

# DesignLA

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EDWARD OGOSTA'S  
CULVER CITY HOUSE





Text by Kelly Vencill Sanchez / Photography by Steve King

## REAR WINDOW

ARCHITECT **EDWARD OGOSTA** REDEEMS A PLAIN CULVER CITY BUNGALOW WITH MANIPULATIONS OF LIGHT AND SPACE

If buildings are reflections of their makers, then architect Edward Ogosta's Culver City home deftly encapsulates his belief in what he calls "quiet architecture." Lean and introspective, with a modern addition that gracefully extends the living quarters while retaining 97 percent of the original dwelling, it offers a compelling alternative to the demolish-and-rebuild mentality that has reshaped neighborhoods across Los Angeles. "These houses aren't always teardowns," he says. "We could have torn everything down and gone to thirty-five-hundred square feet. All we need is fifteen hundred."

Ogosta, a second-generation Angeleno, has been interested in clean, minimal spaces since he was a boy growing up in Palos Verdes. The area wasn't exactly a hotbed of cutting-edge contemporary architecture, but the library he frequented was an A. Quincy Jones and Frederick E. Emmons design, and his high school was a later work by Richard Neutra. Both buildings, he says, seeped into his consciousness. Later, while earning architecture degrees at U.C. Berkeley and Harvard, he steeped himself in Southern California's Light and Space movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

*Above:* "The original house was built for a small family in 1944," says architect Edward Ogosta. *Right:* He added a 450-square-foot library and master suite at the back. "The rear window is floating—when you step out, it's almost like stepping off a boat."





*This page:* Ogosta and his wife, Kate, stripped away the old trim throughout the interiors. "We bleached and stained the floors and changed out all the doors and windows."

*Opposite:* The new library is set off from the master bedroom by a partial wall. "I come here a lot," says the architect. "I read here late at night. It's a wonderful, simple place to be."



Ogosta would have his own chance to explore the possibilities of structure and light when he and his wife, Kate, bought a compact 1944 bungalow in Culver City. The intact neighborhood was an immediate draw. "We liked that there hadn't been a whole lot of teardowns to build new and different houses over the years," he says. The magnolia trees shading the street sealed the deal.

The fact that at 1,000 square feet the house held three tiny bedrooms and one bath didn't deter them, nor were they in any particular hurry to undertake a major renovation. "Even though it was small, it felt like a long-term solution for us," Kate says. The couple lived in the house for six years, making small changes along the way, like updating the bathroom, removing crown moldings and refinishing the floors. But when Kate got pregnant, they decided it was time to expand.

In a process that he describes as "stripping away, simplifying and clarifying until I can't add anything or take anything away," Ogosta worked through close to a hundred renderings

before landing on the current scheme, which sets the master suite and library in a rectangular 450-square-foot volume that extends from the existing house into the backyard. "It's not a completely blank box," he says. "It's got some moves and components to it, but I'm always searching for the solution where I can do the most with the least amount of means."

To tie it to the neighborhood vernacular, the addition incorporates low roof pitches, but Ogosta also set it apart by wrapping the entire volume with off-the-shelf asphalt shingles, which can look like metal or wood depending on the way the light hits them. "It's a very humble material," he says. "But by using it in a different way, it elevates it."

A skylight near Ogosta's home office in the original structure marks the transition from old to new and signals his treatment of the home's ever-changing natural light, which washes down from above or through large expanses of glass and bounces off white walls and bleached-oak floors.





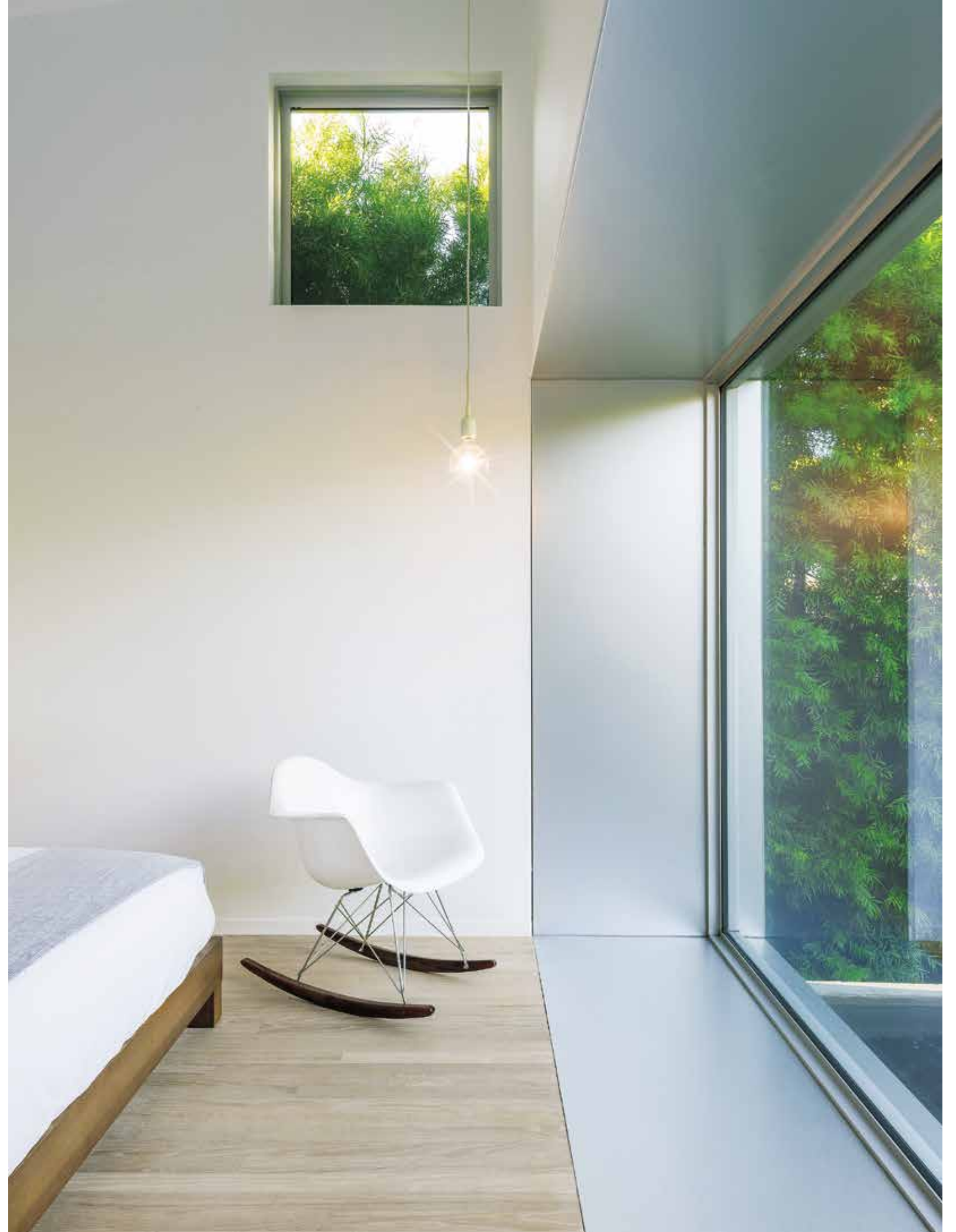


The hallway that runs the length of the addition sets up a sequence of crisp spaces, passing through a walk-in closet and storage area before it jags past the skylit master bath and a 15-by-5.5-foot window that opens to the patio off the kitchen. Beyond, the feeling of airiness is amplified by the dynamic, loflike ceiling that rises above the library and master bedroom, which are themselves separated by a freestanding partition. As elsewhere, he and Kate have kept furnishings and details minimal: There are floating white bookshelves and an Eames chair and ottoman in the library, a simple low bed in the master bedroom. Notes Kate, who works as an attorney at a video-game company, "Ed and I are pretty compatible in our design decisions. I wanted an unfussy, practical, easy-to-maintain house, and the things we decided on fulfilled Ed's aesthetic needs and my pragmatic needs."



*Above and opposite:* "People ask how we can sleep in here with no shades," says Ogosta. "When the sun comes up and it gets bright, we wake up. In the afternoon we can open up the door and hear the water and see the reflections on the ceiling."

*Left:* "We used Venetian plaster instead of tile in the master bath, so it's a completely seamless shower," he notes. "When you clear away visual clutter, you can appreciate the light."







*Above:* “There’s a sequence you go through in the house,” says Ogosta. “That’s one of the reasons for the skylight outside the office. You need to turn the corner there to get into the addition, and it was dark, so by just introducing light, it makes the turn more of a step along the sequence.”

*Above right:* The addition forms a sheltered outdoor courtyard. “Pavers line up with the window, so there’s kind of an invisible grid or proportion that’s going on,” Ogosta observes.



Ogosta reserved his “big move” for the master bedroom: a windowed wall framed by aluminum-clad plate steel that cantilevers two feet out from the rear facade to a “meadow” of tufted red fescue. A water feature set into the concrete plinth just outside emphasizes a sense of floating. Installing the window required some serious engineering, including eight-foot-deep foundations to anchor the steel moment frame that holds the structure in place. “When you’re designing on the computer, you never really know until a structural engineer gets a good look at the gymnastics needed to achieve the form you want,” he says. He laughs. “It’s very hard to make something look like nothing.”

The window doesn’t just integrate the addition into the landscape, it establishes the theme of extrusion Ogosta deployed elsewhere. “Before we added on, we weren’t using the backyard as well as we could have,” he says. “I pulled out the window frames and the porch off the kitchen to emphasize that sense of telescoping into the garden.”

Whether they’re watching daughter Audrey perform her dance moves on the rear porch, entertaining on the patio or decompressing in the library after a long day, the couple say the house will serve as their family home for years to come. Ogosta hopes the project, which

has won AIA awards at the local, state and national level, might serve as a prototype for thoughtfully renovating the city’s existing housing stock. “I want to show that there’s a subtler and quieter version of architecture in Los Angeles that’s about things like quality of light. I don’t buy into the mentality that square footage equals quality of life.

“For so many years, the work that architects were doing in Los Angeles was about shouting for attention,” Ogosta adds. “I’m for innovation and experimentation, but it’s got to mean something—it’s got to be purposeful.” ●