

THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER AUGUST 15, 2007

HOUSE OF THE ISSUE > LEISNER, JEEVANJEE, TRIGAS



Angling the addition's facade, above, minimized its impact and made for bright interiors, above right.

Gentrification can occasionally foster good design rather than vulgar excess. As the humble cottages on narrow lots in Venice rise past the \$1 million mark, the challenge for architects is to satisfy the expectations of new buyers without destroying the character of the community. Inevitably, some developers have maxed out their sites with dumb boxes, but it's exciting to see how other people have curbed their greed and developed inventive solutions. Last year, three young architects collaborated on a trio of two-story additions for a young Persian couple, giving them an extra 2,500 square feet to enhance their 900-square-foot bungalow without overwhelming its more modestly scaled neighbors. The couple works at home—he's an entrepreneur, she's an artist—so they wanted private work spaces, a separate area in which to live and entertain, and a rental unit for income to offset the cost of the expansion. They contacted Ali Jeevanjee, who was then working at Gehry Partners, and he brought in SCI-Arc graduates Steffen Leisner and Philip Trigas. Together they adopted a subtractive design strategy, carving away at a block that represented the total addition and redistributing it to the front, middle, and rear of the long, skinny site. To

conform to code, they cut away one side to accommodate a walkway, and they angled each two-story block to maximize sunlight in the front patio and the central courtyard. The angled gray stucco facades and the opposed pitch of the three corrugated metal shed roofs introduce a lively rhythm in the progression of volumes strung out along a linear axis.

The sequence of spaces begins with the front addition, cut away to create a porch, and containing a library, study, and second-floor meditation room that includes tapering walls, an inclined ceiling, and a high window to frame the sky.

This addition attaches itself to the front of the original bungalow, with its gable roof and tie rods, which is now a dining room and kitchen. Through this space one walks through a bracing arch that frames the newly attached concrete-floored living room and upstairs master bedroom. The snug bedroom borrows space from the stairwell and from the bathing and dressing area on the opposite side. At the rear of the site, beyond a wedge-plan courtyard, is the third pavilion. It contains a rental apartment at ground level and the wife's studio above, from which a top-lit stair leads to the



CHRISTOPHER CULLITON

roof terrace, where a shutter rolls up to reveal an expansive opening framing a panoramic view over the neighborhood. The design went through several iterations, allowing the clients to critique the models at each stage. Leisner describes the pavilions as "follies," but each is carefully calibrated to play off the others. Not a foot was wasted and every feature does double duty or offers more than one perspective. Large and small openings are carefully positioned, and they complement expanses of blank wall. Landscaping adds another layer of richness. Water splashing from a pool in the front patio, a wide-branched olive tree, and a profusion of flowering plants are reminiscent of the land the wife left as a child, 20 years ago.

**MICHAEL WEBB HAS WRITTEN MANY BOOKS ON ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN, MOST RECENTLY VENICE, CA (ABRAMS).**

## 1+3=1 House

Venice, California

Steffen Leisner, Ali Jeevanjee, Phillip Trigas

### An asymmetrical collage named 1 + 3 = 1 House

By Sam Lubell - This is an excerpt of an article from the October 2007 edition of Architectural Record.

How do you triple the size of a house when it sits on a small lot in Venice, California? Young Los Angeles architects Steffen Leisner, Ali Jeevanjee, and Phillip Trigas faced this challenge when they collaborated on expanding a house for a couple living in a 970-square-foot, avocado-colored Venice bungalow with shingled siding and a gabled roof near Abbot Kinney Boulevard, the town's vibrant central drag.



Photo © Sam Lubell

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The owners—a filmmaker and a multimedia artist—asked the architects to provide them with 2,500 square feet of new space on the bungalow's long, narrow lot, including living and office areas as well as an art studio and rental unit. Since the bungalow, which contains a kitchen and an entertainment area, had been renovated only five years before, there was no point in knocking it down and starting from scratch. Knowing that a large addition would dwarf the existing home, the architects added three multistory structures that distribute the new program around the site, making the existing bungalow a vital part of a new complex.

In front of the bungalow, which sits sideways on its thin site, the architects built a 7.5-foot-wide, 26-foot-long, dark concrete pool, and added a 450-square-foot, two-story structure that includes a small, carved-out front porch, a work space, and a top-floor meditation studio. Behind the bungalow, the architects added a 1,000-square-foot structure that accommodates a sunken, 12-foot-tall living room, attached via an archway where they tore down the bungalow's east wall and a 160-square-foot second-floor bedroom. In the backyard, separated from the other two structures by a small, paved courtyard, they built a 1,065-square-foot building that contains a small, first-floor studio for renters, and a tall, second-floor artist's loft. Above this, the architects provided the basic infrastructure for a rooftop lounge.

Spaces flow smoothly into one another: For example, the entrance hall and newly renovated kitchen in the existing bungalow opens onto the new living room. A full-height window in the living room connects the space visually to the courtyard, while an open, wall-size window in the artist's loft offers views of the neighborhood.

By clearly differentiating the new structures, the architects complemented the bungalow rather than imitating it. In the process, they used a sophisticated modern palette of construction materials, specifying modestly priced items such as polished concrete floors, exposed plywood ceilings and doors, and greenish-blue windows with aluminum frames that kept the cost down to \$700,000. The structures too are inexpensive: simple wood-frame construction with gray hard-trowel stucco walls.



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Man of the House

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INNER LIFE

Modern in style, bohemian in spirit



Mark Boster / Los Angeles Times

Asa Soltan Rahmati peers from a tub set on a landing in her studio.

**An unconventional couple and their young architects set out to build a modern addition without bulldozing their humble old bungalow. The result: It's pure Venice.**

By David Hay, Special to The Times  
October 25, 2007

WHEN documentary filmmaker Shaahin Cheyene and artist Asa Soltan Rahmati decided to enlarge their Venice bungalow four years ago, they embarked on a long conversation about aesthetics, their way of life, and the sometimes testy clashes of this evolving beach community.

It was an occasionally contentious, often fanciful discussion further complicated by the dictates of the narrow lot. Bound on two sides by alleys — one frequented by drug dealers — the couple had few options for the large living spaces their hearts were set on.



PHOTO GALLERY  
Bigger, but still

With the front of the 970-square-foot house close to the street, the most logical choice was to tear down and start over, but the couple were uncomfortable with that proposition. Their architects then proposed a two-story addition that extended far into the garden behind the bungalow, but the structure's obvious bulk could have fueled charges of gentrification, a criticism the bohemian couple sought to avoid.

"We didn't want our house to be insulting to the people