

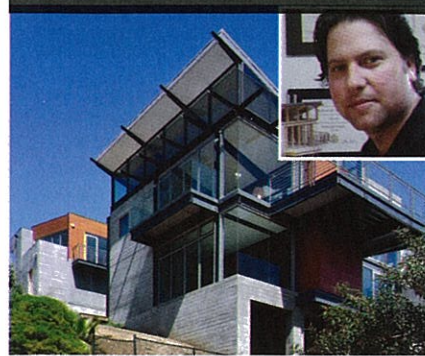
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2008 SPIRIT AWARDS AND LEADING ARCHITECTS

A leader brings vision and direction, showing others the way, or at least a way to aspire to better things. These builders and architects, through forward thought, passionate design and fresh ideas, have emerged as leaders in their field. We took this space to honor them and their achievements.

» NEIL ZAWICKI



WorkPlays Studio

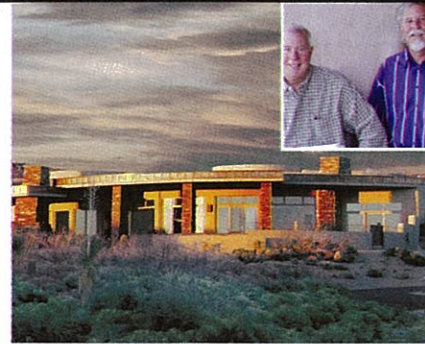
GRENOLA HOUSE

The award winner featured on our cover is the 320 Grenola from WorkPlays Studio in Pacific Palisades, Calif., which creates a space with both an indoor and outdoor feel. This project, says WorkPlays principal Kevin Tsai, is the result of steady collaboration with the client.

"With custom homes, you're given a set program and you work with them through to the completion," he says. "It's almost like you're in a marriage—you know, you start at the beginning and then you really help them all the way. It usually takes about two to three years. And we're very involved in helping them pick out plumbing fixtures and colors. As an architect, you think of a formal solution, but we really think about how a space should work."

The mind behind the architecture at WorkPlays is founder Ric Abramson. He's a former Fulbright Scholar and an instructor at the University of Southern California School of Architecture. Designing and teaching in this era certainly presents opportunities for forward-thinking architects, letting them put into practice the ideas that kept them excited in school and keep their students inspired today. Homes like the Grenola are the product of his passion for design.

More than anything else, I have always been intrigued by puzzles," Abramson says. "It's the need to bring concerted intense thought to the solution of a problem. When coupled with an artistic and mathematical disposition and an interest in visioning the future, architecture became the natural choice. It is the ultimate right brain-left brain exercise. When I teach, I explain to my students that for me, a masterwork of architecture attends equally to three disciplines: art, science and philosophy."



Edwards Design Group

ARROWHEAD HOUSE

Doug Edwards of the Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Edwards Design Group takes the desert climate and applies it to custom homebuilding in a way that has earned a place in our Spirit of the West feature. His Arrowhead House is a prime example of how he incorporates the environment to create a truly special home.

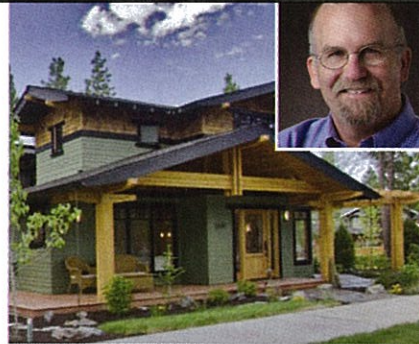
"I designed this home to really have a circular-saw-blade roof configuration," says Edwards. "So on the east end, the overhang was about three feet. But as you start going west, the overhang gets deeper and deeper until you get to a 27-foot overhang that shoots to the west. That keeps the sun out, except for that little bit of sunset."

Edwards says his design approach begins with the landscape itself.

"It has everything to do with it, really," he says. "I always use five different parameters when I design a house. I look at solar orientation, the view corridor, if there is one, the natural vegetation and accessibility. With this house, we really wanted to capture the panorama, with a view of the city at the bottom of the hill."

Edwards, who became an architect after a short stint as an iron worker 30 years ago, says modern technology helps him tailor his homes to the landscape to make his clients happy.

"I'll work with the client and learn what's important to them in terms of interior space and views," he says. "In fact, with CAD drawing, I can take the vantage points and I can draw a line perpendicular to them in order to frame that view in a window. What happens then is you have an absolutely perfectly framed window for that view. And it's so balanced. Every time I do it, it just absolutely freaks me out."



West Bend Property Company

NORTHWEST CROSSING

David Ford of West Bend Property Company LLC wants to build not just homes, but new communities. For this reason, the Bend, Ore., developer's newest community, Northwest Crossing, earned recognition as a Spirit of the West winner. The community features solid, elegant, sustainably built homes in an urban village setting. This, says Ford, is all part of his master plan.

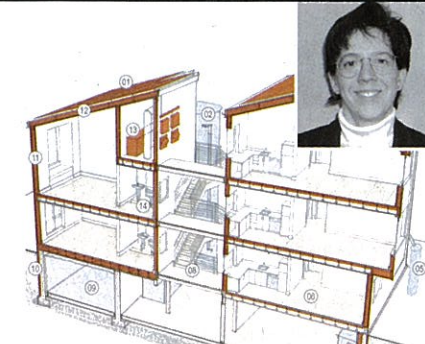
"It's directly tied to our goal from the start, which is to develop a traditional neighborhood," he says. "We're requiring all homes in Northwest Crossing to be Earth Advantage or Energy Star certified."

Along with the Green elements, the homes are arranged to promote continuity among residents.

"It gets back to traditional neighborhood development and new urbanism," he says, "where we model our master plan after those philosophies, which really are focused on people and pedestrians, rather than cars. It's clearly an approach to designing neighborhoods that creates an interconnectivity of streets and trails and sidewalks and open-space parks. We provide the opportunity for the residents to enjoy the amenities without being so dependent on the automobile."

Another winning aspect for Northwest Crossing is the built-in aspect to promote a better community.

"Northwest Crossing, by design, does not have an association, so all of our parks, streets and public right-of-ways are owned by the public," Ford says. "Our design guidelines encourage homes to be within 10 feet of the sidewalk with outside patios or porches that allow the opportunity for interaction."



Lisa Petterson

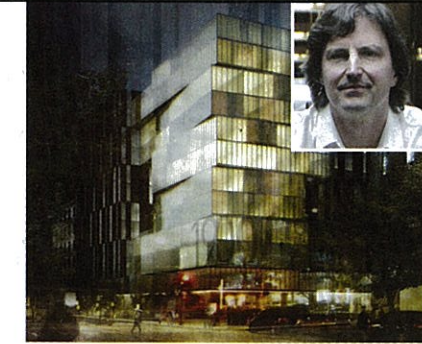
SERA ARCHITECTS

Lisa Petterson is excited about sustainable design. She's in the right place for it, and as luck would have it, the right time as well.

"It really goes back to my design education at the University of Oregon," says the project architect at Portland, Ore.-based SERA Architects. "I had the great opportunity to study with two of the Northwest's leaders in sustainable design, GZ Brown and John Reynolds. They were involved in sustainable design before anybody called it that, and it was their work that really opened my eyes to the possibilities of designing our buildings to be more climate-responsive and how that could be something that not only saves us energy, but could almost make a building more beautiful."

Petterson is a leader in daylighting design, working with her firm to create potentially the nation's first "Living Building," a structure that would run on a completely sustainable level, generating its own power and water and working in harmony with the surrounding ecosystem. In addition, Petterson is kept busy with the newfound demand for sustainability, something that both amuses and delights her.

"It's actually a little surprising to hear people thinking that sustainable design is a new topic," she says. "But it is really exciting and rewarding to think about the fact that now it's so common. We used to beat our heads against the wall to try to get people to think this way, and maybe one out of every 20 projects would get something. And now everybody wants it, and even our developer clients are asking for it. There's a lot more success, so that's really nice to see."



Tom Kundig

OSKA ARCHITECTS

Tom Kundig is something of an architecture rock star. Whenever one of his homes is featured in a magazine, the phone lines at Olson Sundberg Kundig Allen Architects go flush with moneyed clients hoping to hire Kundig to design their next home. It's no surprise. His signature style is a hybrid of function and taste; a mix of curiosity and practicality. The latter is a product of his younger years spent climbing mountains. Such a sport lends itself to both virtues: his use of hard vertical and horizontal planes, as well as his affinity for gadgetry. He incorporates industrial wheels and even a city water pressure-powered skylight at his firm's headquarters. Wheel systems serve to swing open glass-paned walls—another recurrent theme in his designs. Such elements let Kundig-designed homes take on a machine-like quality. One such dwelling, commissioned by a filmmaker and called "The Brain," creates a Renaissance space, complete with an art loft, library wall and grand piano, in a concrete cube flanked by two of those signature pane-glass walls. Others, like Delta Shelter, retain the Spartan line quality with a hefty dose of gadgetry. Large wheels are used to roll steel panels into place, covering all the windows, turning the 3,500-square-foot cabin into a sealed fortress from the choices. Such design elements, again, speak to the utilitarian approach that comes from his climbing days. The final product, however, declares the art that is architecture, pulling together physics, passion and form into a total package that make up the rough-hewn finish that defines Kundig's style.



Michelle Kaufmann

MICHELLE KAUFMANN DESIGNS

Michelle Kaufmann has a special eye for space and structure. Her approach to design is part farm girl simplicity, part environmental responsibility and part aesthetic innovation. Most recently, her Green-built home, the mkSoltaire, has become an attraction at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry. Kaufmann achieves a sleek, forward-thinking look and a Green coefficient through the use of modular construction. She uses the method so well that she's beginning to change public perception. Once thought of as low-end manufactured homes, modular building, with the help of leaders like Kaufmann, is becoming a standard for design. She founded Michelle Kaufmann Designs in 2002, after working with noted architect Frank Gehry. She says she wants to "make thoughtful, sustainable design accessible to all." This, of course, is why she incorporates modular building. But with Kaufmann it goes beyond thrift and moves into art. Such economy of material serves to create progressive spaces with sustainable practicality, generating a style that delivers modern appeal in concert with common sense. Kaufmann, who grew up in Iowa, learned to love the simplicity of farm structures, incorporating barn design into a lot of her work. She talks about her understanding of the relationship between humankind and the environment.

"I believe how we develop our landscape is such an integral part of our culture," she says. "And how we build should improve the environment rather than harm it."