
- 12 Bedroom
- 13 Linen closet
- 14 Bathroom
- 15 Study
- 16 Master dressing room
- 17 Master bedroom vestibule
- 18 Master bathroom
- 19 Master bedroom
- 20 Deck
- 21 Family room terrace
- 22 Garage

