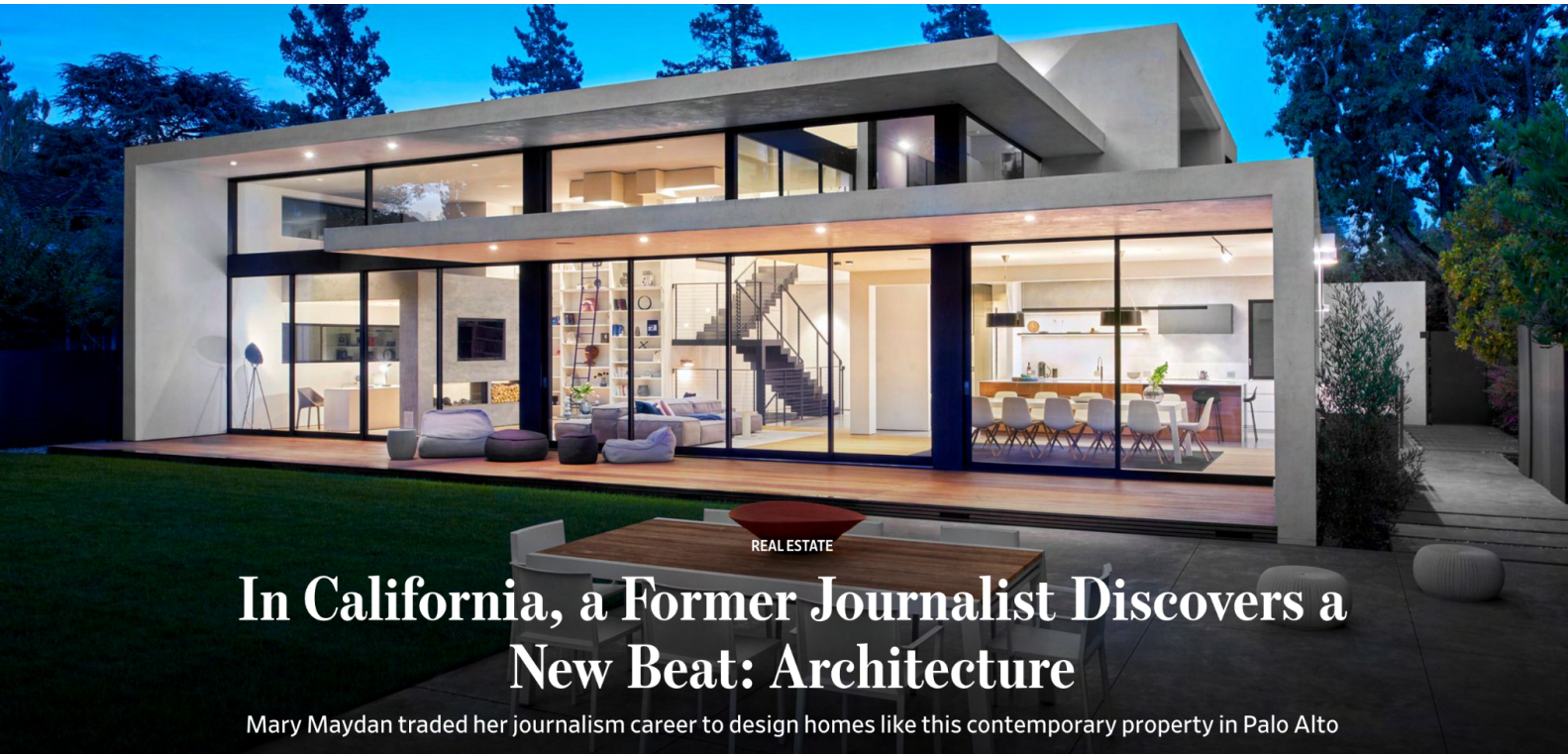


THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.



In California, a Former Journalist Discovers a New Beat: Architecture

Mary Maydan traded her journalism career to design homes like this contemporary property in Palo Alto

Mary Maydan of Maydan Architects designed this 7,000-square-foot house in Palo Alto, Calif., for her family. JOHN SUTTON

By [Nancy Keates](#)

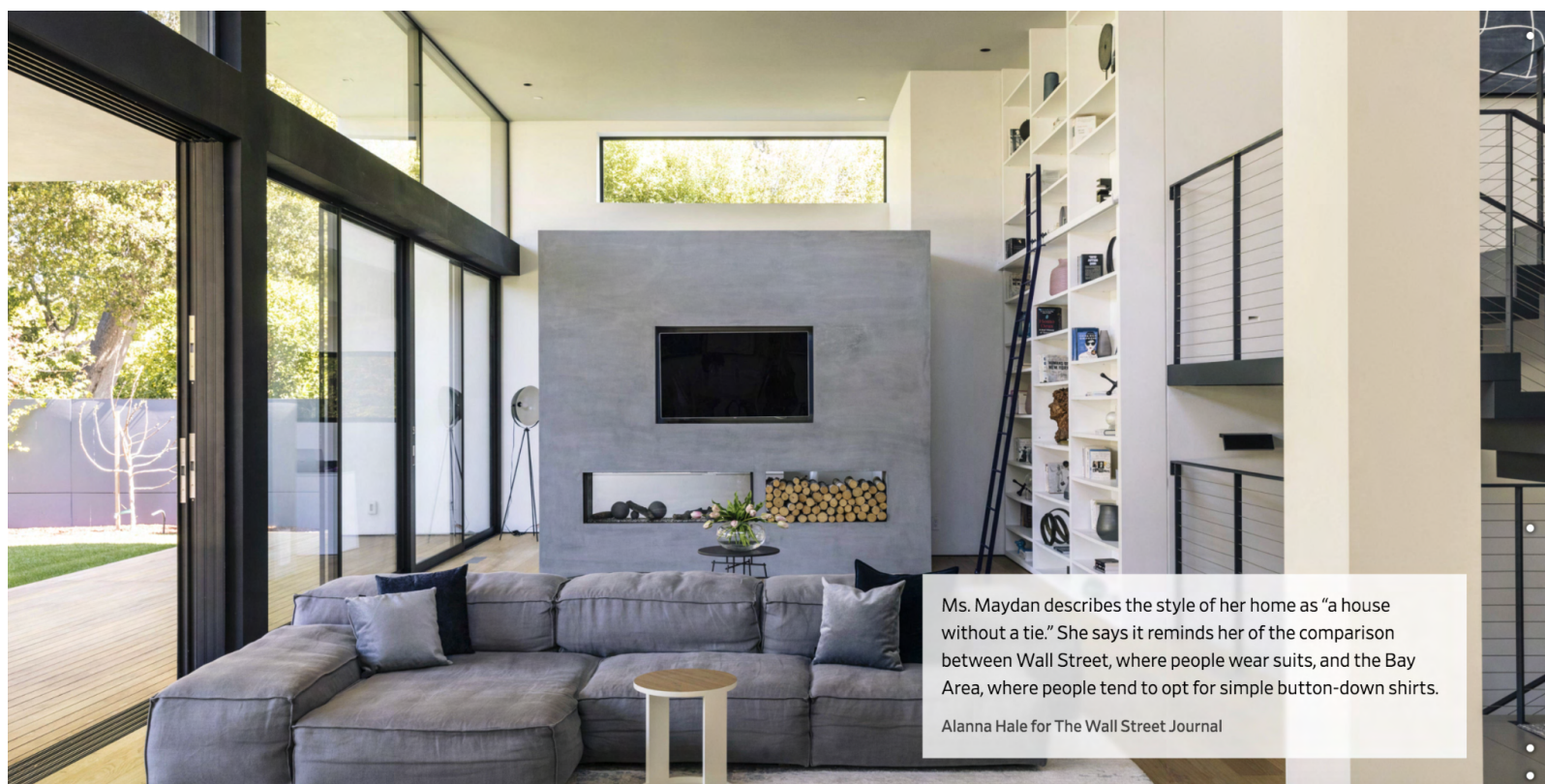
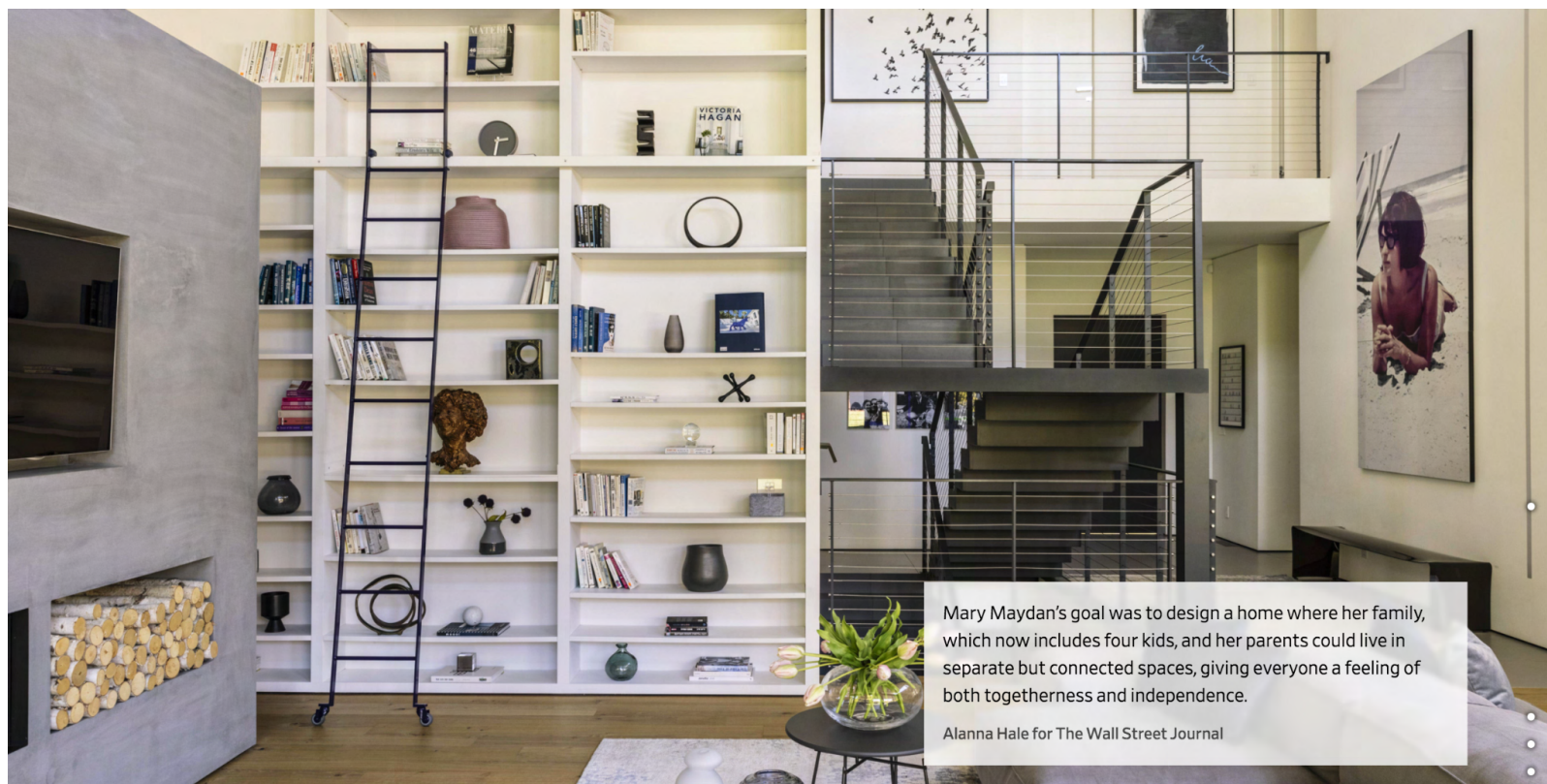
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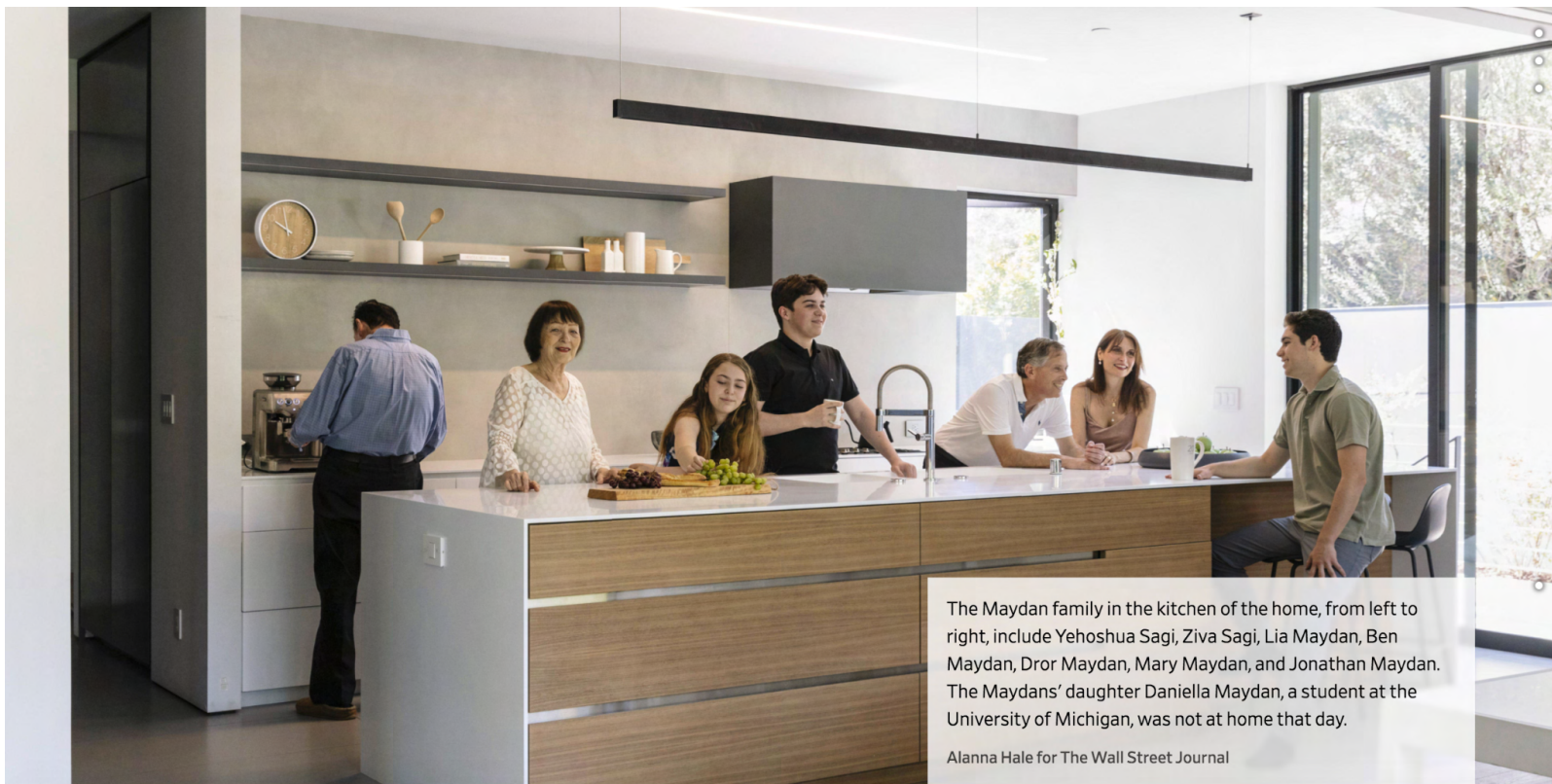
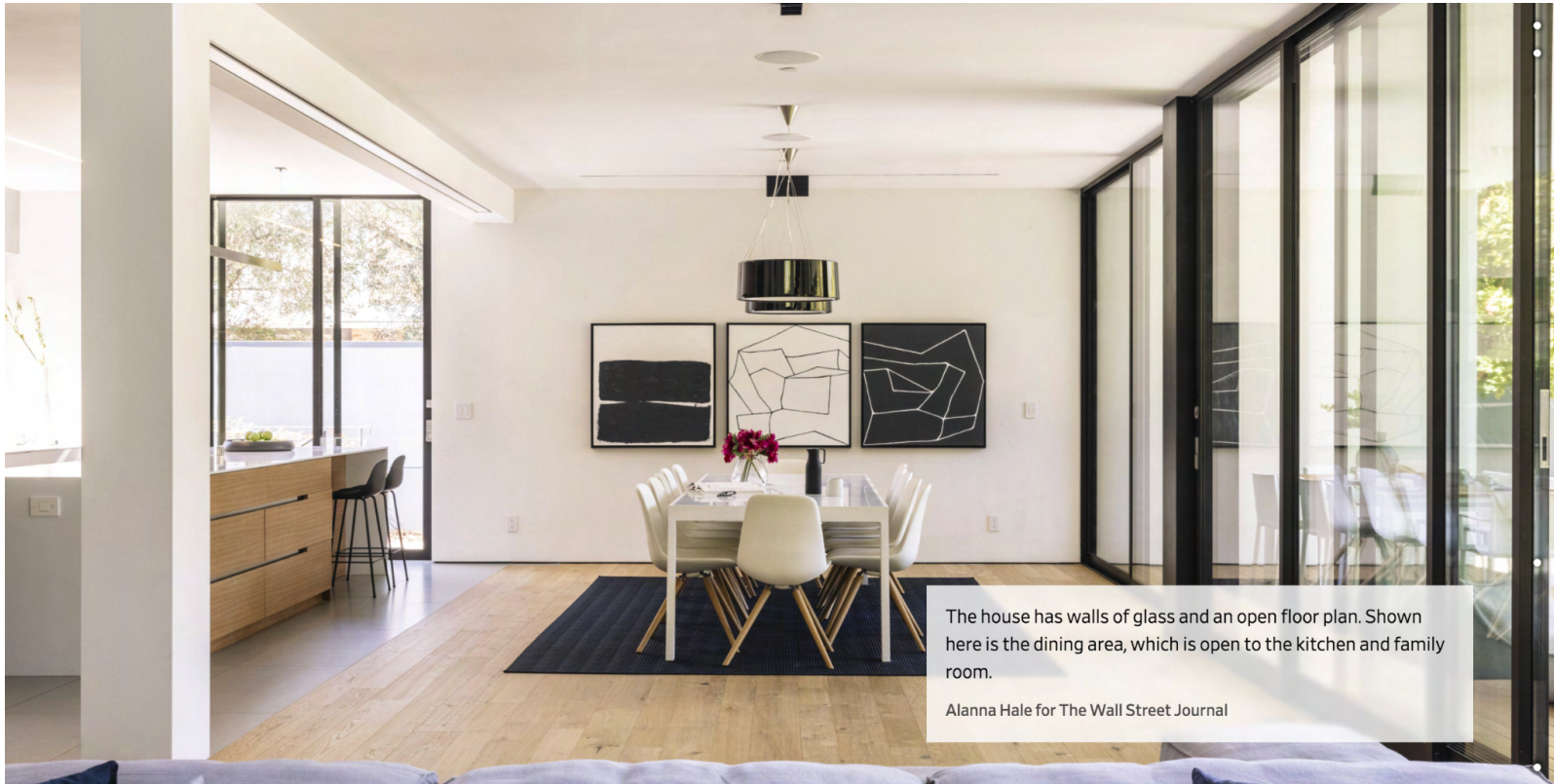
 SAVE  SHARE  TEXT

It was hatred for a Tudor that catapulted Mary Maydan toward a career in architecture.

In 1998, Ms. Maydan, a journalist and 28 years old at the time, had moved from New York into her new husband's house, a Tudor, in Palo Alto, Calif. She was surprised to find that in such a sunny, outdoor-oriented environment, the bulk of the homes, including her husband's, were traditional, with small windows and limited indoor-outdoor transitions.

"It didn't fit the context of California," she says.





So Ms. Maydan set out to design a house that did; a contemporary with walls of glass and an open floor plan. She and her husband, Dror Maydan, a software developer, bought a lot in 2002 for \$1.25 million. Ms. Maydan started working with a contemporary architect in Los Angeles. The process was slow, so she began producing drawings herself to convey her vision to the architect. When he died midway through, she ended up finishing it herself, spending hours at the planning department studying the zoning code and reading plans to learn how to translate her ideas to a constructible set of drawings.

After living there for 13 years, the couple sold the six-bedroom, six-bathroom, 4,469-square-foot house, which included a detached guesthouse, in 2017 for \$8.4 million. Ms. Maydan had already been plotting her next creation. In 2016, the couple bought another house, also in Palo Alto, for \$3.6 million, intending to tear it down. She wanted to design somewhere her family, which now included four children, and her parents could live in separate but connected spaces, giving everyone a feeling of both togetherness and independence.



The Maydan residence.

PHOTO: HAROLD GOMES

BALANCE SHEET

- Concrete: \$498,000
 - Hardwood floors: \$91,000
 - Floating staircase: \$97,000
 - Kitchen cabinets: \$205,000
 - Appliances: \$61,000
 - Glass shower doors: \$45,000
 - Tile: \$124,000
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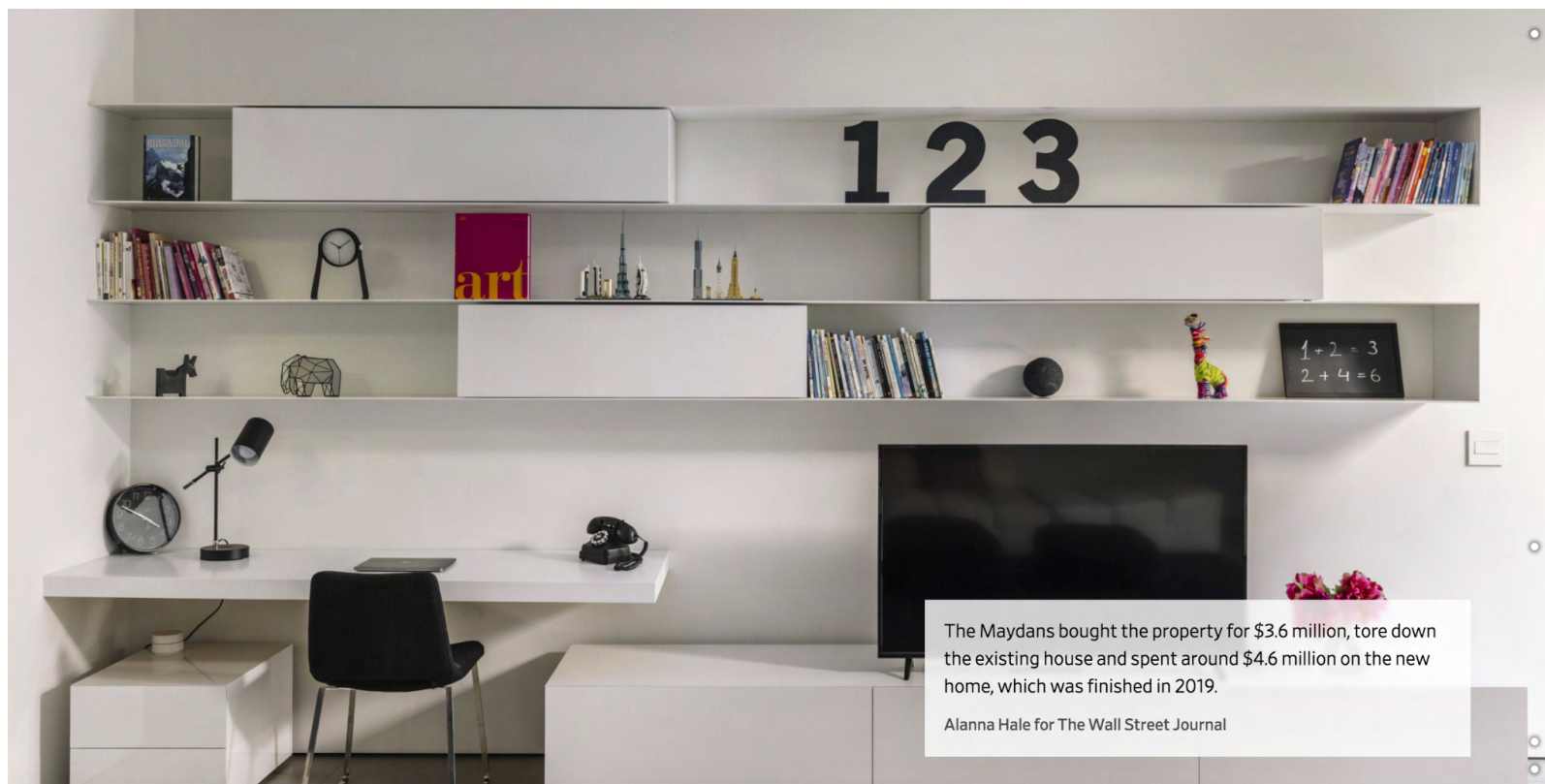
By then, she had become a sought-after designer, abandoning journalism and starting an architectural firm. With an architect on staff to serve as a supervisor and mentor, and by taking classes at the University of California Berkeley, she began mastering the craft, taking on about six projects a year.

Her new house, finished in 2019 for about \$4.6 million, is 7,000 square feet and is composed of what looks like three floating boxes, made from poured-in-place concrete, stucco and Western Red Cedar, leaning slightly against each other, the way a child might balance differently shaped blocks. The three boxes are connected inside, but there is a floating element there too, with walls that appear to be detached from the floor and ceiling, an effect achieved using aluminum drywall molds.



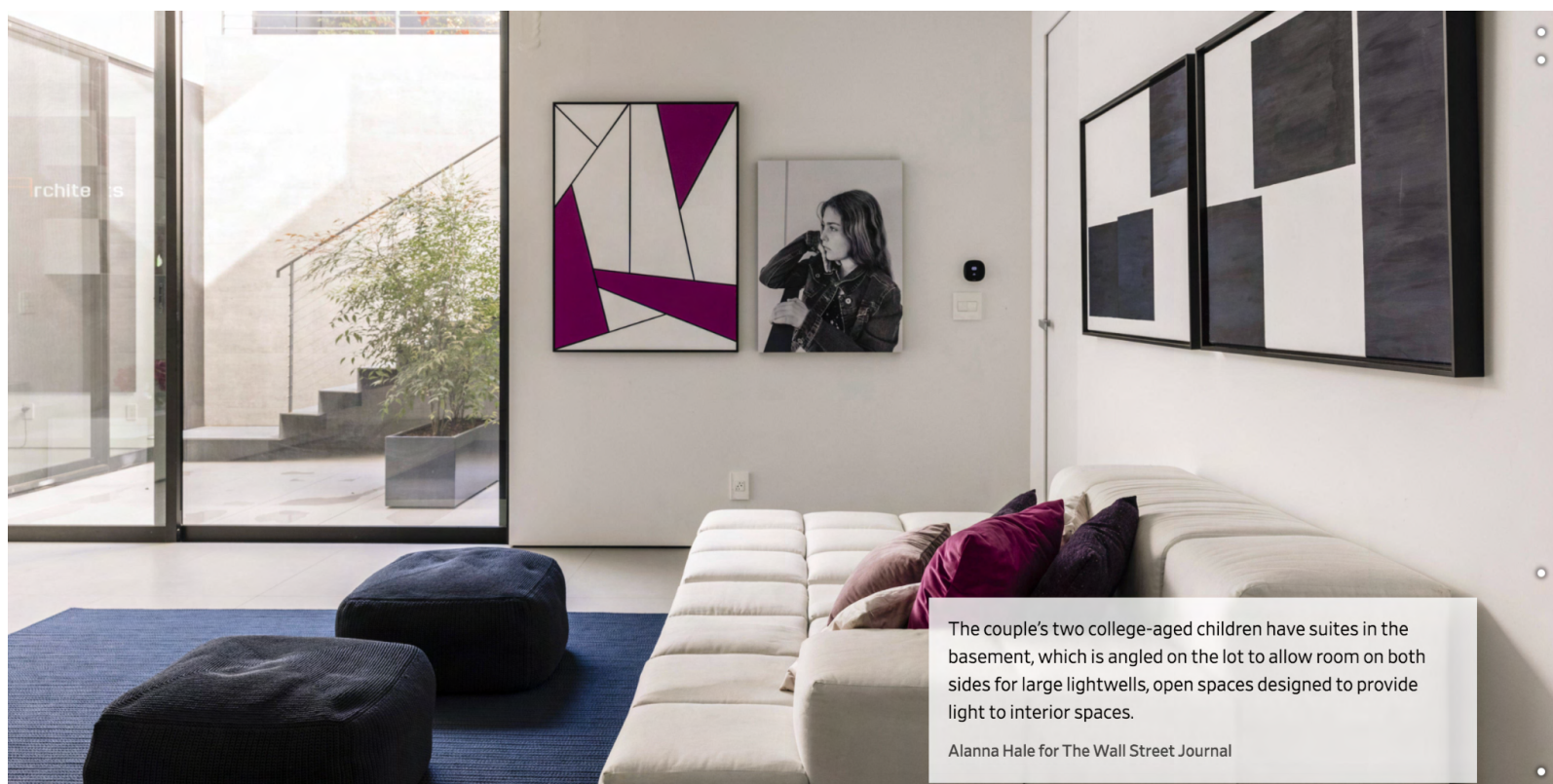
The house is composed of what looks like three floating boxes, made from poured-in-place concrete, stucco and Western Red Cedar, leaning slightly against each other, the way a child might balance differently shaped blocks.

Alanna Hale for The Wall Street Journal



The Maydams bought the property for \$3.6 million, tore down the existing house and spent around \$4.6 million on the new home, which was finished in 2019.

Alanna Hale for The Wall Street Journal



The couple's two college-aged children have suites in the basement, which is angled on the lot to allow room on both sides for large lightwells, open spaces designed to provide light to interior spaces.

Alanna Hale for The Wall Street Journal



The media room in the Maydan house.
Alanna Hale for The Wall Street Journal

The couple's two college-age children have suites in the basement, which is angled on the lot to allow room on both sides for large lightwells, open spaces designed to provide light to interior spaces. A separate office in the basement with a bathroom, pantry and its own exterior staircase acts as the office for Maydan Architects. The two younger children, ages 11 and 16, are upstairs on the same floor as the main bedroom suite.

Ms. Maydan's parents have a one-bedroom unit on the ground floor with a full kitchen, a living room, two bathrooms and a small office. It has its own exterior entry and a door leading to the rest of the house. There is an elevator shaft in case an elevator is needed in the future.



The Maydan family in their Palo Alto home.

PHOTO: ALANNA HALE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

To keep the family connected, Ms. Maydan included a large media room, playroom and gym, where she and her husband often sit and wait for the others to drift in. “We almost never invite the older kids to hang out with us, because then they wouldn’t. Instead, we sit around and joke and have fun, and eventually they join us,” she says.

Ms. Maydan describes the style of her home as “a house without a tie.” She says it reminds her of the comparison between Wall Street, where people wear suits, and the Bay Area, where people tend to opt for simple button-down shirts. More than two decades since she first moved into that hated Tudor, she now lives in a house she calls “very California.”

“It’s a shirt that is still pressed, neat, and clean-cut, but free of unnecessary ornaments,” she says.