

New angle on going with the flow

Marin artist creates sense of spaciousness in home that melds nature, human scale

By Caroline Drewes
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

THE HOUSE THAT crowns what may have been the last great empty lot on the Inverness Ridge is finished. A captivating, an unusual, an intensely personal statement, 1,000 feet up, designed by its owner with feeling and skill and imagination.

And now that it is done, Marin County painter Bruce Lauritzen, who built it for himself, is free to focus solely upon his art.

As for that, not only does he have a new house, he also has a new work location, having moved simultaneously from his San Rafael studio to a new studio near South Park in San Francisco, where he is putting together a new body of work.

Lauritzen came upon the Inverness property a decade ago while house-sitting in Tamales Bay for friends away in Saudi Arabia; a year after its purchase, he was offered three times what he had paid for it.

Those three years of living in someone else's home were a time of recovery from a broken marriage and, he says, of "re-establishing the need to be close to nature."

10-minute concept

It took 10 minutes one day to sketch the concept of his house on a paper napkin over coffee in a favorite bistro.

It took five years to complete the project, to refine the plan. Three years at the drawing board, two years supervising construction.

For Lauritzen, a lean, graceful, sandy-haired man in his mid-50s with his Danish forebears' clear blue eyes and a cleft in his chin, the process of building was the same as the creation of a work of art. On a human scale.

His house sits on a wooded knoll under soaring Bishop pines as though it has always been there, its view commanding the reaches of Tamales Bay and Hog Island, Bodega and beyond, conceivably as far as Jenner. And to the east, easily as far as Mount St. Helena.

He has achieved what he wanted ... "the feeling that the place took birth from the ground upon which it stands, to become sculpted by the elements, like a tree shaped by the wind, adapting to the forces of nature. ... Architecture, especially in environmentally sensitive areas, should be a trade-off between structure and surroundings."

Lauritzen had remodeled, had built a studio from scratch and had done planning design before. He visualized this house as "something generic to the rural West Marin environment ... embodying the conception of a barn for the sense of interior raftered space and shelter, of a hunting lodge for the sense of loftiness and spirituality, and most of all, it would be a synthesis of all the artistic influences on my work from classic to modern, in sculptured form."

contains three fireplaces, one a barbecue.

The artist says "The column serves as a visual space divider although it floats in the middle of the house. I call it the 'engine room' because it contains the stainless steel flues that heat the house through radiation and a system of fans, the heat forced out of 'pigeon holes' at the top and distributed by panama fans. Also the water is heated by a system of convection through a radiator and pipes in the column." This column is extraordinary.

Born in The City

Bruce Lauritzen was born in San Francisco and reared in Ross, where he was enrolled in a life-drawing class at the age of 10. Printmaker and photographer as well as painter, he attended the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, and earned an MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute.

He has lived in a number of places in his life, from the time he was drafted at 19 as an art director with a top San Francisco advertising agency. Apropos of which, he says that, being a Depression baby, "like so many kids of that era who aspired to be artists, I had been influenced by parents who aspired to keep me from being an artist — a commercial artist perhaps, but a fine artist? Heaven forbid!"

Undeterred, he continued to paint in his spare time, and that period "was good for keeping the mind's eye nimble. I managed to come up with some award-winning commercials and found the fast-paced world (both) enervating and exciting. But the time came when I knew I needed to make the break."

At the end of 1960, he took off for Europe, settling in London and ultimately in Milan, "where I painted profusely and showed my work, while doing advertising and fashion illustration for my bread and butter. I did not see the USA for six years."

For the last four of those years, he spent weekends aboard his eight-meter sloop. "She was an old boat with classic lines built in Norway and I completely refurbished her, sailing from Copenhagen to the Mediterranean, berthing her in Portofino and Santa Margherita." Years later, he was to recognize his boat in a poster of Portofino in a San Rafael print shop; the poster hangs now on his bathroom wall.

Desert pilgrimages

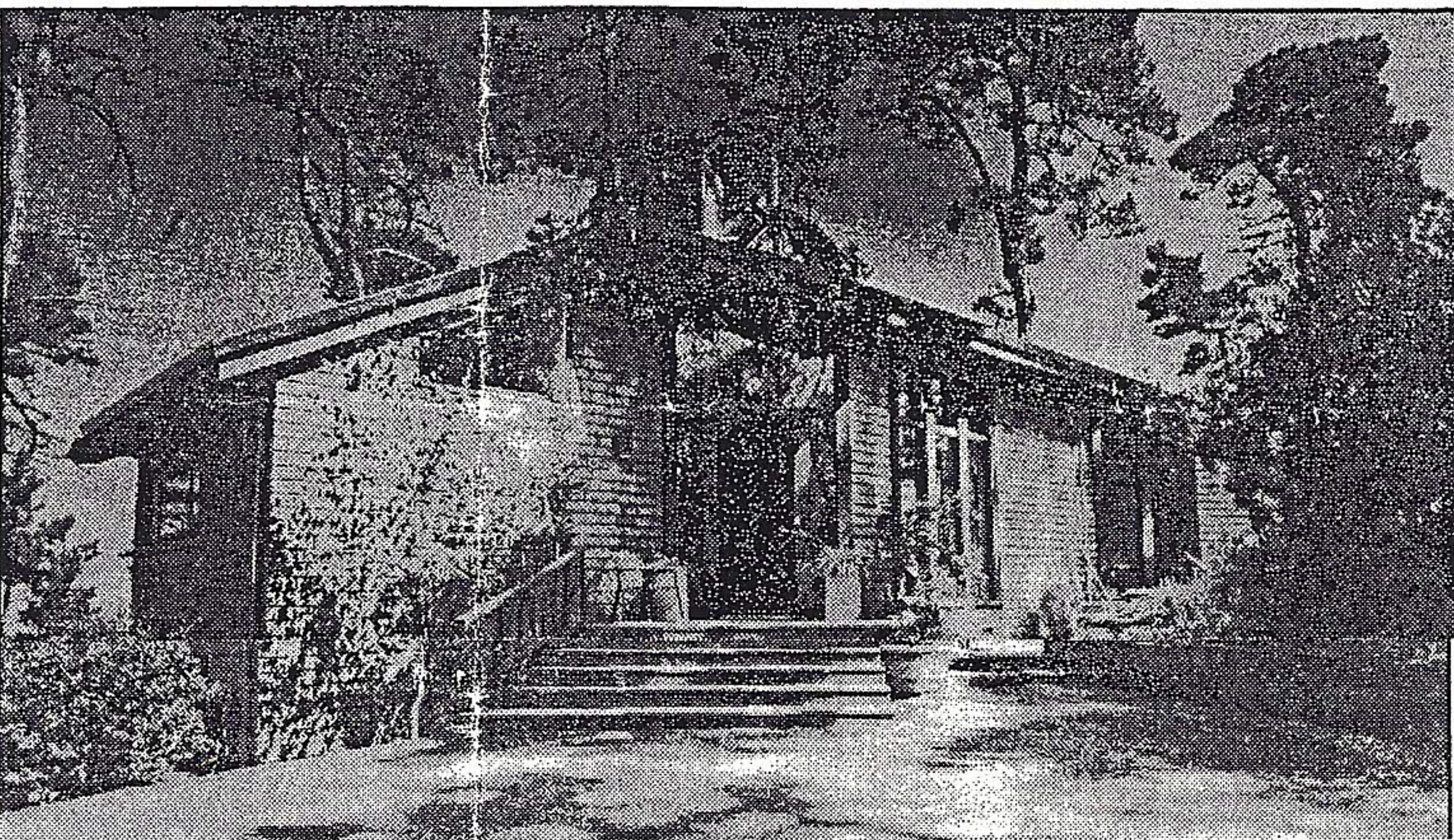
In his house, the bleached skull of a steer from the Colorado River hangs on the stairwell to the basement. (The desert is important to the artist; he makes solitary pilgrimages he considers spiritual encounters to New Mexico and Arizona.)

The visitor's eye is captured by a gorgeous stuffed peacock perched on a high ledge so the tail cascades, a leftover perhaps from his feather series, when he was painting landscapes dominated by giant feathers as a metaphor for freedom and transcendence.

There is a 17th century chest left him by his parents and an old upright piano he says he would like to play better, perhaps now he will have time. And clearly visible, a Lauritzen bas-relief on the tile wall of his shower, a splendid female torso of glazed ceramic.



EXAMINER PHOTOS BY CRAIG LEE



Architect/painter Bruce Lauritzen, above, says his house "took birth from the ground upon which it stands, to be sculpted by the elements." The exterior, left, sits on a wooded knoll under Bishop pines with a commanding view of Tamales Bay, while the interior, below, features a vast amount of glass under lofty timbered angled ceiling, with accent on verticality.

Pines like cathedrals

To him, the towering pines are like a Gothic cathedral; they inspired the dominant theme of his house: verticality. Some of the windows are 13 feet high, with heavy timber accents; the house has much open space, many angled spaces, and a vast amount of glass under a lofty timbered angled ceiling. Angular in shape, compact, airy, this is a one-floor shingle house encompassing 1,800 square feet; it appears larger than it actually is.

Lauritzen wanted to "feel" the movement, the transition from one interior space to another, with a simultaneous consciousness of the whole. "Spaces changing, light from different directions in different seasons. . . . All the angles keep one slightly off balance," he says. "Turn around a corner and your perspective is altered, what once was an angled wall is now a square room. And around another corner is another challenge as a low ceiling shoots up at an angle, or high rafters plunge to a low soffit."

Between spacious country kitchen and dining and living room areas is a massive concrete column the shape of a parallelogram ris-

A self-styled "unconfirmed bachelor," he has moved into the new house with a calico kitten named Tango. There is an osprey's nest in one of the bishop pines on his ridge . . . "flying white against the sky, this fishing hawk has a wingspread of nearly 5 feet," Lauritzen will tell you. "Occasionally there is the hoot of an owl or the bark of a fox; otherwise, the stillness makes you feel as if you are suspended in space and time."

Chipmunks and songbirds frequent the broad deck that wraps the house; however, it is "the big shiny audacious" ravens that intrigue the artist most, and the 15-inch-long pileated woodpecker, "powerful, magnificent, an endangered species."

Drawn to architecture

Lauritzen has been drawn to architecture from childhood, as he has been an active and passionate environmentalist and compellingly passionate about his painting. A compassionate man as well; there is the impression of quietude and strength and competence. Stemming, one would guess, from a surety about himself and his place under the sun. He is intuitive, art

happen, with a sense of humor to lighten the gravity; this is reflected in his painting sometimes.

He has had 26 one-man shows and shared in 56 others, and his works are included in art collections throughout the United States and abroad. Some of his current work may be seen at the Campbell-Thiebaud Gallery on Chestnut Street.

Although this work is uniquely his own, the influences he acknowledges range through the abstract expressionists to contemporary artists like Richard Diebenkorn.

In the past he has taught at the college level. In the past few years, he has not shown his work, partly

Now, he observes, "my work has changed dramatically over the years, of course. . . . Right now, I'm working on a series of swimmers and getting more abstract. I've done this image for a long time, now I'm thinking of it as a series.

"I suppose my conviction has shifted from figurative to abstract back to representational and back toward abstract again."

Coastal lifestyle theme

His swimmers are in pools, reflecting the California coastal lifestyle he has adapted as a theme. He has also become increasingly absorbed in the pyramid, "the per-

phor for purity and perfection, and a carry-over from his work at construction.

Lauritzen expresses his feelings easily, interpreting his house for a visitor as he might a painting.

"There is an interplay between the glass, the walls, and the eaves that I think of as a dance in a way, which is the way I was affected by Christo's 'running fence' — I worked with Christo for several years when he did his Marin County project — the interaction of the subject and the object, the advancing and retreating of the object in relation to the observer."

him at his house, "... It is hard to take one's space for granted here."

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RECORD	LAYER	REDDWARP	
AMUSE	SIREN	KOREA	GOA
COBS	ELMER	SOLOS	MAGI
ETE	ETUIS	BERET	HOVEL
REDSTART	MIDAS	SEEVERS	
HUNS	RENAN	DIRE	
CANADA	LADEN	REDOSIER	
ABODE	BEGIT	SYNDICATE	
TIATE	ROPES	RODIN	ROME
ESE	ELLED	CEDES	BENES
REDADDER	RADAR	RUDEST	
MISS	BANGS	BERG	
DULUTH	RIVER	REDLIGHT	
REAL	ANISE	AMATE	ALOE
ALLIE	NITTOIN	VOLTA	NEIND