



GALLO RESIDENCE

# Locally Inspired

ARCHITECT ANDERS LASATER LIVES OUT HIS DREAM, CREATING SPACES THAT ARE AWE-INSPIRING AND ARTFUL.

BY SOMER FLAHERTY

“WHEN I WAS 10 YEARS OLD, I KNEW I WOULD EITHER BE AN ARCHITECT or a drummer in a heavy metal band,” says Anders Lasater. However, as a fortuitous event, the rise of grunge and alternative music in the early ’90s pushed heavy metal out of the spotlight, and Lasater shifted his focus, attending Cal Poly Pomona to study design.

After earning an undergraduate and master’s degree in architecture and becoming a licensed architect, Lasater became a teacher, instructing other precocious design students—a process he calls, “both exhilarating and heartbreaking.” Exhilarating because he can encourage and challenge a student, and then witness their creativity but heartbreaking because not all students are willing to take risks. “I refuse a life like that for myself, and I have to wish something more rewarding and meaningful for them,” he says.

While still guest lecturing, Lasater ultimately found his place working for a prominent architect in Laguna Beach—only a few miles north of The St. Regis Monarch Beach—doing fine home design. He was living an architect’s dream, designing stunning properties in the area’s diverse land. “From craggy cliffs at the water’s edge to rolling hillsides along the canyon rim and in between, we’ve got the flat land and village neighborhoods that link the two extremes to-

gether to form a compact but richly varied city,” he says.

Nevertheless, Lasater felt compelled to go out on his own and start a firm. Beginning with a laptop and a small desk in the corner of his bedroom, he admits the experience was a bit daunting, especially with a family to support, but since his move five years ago, Anders Lasater Architects is flourishing. He has enjoyed success including opening his new spacious office in the town’s Lumberyard Center, designing some of the area’s most sought-after homes and retail spaces and, most recently, winning a design award from the prestigious American Institute of Architects.

Lasater says the process of working with a client is both very personal and can also be quite affecting. “You are designing spaces for the private and intimate moments of your clients’ lives tailored just for them,” he says. “In helping them to identify their core needs and balance them against the limits of their resources, I often find myself playing the role of friend, counselor, advocate, moderator, and sometimes, having so much experience with the process, a bit of a dictator.” However, Lasater says that through it all, “I strive to get them the most out of what they have in light of what they need.”

### Connecting the Dots

Too often the backyard takes a backseat to interior design. This wasn't the case for the Gallo residence in Laguna Beach. With this property, Lasater's client wanted a modern pool and landscape solution that was still complementary to the existing 1930s cottage. Connecting the spirits of the two areas could be a challenge, but in spite of, or perhaps because of the limits, the result was an outdoor space that felt as important as the inside of the home.

Lasater set the tone for the property by mirroring the original house style and material with the new 900-square-foot pool cabana set at 90 degrees to the house to create a backdrop for the pool. The entire side of the cabana was open to the pool with



FETNEH BLAKE

### Balancing Act

Just north of gallery row in Laguna Beach is the Fetneh Blake clothing store. The 1,500-square-foot space is an art deco “motor court” apartment from the 1930s. Lasater, who says he has always been fascinated with the juxtaposition of something old against something new, considered the space an exciting opportunity to do just that—inserting something new into an old structure and celebrating the collision of the two. “We jumped at the idea of peeling open the entire facade of the building along the street, of creating a lantern that glowed with a modern vibrancy in the shell of the old structure,” he says. “It’s very satisfying to see our work living alongside that of another architect’s from 70 years ago. You feel as though your work is part of a continuum that exists now, before, and after you’re gone.”

Lasater, who believes that the most important thing to consider, whether designing a home, a retail space or any space is the light, says the Fetneh space provided a challenge because he had to balance the north facing window along the street that brought in a lot of diffused light to just one side of the building. “Light is the best building material we have, but the hardest to master,” he says. To balance the light flowing into the space he relied on including small skylights to the darker side of the store to bring in the brighter direct sun. The effect is an illuminated space that makes the small room feel larger.

From the start, Lasater and the client wanted the space to feel more like a gallery than a store. “The clothing pieces are unique, one-of-a-kind creations that should hang on the walls more as a piece of art, so we created some very custom and unique hanging and lighting solutions,” he says. The design also included recessed openings for smaller objects such as jewelry, shoes and handbags that are placed thoughtfully along the back walls and appear as smaller paintings hung on the wall.



GALLO RESIDENCE

a multi-panel folding glass door, creating a wide indoor-outdoor space. The cabana, at half the size of the existing home, became a transition element for the property so that the crisp geometry of the pool feels in line with the more traditional elements of the house.

The site of the Gallo home drove the design of the project. As a three-lot property, with only the small structures of the cabana and the original home, there is ample open space—which is very unique for Laguna. “We’ve designed lots of outdoor spaces, courtyards and gardens,” Lasater says, “so you never get a sense that the house is small.”



CORNELIO RESIDENCE

### Solving a Challenge

In San Clemente, a short drive south from St. Regis, is the Cornelio house. The slope and configuration of the lot, how it relates to the street, and where the best views are located from the upper level, provided a conundrum for Lasater, who needed to create the kitchen, dining and living rooms at the furthest point from the public entry. The task required that he carefully design a set of experiences for the user as they move from the street, to the entry, into the house and up the stairs, then ultimately into the public rooms at the end of their journey. The spaces were brought together throughout the award-winning designed home with elements like the glass wall that pulls the upper great room and the master bedroom together and allows each to share the views and the sunlight.

Lasater also provided a refreshing update on the single-family home, carving away several outdoor gardens and patios all around the house so that each room has its own accompanying outdoor space. “My favorite is the garden and patio next to the kitchen that sits on the roof of the garage below. Here we’ve got a jungle of fresh herbs, citrus trees and bamboo that create privacy from the neighbors,” he says.

### Coming Together

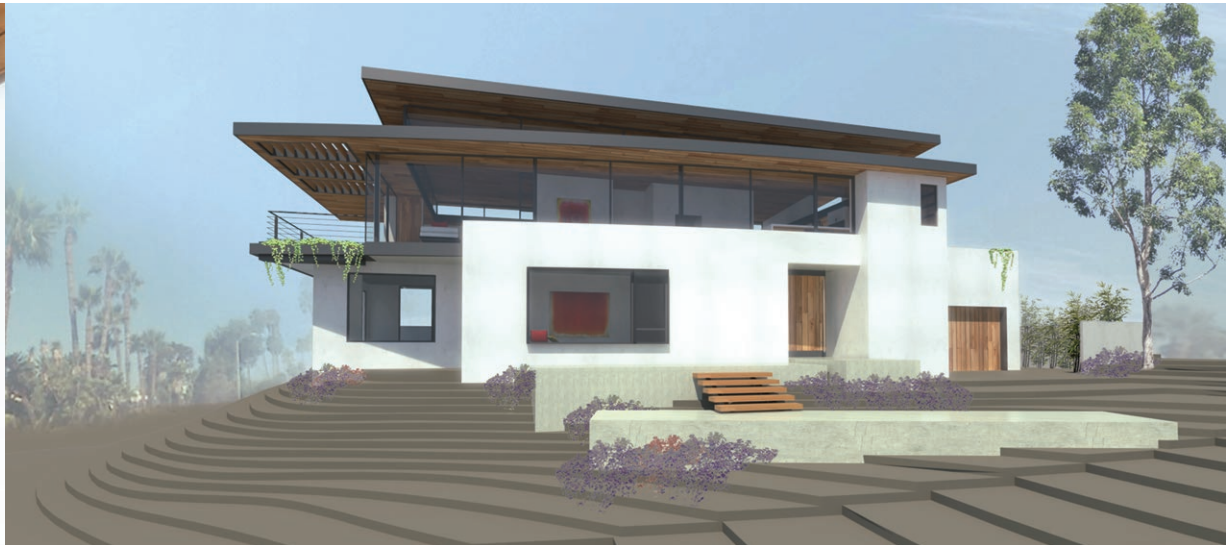
At the end of a narrow street that dead-ends at the edge of a pristine canyon overlooking the coastline of Laguna Beach is the Dillon residence. Lasater’s assignment for this home was simple enough: Form a collection of related but independent structures from the property’s original three small cottages. “The cottages are perfectly sited to

take advantage of the sun, views and breezes, so we took our cue from them as we designed the new house,” he says.

Envisioned as a hidden gem nestled within a hillside grove of fragrant eucalyptus, Lasater and his team designed a contemporary retreat that’s open to its surroundings. The result is a residence that mimics the location and orientation of the existing structures to minimize impact on the lot while maximizing the view and sunlight.

The home’s design also invites participation. “With a sequence of tailored experiences, which include living spaces toward the entry, an inner courtyard, a waterfall pool and finally more serene, intimate spaces toward the back of the lot,” Lasater explains.

For Lasater, the challenge of this incredible site was actually the unending views. Making any



CORNELIO RESIDENCE

DILLON RESIDENCE



changes to the site could impede these views for neighbors, which would prove challenging in terms of getting a new house of any size approved through Laguna’s design review process. Lasater saw an opportunity to mitigate the issue by studying the three small cottages that already existed on the lot.

Breaking the new house down into smaller, distinct parts—a master bedroom suite, great room, guest bedrooms and office—and having them match the location of the existing cottages, he was able to eliminate any view or privacy concerns for the neighbors. The approach also had a bonus, providing an opportunity to mix outdoor spaces among the interior parts of the house and take advantage of the Laguna climate and lifestyle, an advantage that few are blessed with.

Lasater comments, “This house could not be anywhere else, it’s made for this place and this time.” 🌿