

Take A Look Inside Architect Mary Maydan's Modern Palo Alto Home

By [Michael McCarthy](#) | August 25, 2021 | [Home & Real Estate](#)

With forward-thinking design details in every room, architect Mary Maydan creates a minimalist masterpiece in Palo Alto for her family.



THE PROJECT

When local architect Mary Maydan, founder and principal at award-winning [Maydan Architects](#), set out to design her own ultramodern home for her husband, four children and her parents, she says the goal was to provide the family with ample options for privacy and connectivity. The 7,000-square-foot gem, known as “Floating Boxes,” creates the illusion of three separate boxes; they’re actually structurally interconnected and symbolize three generations sharing the home—the ground floor includes an independent space for her parents, with a full kitchen, laundry and dual bathrooms.



Mary Maydan says the design goal for her 7,000-square-foot Palo Alto home was to create spaces that are open and warm with light-washed spaces.



A tall library and cozy sofas grace the home.

"When we started talking about a new house, my husband thought that it was completely unnecessary," Maydan says. "We lived in an ultramodern house that I had designed years earlier, and we were very happy there. Even though I loved our house, I kept lobbying for a new one. I was convinced that this was the right next step for our family. One of the main reasons I wanted to design a new one was that I felt it would be better for my parents—who were nearing 80—to be connected to the main house. Hopefully, they'll both be healthy for many years, but I was worried that if something happened to one of them, the other one would be lonely. I also wanted bigger rooms for the kids, giving them more privacy and a space almost like an apartment to live in when they come home for college breaks or even after they graduate."



Floor-to-ceiling windows bathe the home in lots of natural light.

THE TEAM

Maydan Architects specializes in modern design characterized by clean lines, open spaces, indoor-outdoor flow and abundant natural light. "I've always been fascinated by the exploration of what modern means today," Maydan says. "For me, it means being forward-thinking, environmentally responsible and creating functional, beautiful and timeless architecture. Often, our clients ask us to design exactly what they saw in another one of our projects, but we're passionate about not repeating ourselves, [leaving] our comfort zone and reinventing with designs that are innovative and fresh." [Exact Builders](#), was the general contractor.

THE GOALS

When the only client who needs to provide approval for a project is the one designing a home, the process becomes infinitely more streamlined. "I was able to set the tone for new ideas, think out of the box and be daring," Maydan says. "It's such a privilege to design without needing approval. While the house is striking and ultramodern, I wanted it to still be warm, inviting and livable. This design sensibility is achieved through open, light-washed spaces that promote a seamless indoor-outdoor flow, as well as the materials and finishes used. We made design selections that contribute to the inviting feeling, such as the warm hardwood floor, the tall library, cozy sofas and careful lighting."



Indoor and outdoor living spaces blend seamlessly.

MULTIGENERATIONAL DESIGN

Designing a functional and aesthetic knockout is always an architect's goal, of course, and this was no different with her own home, says Maydan. But the architect is quick to note that designing for her own family was a challenge. "You can be sure that the people closest to you will push you the hardest," she says.



The minimalist and highly functional kitchen.

"My teenagers wanted their rooms to be in the basement," Maydan says. "In hindsight, it was such a great move. Having big rooms in the basement gives them a lot of privacy. I love that their friends, pre-COVID, always liked to hang out in our house."

Maydan says her son also wanted his own exterior staircase to his room in the basement. "I really didn't see the need," the architect says. "We trust him and give him so much freedom, so why would he need another set of stairs? I told him that it didn't work with the design and was impossible, but he wasn't buying it. He used my own words to prove his point and said, 'Mom, you always say that everything is possible in architecture!' It's wonderful to have clients that know your beliefs so well!" The team built a staircase next to his room.



Warm hardwood floors line a bright workspace.

"Given that we are a family of eight at many different ages, designing the house required thinking of what we would need at each stage" and how those needs will evolve, Maydan says. "We designed an elevator shaft. It's structurally designed so that it will be easy to add an elevator in the future." At the moment, the shaft area serves as storage and closets on the three floors.

For her parents' ground-floor unit—which has full privacy and an exterior door but is also connected to the house—Maydan ensured the doors were 3 feet or wider to allow for future wheelchair maneuverability. Her parents' living area also features two attached bathrooms with curbless showers; each is designed so that the wall between them can be deconstructed to create a large space that would be easier for an aging parent and a nurse or helper.



The media room has become a hit for the family and a favorite gathering space.

THE MATERIALS AND FURNITURE

"For the younger kids in our family, I used indestructible materials," Maydan says. "For example, for their playroom, I preferred porcelain ceramic tile over hardwood, and the work table for art has a Corian top instead of wood. The sofa fabrics are washable and removable, and can be put in the laundry machine. Anything that makes the house stress-free contributes to happy living."



The en suite bath offers dual vanities and a lovely soaking tub.

Maydan notes that her architectural style employs lots of sharp right angles in the form of cabinets and counters. But she had to keep her parents in mind when choosing materials for some parts of the home. "When designing spaces for older people who might slip or bruise easily, I try to use softer materials and be aware of tripping hazards," says Maydan, who selected a fabric-wrapped bed frame and found door handles that are more curved but still decidedly modern.



Built-ins serve as clever storage areas for toiletries.



Mirrors run the entire length of the vanity, offering plenty of morning-prep space for the busy family.

The home's exterior materials include white stucco, gray stucco and Western red cedar, while the entry door is crafted from steel and left in its natural form. The hardwood floors are white oak by Italy-based [Listone Giordano](#); plumbing fixtures include [Fantini](#), [Dornbracht](#) and [Hans Grohe](#). Lighting fixtures from [Vibia](#), [Foscarini](#), [Davide Groppi](#), [Flos](#) and [XAL](#) grace the home. Maydan also tapped [Floordesign Rugs](#) for bespoke silk rugs, and she added pieces from a diverse set of contemporary Italian furniture-makers like [Living Divani](#), [Paola Lenti](#) and [Poliform](#).



A light-filled bedroom

THE OUTCOME

While Maydan designed the home to give her teens privacy, she also wanted to create spaces for lots of family time. It has been a wonderful success—with some surprises. “When I designed our double-height living room, which is open to the dining room and the kitchen, I was expecting us all to always gather in this big

space," she says. We do sit there a lot, but I was surprised that my parents' much smaller family room has become just as popular. This is actually something I notice with all of our clients. I think that every home should have a small space. It's fascinating to see that, at the end of the day, even people with huge mansions love to relax and wind down in a cozy space that feels more intimate. I remember reading in Michelle Obama's biography that her favorite place to sit and relax at the White House was in her walk-in closet."



The home's striking exterior reveals a perfect place to take in the stars or host an intimate dinner.

The family also loves hanging out in the media room and around the kitchen island. Maydan's husband originally didn't like the idea of the kitchen being open to the dining and living rooms, so the architect added a concealed drop-down screen by [J. Geiger](#). "We haven't even used it yet, as I think he warmed up to the open-plan concept, but it's there as an option."



Contemporary art and furnishings are featured in a stunning family room.

Having her parents in an attached unit has been wonderful, according to Maydan. “The pandemic hit shortly after we moved into the house, and it was nice that we could all be together,” she says. “The kids paid a price, as we were especially strict in order to keep my parents safe, but it was also a gift having them so close. In between Zoom classes, my kids would visit my parents, and my mother would offer them delicious meals. I can design beautiful kitchens, but my mother is the chef of the family. My parents are also very young in spirit, so it’s fun for the kids to talk to them. I hear my mom giving my younger son dating advice!”
