

A photograph of a modern residential building at dusk. The building features a mix of materials, including dark blue vertical corrugated metal siding and horizontal wooden slats. Large windows and a glass door are illuminated from within, showing interior spaces with warm lighting and modern decor. A stone path leads from the foreground towards the building, flanked by green grass. The sky is a deep blue, suggesting twilight.

RD

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

FOR ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS
OF DISTINCTIVE HOMES

VOL. 4, 2017

Gable Havens





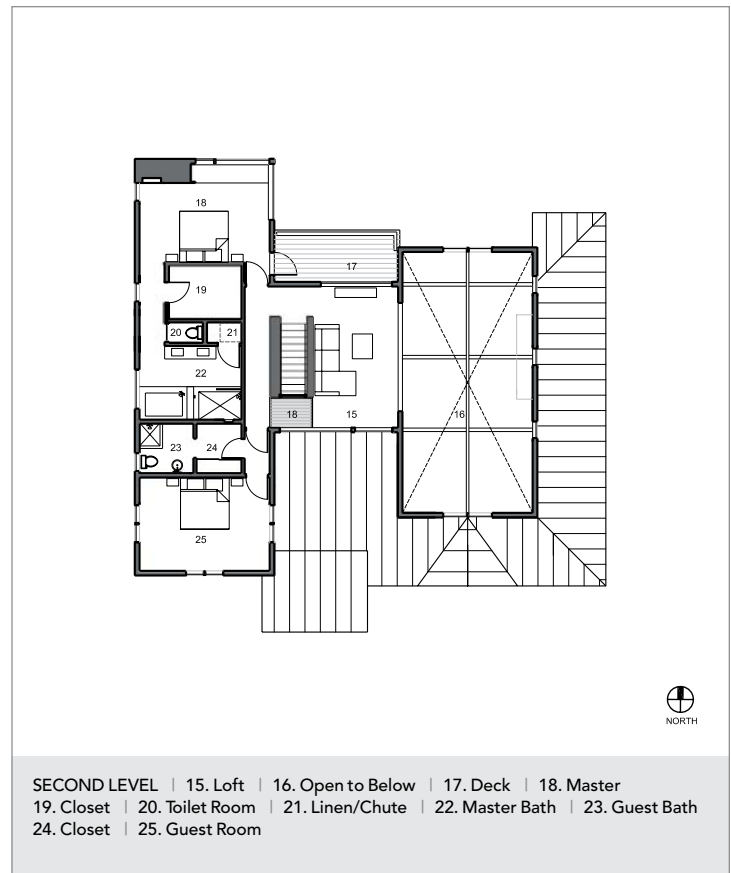
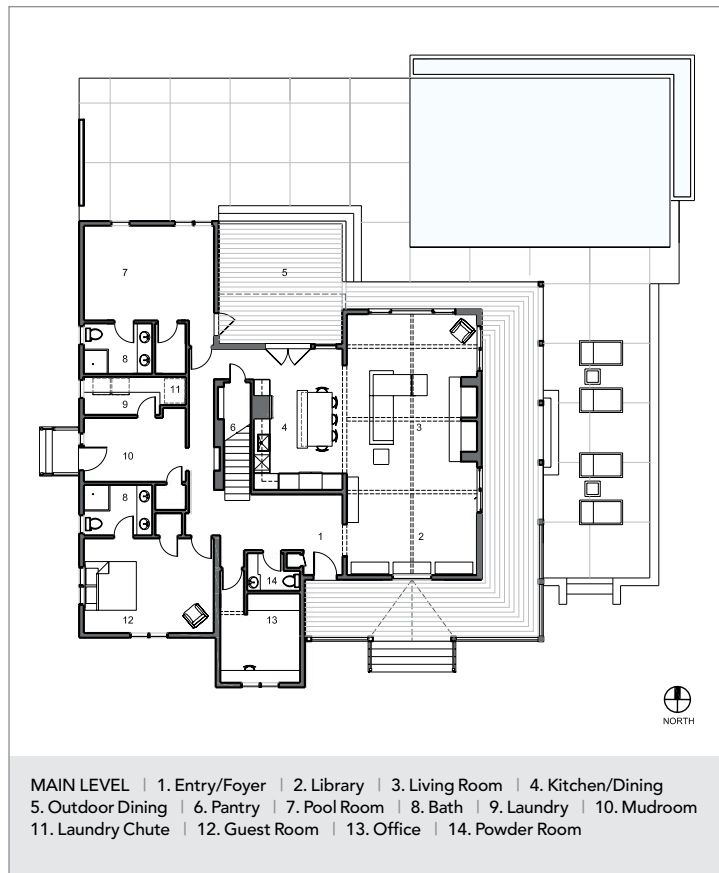
Vineyard Farmhouse

SONOMA, CALIF.
AMY A. ALPER, ARCHITECT

When it comes to renovations, pulling threads is an expensive proposition. A client comes to you with a house on a pretty piece of land. They're price sensitive and they think to themselves, "All it needs is a few tweaks to tailor it to my needs." Amy Alper, AIA, had such a client for Vineyard Farmhouse in the Russian River appellation of Sonoma. His main prize in purchasing the property was its established vines, but he also needed a house that supported his remote work in the tech field and his aspiration to grow pinot noir grapes for the wine industry.

The existing house was a rather lackluster single-level building, mostly likely sourced from a plan book—but that was not its worse trait. "My client bought the property for the view and the vineyard," says Amy. "The house was cold, it was dark, and it didn't engage the landscape." Custom builder Andy Bannister of Earthtone Construction describes it this way, "It was a funny old house built in the 1970s. It wasn't very well put together—really it was more like a cardboard box."

Nonetheless, it was at the tail end of the recession when the design work began, so everyone was concerned about costs. "When we started, some clients were still pulling the plug on projects. Others went ahead, but looked for places they could cut," Amy recalls. So, she and Andy set about saving what they could of the existing structure. "We leveraged a lot. Everything came down to the foundation, and a handful of main-level walls that we were able to leave intact and work with." At least the funny old house was sited on the sweet spot of the property.



Twins That Aren't Twins

Along with saving bits and pieces of house, Amy's chief challenge was to balance the client's desire for views of the vineyard from inside of the house and his need for privacy from workers tending the vines outside. Seasonal field hands often arrive very early in the morning to beat the heat, and they work on vines hard by the house.

Given the layout of the property (including two existing red barns that were to remain unchanged), Amy thought the new house should establish a certain presence on the site. Her solution: an iconic vernacular farmhouse form but with obvious modern updates.

"Essentially the plan is a twin gable-end and basilica form. One of the

twins is primarily private space, and the other is more about the public spaces," she says. "The idea was in keeping with the rural character of the property. And there's a kind of ever-presence and intrigue in 'what is a farmhouse?' Here, there is a constant overlay of the modern. Rooms are open to each other; there is volume. And that higher-volume space allows for bigger windows and passive airflow through the building."

The twins are fraternal not identical, and their differences play out on the exterior in the directions their siding is applied and the size and arrangement of their fenestration.

Traditional farm materials such as lap and board-and-batten siding, hog-wire

guardrails, and rough-hewn wood beams appear inside and out, but the introduction of steel—in connections, handrails, custom lighting, and the fireplace wall and surround—underline the more modern aesthetic at work.

The "private" twin contains the owner's master bedroom suite on the second level, a walk-out balcony, and a guest room. On its main level are a guest suite, mudroom and laundry, plus a room and full bath to service the pool area.

The space between private wing and public holds overlapping private/public functions, such as the open kitchen and home office on the first level, and the loft sitting area on the second level.

In the loft is the owner's favorite view, a



Above: A double-height living room and loft space allow the Vineyard Farmhouse to borrow light, air, and views from all directions.



Top and above: Amy had the wood-clad windows painted black to resemble steel, adding modern flare to the farmhouse forms. Metal tiles in the fireplace surround extend the cultivated industrial look. The upstairs loft is runaway space for the owner when the fields are being worked.



Below: A pony wall holds the shower valve, so it can be turned on without getting wet. There's a mountain view just beyond the foot of the tub.
Bottom: Special care was taken to frame the expansive views from the master suite.

panorama of the Mayacamas mountains to the east. The ceiling is only about 9 feet high here, but the room benefits from the expansiveness of the double-height living room it overlooks.

The loft borrows welcome breezes and fresh air from below, aided by an adjacent stair topped by operable skylights and plenty of windows that open. Early in the morning when the vineyards are bustling with activity, the owner can enjoy his morning cup of coffee at a relaxing remove, high above it all.

Sweet Symmetry

A deep, shading porch wraps the public wing of the house, continuing from the front around to the side and terminating just past the living room wall plane. Coming up the stair to the porch at the front of the house, visitors encounter a big window and a view straight through the living room to the rear.

The front entry is actually to the left and passes into a foyer where space is compressed. "It's more of a traditional foyer," Amy notes. Turning and entering the living room provides the big "ah" moment of release.

"The notion of sequence was important," she says. The original house had the porch stairs oriented directly in front of the entry. "Regardless of any formal architectural concepts going on, my basic consideration at all times was, 'How are we engaging with the view?'"

Even so, Amy adds, "the project needed a certain amount of classic symmetry." That symmetry is most powerfully perceived in the living room. Doors and windows align as they should, and even the battens on the walls hit the perfect terminus at every





Above and opposite page: The only notable aspect of the existing house was its siting, which Amy retained. “When you’re outside eating or relaxing, you engage with the lines of the vines and then the views beyond. There’s not a bad time of year to be there.”

transition. These are the details good architects make sure to draw perfectly, and good builders execute with precision.

Exposed beams span the room to join the mezzanine level, and are bisected by a perpendicular custom-made metal channel. “The beams modulate the volume, and they provide an opportunity for lighting,” Amy explains. “The channel hides LED uplights and provides a place to hang the central pendant. The uplighting really adds warmth and complexity to the space, in addition to function. And we get virtually full illumination of the

ceiling without downlights.”

Symmetry plays out in more subtle ways, as well. For instance, the herringbone pattern that appears in the metal-tiled fireplace wall turns up in smaller scale as marble herringbone tile for the kitchen backsplash—fireplace and kitchen are directly opposite each other, of course.

Says Amy, “There’s a play in texture and a change in scale between the fireplace and the kitchen. The entire space is about a layering approach. The building blocks are texture, light, detail—these

are the classics of architecture regardless of the style.”

When Amy needs some inspiration for the vernacular work her clients often request, she doesn’t have to look far afield from the agricultural and residential precedents of her home base in Sonoma and Napa.

“The forms are primary to the rural areas out here, and are so compelling architecturally,” she says. “That intersection between the vernacular and the modern—it’s a very satisfying place to play.”



Vineyard Farmhouse

SONOMA, CALIF.

ARCHITECT: Principal-in-charge Amy A. Alper, AIA, Amy A. Alper, Architect; associate architect Dirk M. Smolak, Sonoma

BUILDER: Andy Bannister, Earthtone Construction, Sebastopol, Calif.

INTERIOR DESIGNER: Amy A. Alper, AIA; material sourcing, Rochelle Silberman Design

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER: Allen Land Design, Santa Rosa, Calif.; Bluestone Pool and Landscape, Napa, Calif.

PROJECT SIZE: 3,550 square feet

SITE SIZE: 7 acres

CONSTRUCTION COST: \$300 a square foot

PHOTOGRAPHY: ©Eric Rorer Photography

KEY PRODUCTS

WINDOWS/DOORS: Kolbe Windows & Doors

CLADDING: James Hardie

ROOF WINDOWS: VELUX

DOOR HARDWARE: HOPPE, Emtek, Basel

VAPOR BARRIER: DuPont Tyvek

COUNTERTOPS: Silestone, Caesarstone

RANGE/VENT HOOD: Bertrazzoni

DISHWASHER: Bosch

REFRIGERATOR/FREEZER: Jenn-Air

KITCHEN SINK: Rohl Shaws

KITCHEN FAUCET: Brizio

SECONDARY FAUCETS: Hansgrohe, Cheviot

SECONDARY SINKS: Kohler

MASTER TUB: Victoria + Albert Baths

TOWEL HEATER: Amba

BATHROOM VENTILATION: Panasonic

LIGHTING: Robert Abbey, Tech Lighting, architect-designed custom by Fabrication Fabworks, Inc.

PAINTS/STAINS: Benjamin Moore, Penofin, Old Masters