

## SOMETHING DIFFERENT: 7257 Skyline Blvd.

### Overcoming some steep challenges

#### Five-level hillside home has bay views, intriguing amenities and plenty of stairs

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Not many would have the nerve to label Sallie Lang an old-fashioned girl. First of all, it's not PC to call a 44-year-old woman any kind of girl. Second, she's a builder and could do serious damage with hammer in hand. And third, her first spec house, vertically arranged on a view-saturated, tree-flanked Oakland hills lot, seems so much more Modern than Victorian.

But behind the Japanese-inspired design and Earth-sensitive practices that differentiate 7257 Skyline Blvd. from the rest of the housing market lurks an attention to detail that seems so much more '20s than 2000s. From backing up the touchpad entry with lock-and-key to ensuring a view from the couch, Lang's customization defies mass production.

"All the beam work is hand-planed -- 90 percent of it by me," Lang pointed out on a recent tour of the house.

"Nobody does that anymore," said Robin Dustan, the McGuire Real Estate partner entrusted with selling the house for \$2.68 million.

"Well, I'm crazy," Lang said. "And besides, it's fun to do."

Lang might decide she's indeed crazy if the house, financed by an all-woman team that calls itself Green Lane Development, doesn't soon find a buyer. "Maybe we went overboard, I don't know," she said.

Considering her background, that wouldn't be surprising. Adopted as an infant, Lang grew up on the East Coast. She attended a year of law school at Hastings in San Francisco, then decided to seek out her birth parents. Her mother, she discovered, was a builder with a design-build company in East Hampton, N.Y.

"I pulled up stakes and moved back, met my two new brothers and worked in the family business," Lang said. When Lang returned to California in 1993, she got her contractor's license and began doing remodeling and additions. One of the people she worked for was Paul Discoe, a Zen priest who had studied temple building in Japan and started a company called Joinery Structures. Then Discoe was selected to manage the construction of Oracle CEO Larry Ellison's compound in Woodside.

"Paul called in all his forces when he got the project," Lang said. "There were different managers assigned to each building, and I had two buildings and a boat. I learned an enormous amount from Paul. I think the main lesson was in the judicious and graceful use of natural materials."

Lang would apply that lesson, and even some of the project's leftover materials, to the Skyline Boulevard house. She formed a development team with longtime friends Holly Reese (an electrical engineer responsible for the house's many high-tech features), Maria Giatrakis and Jan and Dorothea Crosbie-Taylor, and when the hillside sliver of property went on the market in 2003, Reese snapped it up and the friends put Lang to work.

It was a steep, challenging slice of land, and the result is a three-bedroom, four-bathroom (and two half-bath) floor plan full of light, and also stairs -- five levels, starting with the street-level garage and bottoming out with the spa level that has garage-style rollup doors opening to a large deck with bay views.

The master suite covers one of the levels, and each level has some sort of balcony or deck.

"The concept is that there's no front lawn, so this is your indoor-outdoor space," Lang said.

The main entry -- that keyless, coded sliding door -- is mahogany, in the Japanese style of wood and glass to immediately convey the inspiration for the house.

"With Japanese-style building, you do everything ahead of time -- like kit building almost, doing models, then building the frame in the shop and bringing it in," Lang said. "I drew this all in 3-D on CAD, and 99 percent of the details were figured out before the first stick was put up."

The frame was built of red cedar in a Canadian factory, in panels -- which is one of the green features of the house, Lang said. Others: a standing seam metal roof rated for 60 years, radiant heat (with hot water warming pipes in the floor), passive solar heat with an orientation to the west, use of less-toxic paint, Energy Star rated (and deluxe) appliances and recycling during construction.

There are also lots of clever features -- the home office, for instance, with half-bath is easily closed off from the living space; there's a dumbwaiter connecting the garage to all other levels; an exhaust fan rises from the kitchen counter when the stove is in use; the acres of kitchen counter are of a Brazilian soapstone impossible to stain.

And the choices in tile, lighting (simple yet elegant lanterns, sconces and chandeliers, some of them hand-crafted by Charlie Jenkins) and glass (unusual patterns from Berkeley's Stained Glass Garden) speak glowingly of the design input of yet another woman friend, Jarl Forsman, who met Lang during the Ellison project.

Forsman and her partner, Steve Sekhon, also chose the interior paints, spurning the current richer-deeper trend for almost-white hues.

"It was the wood -- there's so much detail, we didn't want to take away from it, so we kept the palette calm," Forsman said.

Indeed, what's most striking is the abundant use of all kinds of wood -- all certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, or recycled, or local. Beams and posts of fir. Alaskan yellow cedar in a ceiling grid at the entry, red cedar in the main floor ceilings. Doors of ash. Bamboo floors throughout, except for the cork

in the kitchen, and a countertop of end grain bamboo on the spa level. Maple cabinets. Fluid posts of Port Orford cedar from the Ellison leftovers. A hearth and mantle of elm, salvaged from the 1995 storms in Golden Gate Park. A Santa Maria wood deck (from Earth Source in West Oakland) off the spa level.

"Some people really get what was done here, the finishes," Dustan said. "Others, it's 'Show me the McMansions, I want big.' "

Those folks probably won't want Lang's house. But, it's hard for her to imagine it any other way.

"I'm just not able to cut corners," she said. "And I think it's worth it."

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### Lang's resources

To learn more about the house that Sallie Lang built, visit [www.7257skyline.com](http://www.7257skyline.com) or e-mail Robin Dustan at [rdustan@mcguire.com](mailto:rdustan@mcguire.com), or contact Lang at Bliss Building, (510) 759-1323.

Lang called on many craftspeople for custom features, but here are a few of her retail resources:

Interior design: Artful Interiors, Jarl Forsman and Steve Sekhon. (510) 597-9857.

Art glass: Stained Glass Garden, Berkeley; (510) 841-2200, [www.stainedglassgarden.com](http://www.stainedglassgarden.com).

Lights: Berkeley Lighting; (510) 524-1782, [www.berkeleylighting.net](http://www.berkeleylighting.net).

Tile: Import Tile, Berkeley (Audrey Kral, consultant); (888) 843-5959, [www.importtile.com](http://www.importtile.com). Dunis Studios, Texas; (830) 438-2996, [www.dunisstudios.com](http://www.dunisstudios.com).

Wood: Live Edge.

Cabinetry: Omega, Wenge.

Vanities: Decolav.

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/02/25/REGAUO8NM81.DTL>

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