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A photograph of a modern residential building with a courtyard. The building features a mix of dark and light wood siding. On the left, there's a section with dark, patterned metal panels. A person is walking through a large glass wall in the center, which looks out onto a lush green landscape. In the foreground, there's a gravel courtyard with some small plants and two tall, thin evergreen trees. The background shows a mountain range under a blue sky with light clouds.

MODERN HOMES EVOLVED

Inside the New Priorities of High-End Residential Architecture



Modern Home by David Strand Design;
Cover photo: The Notch Residence, New
Hampshire, by Paul Designs Project.

All photos courtesy of Marvin®

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Contents

Introduction	1
Participants	2
Executive Summary	3
Takeaways, at a Glance	5
Part 1. Contextual Inspiration	6
Part 2. Geography and Practice	10
Part 3. The Custom Residential Market	15
Part 4. Windows, Materiality, and Performance	21
Part 5. Conversations About Modern Design	24
Part 6. Modern Design as It Relates to Windows and Doors	28
Part 7. Redefining Luxury	32
Part 8. Final Reflections	36

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The Summit View Residence, Vermont,
by Method Architecture Studio.

Introduction

Around tables from coast to coast, architects describe a field that’s changing quickly but still grounded in timeless principles. Architectural inspiration might come from a museum show, a book, or even a child’s sketch, and design is becoming more collaborative and personal. Clients are less focused on size or style and more interested in homes that feel authentic, rooted in place, and connected to daily rituals.

More than ever before, windows and doors are being seen as central to the experience of a home—shaping light, comfort, and the relationship to the outdoors. Modern design, too, is being redefined: It’s about warmth, approachability, and spaces that feel livable. And as the idea of luxury shifts, architects see the future “dream home” as one that treads more lightly on the earth while offering richer connections to family and place.

Participants

New York

David Bench, *Principal and Founder*,
Bench Architecture

Matt Berman, *Founding Principal*,
Workshop/APD

Katherine Chia, *Principal and*
Co-founder, Desai Chia Architecture

Peter DePasquale, *Principal and*
Co-founder, GARNETT.DePASQUALE

Arjun Desai, *Principal and Co-founder*,
Desai Chia Architecture

Andrew Heid, *Founding Principal*,
NO ARCHITECTURE

Jing Liu, *Founding Partner*,
Solid Objectives Idenburg Liu

Faith Rose, *Principal and Co-founder*,
O’Neill Rose Architects

Philipp von Dalwig, *Principal and*
Co-founder, vonDALWIG

Bryan Young, *Principal and Founder*,
Young Projects

Chicago

Joseph Altshuler, *Principal and*
Co-founder, Could Be Design

Tyler Gaeth, *Associate Principal*,
Booth Hansen

Fanny Hothan, *Architect*,
34-TEN Architecture

Josh Hutchison, *Founder*,
34-TEN Architecture

Jarrett Jespersion, *Architectural Designer*,
34-TEN Architecture

Pamela Lamaster-Millett, *Principal*,
Searl Lamaster Howe

Jon McNeely, *Principal*, Booth Hansen

Joy Meek, *Principal*,
Wheeler Kearns Architects

Zack Morrison, *Principal and*
Co-founder, Could Be Design

Mark Sexton, *Founder and Co-managing*
Partner, Kreuck Sexton Partners

San Francisco

Kai Alcharabi, *Project Lead*,
Blue Truck Studio

Christopher Baile, *Partner*,
Schwartz and Architecture

Ivor Brown, *Senior Project Architect*,
Buttrick Projects Architecture + Design

Jerome Buttrick, *Managing Partner*,
Buttrick Projects Architecture + Design

Julia Campbell, *Partner*,
Quezada Architecture

Joe DiNapoli, *Co-founder and Principal*,
STUDY Architects

Mark English, *Principal*,
Mark English Architects

Trenton Jewett, *Project Architect*,
Klopf Architecture

Chris Kurrle, *Principal*,
Feldman Architecture

Peter Liang, *Founder and Principal*,
Blue Truck Studio

Dusan Motolik, *Principal*, Bracken &
Bracken Architecture / Lifestyle / Wellbeing

Angela Todorova, *Principal*,
Klopf Architecture

Geddes Ulinskas, *Founding Principal*,
Geddes Ulinskas Architects

Mindi Weichman, *Principal*,
STUDY Architects



The Well House, Massachusetts,
by Neubauer Ennis Architects.

Executive Summary

Research Objective

Ask residential architects from both established and emerging high-end firms to talk candidly about windows, doors, and modern life, and a coherent picture comes into focus. In New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, the luxury modern home is shifting more to substance: healthier, warmer, simpler to live in, and more attuned to place.

Methodology

Insights were gathered through a series of three Jeffersonian dinners hosted by ARCHITECT Editor-in-Chief Paul Makovsky, plus select follow-up interviews, with 34 architects and designers in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco.

A Jeffersonian dinner is a guided conversation format inspired by Thomas Jefferson’s belief that meaningful dialogue is best expressed around a shared table. Each evening brought together a small group of architects for an open, single-topic discussion that encouraged reflection and exchange rather than formal presentation. The approach fostered candid insights into how architects interpret client desires, navigate technical demands, and use windows and doors to shape light, connection, and experience in the modern home.

Jeffersonian Dinners

+

Follow-up Interviews

+

ARCHITECT Research



The Well House, Massachusetts,
by Neubauer Ennis Architects.

Takeaways, at a Glance

Refinement over excess.

Clients want homes that are flexible, healthy, and deeply personal—spaces that live as beautifully as they look.

Windows and doors, center stage.

They set light, comfort, security, and the indoor-outdoor rhythm—and they’re among the largest line items in the construction budget. Architects wrestle with transparency vs. thermal performance but are pleased with innovations in the industry.

Modern, with feeling.

Today’s “modern” is clarity, comfort, proportion, and belonging to place—less austerity, more warmth and livability. Architects see themselves not just as makers of form, but as curators of experience.

Regionalism perfected.

Practices working across geographies translate a consistent design language through local climate, culture, craft, and service realities—from freeze-thaw to tropical rain to who can actually service an appliance.

Faster, yet still tactile, practice.

Pace has quickened and digital tools bring teams together across time zones; even so, studios prize in-person collaboration for material exploration, mentorship, and models.

The inevitability of rising costs.

Fluctuating pricing pushes earlier contractor and consultant involvement, clearer priority setting, and scenario planning. Meanwhile, rising codes improve baselines whether or not clients ask for it.

Tech, by choice.

Clients are informed but often prefer simple, durable automated systems over too much tech; planned obsolescence is a turnoff.

Luxury re-scripted.

Ease, craft, connection to the outdoors, and personalization outrank scale. Experience beats square footage.

Part 1.



Contextual Inspiration

Architects traced their sources of inspiration to places both intimate and expansive. Across all three cities, they described inspiration not as a search for novelty but as a practice of attentiveness—to clients, colleagues, and the quiet rhythms of daily life. For some, it means turning inward, drawing on memory and reflection; for others, it’s about staying open to sparks from the unexpected. What unites them is a shared belief that inspiration is everywhere—and the challenge is simply to recognize it.

In New York, David Bench, principal and founder of Bench Architecture, pointed to family life as a constant reminder of growth and change, and his six-year-old daughter as inspiration. “She’s our first child and it’s pretty interesting to see development happening so quickly,” he said. “She’s really just drawing, and so natural creativity is coming out not only on paper, but also in development of language and how she describes things.”

For Faith Rose, principal and co-founder of O’Neill Rose Architects in New York, inspiration comes less from external discovery and more from pausing to reflect. “I feel like I’m finally understanding what inspiration is,” she said. “For me, inspiration comes from what I know. I realize I’m old enough to draw from experience, I know this world now. I can just take a moment and think about it, and I know what needs to go together in order to make this happen.”

Similarly, Matt Berman, founding principal of Workshop/APD in New York, described inspiration as more of a mindset. “It’s not about inspiration, it’s about curiosity,” he said. “Inspiration is all around us all the time—you either see it or you don’t.”

The same idea surfaced with Josh Hutchison, founder of 34-TEN Architecture in Chicago, who described how even the most ordinary environments feed his design thinking. “I find in-

spirations in the everyday ... like observing people’s patterns when you’re at the grocery store or wherever. And vernacular architecture. I just love walking neighborhoods.”

Architect Fanny Hothan, also of 34-TEN, finds inspiration in elements that encourage calm. “Life is chaotic and busy, and I’m inspired by what makes me calm and feel good,” she said. “Every time I experience a feeling, I try to understand materials or whatever it is and link that feeling to what I could use in future projects.”

Teaching also serves as a wellspring of ideas. “Every semester, my students bring fresh ideas, things I never thought of—that’s where my inspiration comes from,” said Kai Alcharabi, project lead at Blue Truck Studio in San Francisco.

Also in San Francisco, Geddes Ulinskas, founding principal of Geddes Ulinskas Architects, described how a League of Honor exhibition on Chinese fashion designer Guo Pei—who grew up in a culturally restricted place but found examples of opulence from previous eras and lost art forms—inspired him. “To me, she was really emblematic of somebody who had come from an overly austere society and had really longed for richness and beauty, and she brought it out,” he said. “And that had a strong effect on me.”

Translating inspiration into something meaningful isn’t always easy, some noted. “I think the real question is how you select inspiration these days and filter it into something that is useful,” said Philipp von Dalwig, principal and co-founder of vonDALWIG in New York, “because there’s so much from social media and from everything around you.”

Changes to the creative process in the last 3-5 years

For Rose, interiors and architecture have become inseparable in her practice. “I think interiors have always been part of my work,” she said, “but now, I’m thinking about architecture and interiors holistically, from the very beginning.”

“The biggest change is the pace,” von Dalwig said. “Projects today demand faster decisions and quicker delivery, which forces us to synthesize our creative process more than before. It’s not less creative, but it is more structured.”

Left: Tranquil Abiding, Hudson Valley, New York, by Studio MM Architect.

VERBATIM

Joseph Altshuler, *Principal and Co-founder, Could Be Design, Chicago*, on unexpected sources of inspiration:

“I find a lot of inspiration in children’s picture books. Architecture can be alive—full of agency—in illustration. One example is the book *Extra Yarn* [written by Mac Barnett and illustrated by Jon Klassen], where a little kid likes to knit and the yarn never runs out. She starts knitting sweaters for mailboxes, cars, and even buildings! The world is black and white and de-saturated; only the yarn has color. That inspires me—layers or components of the built environment that make the world come alive.”

Right: Summit View, Vermont, by Method Architecture Studio.



Not surprisingly, technology has played a big role. “Within the last three to five years, we as an office have switched over to be basically paper-free, so all of our conceptual sketches—even quick sketches that we want to send to clients—are done through Morpholio Trace,” said Trenton Jewett, project architect for Kloph Architecture in San Francisco. “It’s really streamlined and it has reduced clutter and environmental impact.”

In most cases, architects said they believe the in-person studio experience supports creativity. “You want to be able to brainstorm with people face to face. You want to be able to see and touch materials,” said Katherine Chia, principal and founder of Desai Chia Architecture in New York. “The value of working together in person was reinforced after that full-on remote experience [during the pandemic].”

In San Francisco, Dusan Motolik, principal at Backen & Backen Architecture / Lifestyle / Wellbeing, said that sentiment

about working in the office is particularly true for junior staff at his firm—something he fully understands. “Early in my career, I learned a lot by overhearing and seeing how people in the next cubicle handled problems,” he said, noting that now his firm requires a minimum of two days per week in the office for all architectural staff.

Also in San Francisco, Mark English, principal at Mark English Architects, noted that his firm is 100% in the office. “We’re five people, so we’re small, but I like everyone to be involved,” he said. “And when new people come in, they build a physical model right off the bat—it makes that hand to brain connection. We like to be around each other. I think it’s a superpower.”

Pamela Lamaster-Millett, principal at Searl Lamaster Howe in Chicago, noted that it’s not just teammates who enjoy coming to the office. Clients do, too. “They want to see the staff, see and touch materials, and do it in a space with us,” she said.

Above: The Notch Residence, northern New Hampshire, by Paul Designs Project.

Part 2.



Geography and Practice

Designing beyond one's home base has become both a challenge and a privilege for many of the architects around the table. As their practices expand into new regions and climates, they find themselves balancing architectural rigor with the nuances of local culture and craft.

In New York, Peter DePasquale, principal and co-founder of GARNETT.DePASQUALE, noted that even a short distance can transform the rules of engagement. "Where insulation goes, where condensation forms, is different in different places," he said. "It's fun to learn about the different ways contractors work ... even the difference between a New York contractor and a Berkshires contractor."

For Chia, every new project brings a lesson in adaptation. "Each place has its own climate and culture, and we really try to respond to that—whether it's through local materials, ecosystems, or traditions."

Motolik looks to the lessons of a place, too. "I always invest time to learn about a community—when a place was created, its story, construction and technical aspects, and how to build there," he said. "I'm also interested in how a place functions with respect to water generation, wastewater absorption, and energy generation."

Berman underscored how understanding local realities, such as reliability and maintenance, can carry as much weight as aes-

thetics. "We're doing a project in Costa Rica right now," he said, noting that certain appliance brands are known for prompt service calls. "If you spec anything else, they might come next week," he said. "That's important to know."

In San Francisco, architects spoke about how technology has reshaped collaboration across time zones. "We are very much a hybrid company of about 15 people here in San Francisco, but with 10 others working remotely in the U.S. and Europe, which allows us to have almost a 24-hour workforce," said Joe DiNapoli, co-founder and principal of STUDY Architects. "There's no shortage of challenges relative to operating that way, but we definitely enjoy it. And we have strategic technology in place that allows us to feel like we're sitting across the table from each other."

One of those pieces of technology is an online platform called Figma, said Mindi Weichman, a principal at STUDY. "It has really allowed our team to be collaborative in ways that I don't even think we imagined were possible being remote," she said. "Our teammates in Europe can be working on something—posting things on Figma—for a meeting we're having with clients the next morning."

In Chicago, architects talked about how using tech to work across time zones has expanded community and changed the way they think. "It opened up the world of consultants—lighting designers, landscape architects in other cities," said Joy Meek, principal at Wheeler Kearns Architecture.

The state of regional design

Across all three cities, the consensus was clear: Regionalism isn't disappearing—it's evolving. Architects are embracing a dual perspective, drawing inspiration from global networks and technologies while staying grounded in the materials, building

Left: Pinnacle Sky Residence in the Promontory development, near Park City, Utah, by Upwall Designs.

techniques, and cultural traditions that define place. In doing so, they're building a new kind of design practice—one that's rooted locally but fluent everywhere.

Chia pointed to a project in Costa Rica currently underway that has required research into new building methods and stormwater management. "We're really doing a lot of research on the local climate, local building methods, and how people live and work in a tropical climate," she said. "Managing heat and tremendous amounts of seasonal rain has an impact on the shapes and sizes of buildings and the kinds of materials we use."

Jewett touched on his firm's California modern focus, which has inspired commissions as far away as Spain. "There are elements of Eichler and mid-century modern homes—Corbusier modernist international styles—that lend themselves to places anywhere in the world. That was kind of the whole movement."

Lamaster-Millett roots design in Midwest realities. Clients may bring coastal references to the table, but she translates those qualities into buildings that feel authentic and will perform. "Not everyone appreciates the climate challenges we have—it can be very hot and humid in the summer, and in the winter our freeze-thaw cycles want to rip buildings apart," she said. "Twenty years ago, people were bringing in *Dwell* magazine photos with exposed steel I-beams and garage doors opening to the outdoors. But that's California; it never freezes. Here, we can use a beam inside, but it needs a thermal break. So we ask: What are we trying to invoke, and how do we make it true to the architecture for where we are?"



Above: The Notch Residence, New Hampshire, by Paul Designs Project.

Right: Riverhouse, Oregon, by Anne Usher Architecture.



VERBATIM

Pamela Lamaster-Millett, *Principal*,
Searl Lamaster Howe, Chicago, on design
identities that extend between regions:

"We designed a house inspired by an East Coast firm's shingle style, and [partner Greg Howe] ended up researching woodpeckers to understand how materials would perform here, in the Midwest. We pared back the shingles so they covered about half the house—more manageable for longevity and better suited to our region. Our job is to help clients make their homes livable long-term. What looks beautiful in an image may not hold up here. For instance, while the East Coast still favors wood [window exteriors], we tend to use aluminum-clad windows because our climate strips paint so quickly. At the end of the day, these things play a part in what you see."



Portland Hills Renovation, Portland, Oregon,
by Guggenheim Architects + Design Studio.

Part 3.

The Custom Residential Market

Architects in all three cities described a residential market in flux—one where expectations have grown, priorities have shifted, and the definition of “custom” continues to evolve. Clients are seeking homes that are healthier, simpler, and more adaptable, yet deeply personal—a shift toward refinement rather than excess. They want spaces that live as beautifully as they look. In guiding them there, architects are embracing a broader role—not just as creators of the home’s form, but as curators of experience.

Jon McNeely, principal at Booth Hansen in Chicago, described the challenge of balancing unpredictable construction costs with client expectations, emphasizing the need for early, transparent conversations about budgets and priorities. “I’d say the biggest challenge we’re finding is just construction costs because they’re so all over the board, and then trying to get our clients to be more engaged in the front end,” he said. “We’re trying to bring the contractor in as early as possible, so there are fewer surprises. Getting everyone on the same page, especially when it comes to materials and details, helps a lot.”

In San Francisco, Christopher Baile, a partner with Schwartz and Architecture, noted work-from-home zones, single-level living, and multi-generational flexibility as emerging priorities. “There’s always some kind of work-from-home situation,” he said. “With couples, the dynamic is, *do we want to be around each other when we work—or away?*”

When building from the ground up, Baile’s firm aims for single-level designs whenever possible—to accommodate aging in place. “In San Francisco, we work with 25-foot-wide lots and stairs, but when we get out into the country, people go as far as

to say, ‘I don’t want a single stair in the house ... not for now, but for the future.’”

While the wish lists for specific spaces are longer, they’re grounded in functionality. In Chicago, architects noted those priorities take on a lifestyle-driven form. “Home office, home gym, killer outdoor space—those are big,” Hutchison said. “We have done so many more swimming pools than I’ve ever done before,” Lamaster-Millett said. “Even next to a lake,” McNeely added jovially.

Not surprisingly, technology has changed the rhythm of everyday living—and with it, architectural design.

But smart controls are situational. “Especially with a second home, you want to be able to control comfort for that home through your smart phone,” McNeely noted. But in some cases, architects have seen the opposite. “We have seen a little pushback to the tech lately, with vacation homes in particular,” Lamaster-Millett said, noting it could be that, “this is my space to get away, and I want something more low-tech and more natural. For people who live a certain high-tech life day to day, maybe they want to be more connected to nature and something simpler for their weekend house.”

Even in the tech-savvy Bay Area, architects noted clients tend to want less automation, not more. “Ninety percent of our clients come in and say, ‘I do not want a smart home,’” Baile said. “They will put 15 switches on the wall rather than have them all connected.”

Rose in New York echoed the sentiment. “Now, clients prefer comfort. They don’t want to manage systems. They want to live naturally in the house.”

Still, that client desire often requires more than a single switch, Berman noted. “A couple will come in, and one says, ‘Just give me a light switch.’ They don’t want systems.” But the desire for convenience around everything from lighting, window coverings, audio/visual, and more means that most projects inevitably end up with wall panels of some type. “Everyone says they want it simple, but projects always end up more complex,” Berman said.

DePasquale added that what looks effortless often hides layers of technical complexity. “People want the experience to feel simple ... part of that is to deny all the things that go into what makes it work.”

Technology has also introduced new possibilities, from privacy glass to smart locks and automated systems. Chia said her



Above: The Slate House, Michigan, by Hygge Design+Build.

Right: Vermont Modern, Vermont, by Zach L. Whipple.

firm has been experimenting with electrochromatic glazing, while others are eyeing integration as the next step. An integrated roller shade solution, for instance, would be the “holy grail,” said Chris Kurrle, principal at Feldman Architecture in San Francisco. “We’re forced to reinvent the wheel every time we deal with a new condition. An integrated roller shade solution? Holy smokes. If that could be made at a reasonable price point, that would be amazing.”

At the same time, clients are becoming more informed and more vocal about performance and sustainability. “Clients ask about acoustics, sustainability, and long-term costs,” said Kurrle.

Chia noted that climate change and sustainability play a larger role in her work, too. “The issues with climate change and commitment to sustainability and thinking about the very deliberate use of materials, where materials come from and their durability, has become an even more conscious conversation with clients,” she said.

Her team considers building size and efficiency even more than in the past, she said. “It’s a luxury to have a lot of space, but you have to heat and cool it, you have to maintain it. There are a lot of ongoing costs that have an environmental impact. We try to engage in that conversation very early on with clients.”



VERBATIM

Christopher Baile, *Partner, Schwartz and Architecture*, San Francisco, on the changing landscape of residential architecture:

“The cost to building something has doubled, if not more, in the last five to 10 years. Ten years ago, people would come in and say, ‘I have \$1 million. I want to do my dream home.’ And we were like, ‘OK, we can do that.’ Now, if somebody comes to us with \$1 million, it’s going to be tough. Our clients all have budgets, and money isn’t going as far, so you have to be really creative and diligent to make sure resources go toward what’s important.”



Hawk Court residence,
Utah, by Upwall Design.

Certain trends, meanwhile, are fading. “Clients aren’t asking for TVs in every room ... we used to design millwork walls for specific TV sizes,” Meek said. Others in Chicago pointed to waning interest in spaces once considered essential, from oversized closets to dedicated media rooms.

How relationships with builders and other design pros have changed

As client expectations grow more complex, so do the relationships among architects, builders, and consultants. “Recently, I’ve really embraced a lot of our consultant teams,” Kurrle said. “In the Bay Area, we have the best teams in the country, whether it’s lighting, landscape, interiors, technology—all of it. I’m leaning on my consultant teams to take me places where I’m not really comfortable. I feel I’ve grown significantly as an architect by pushing myself out of the comfort level of what I already know is going to work.”

Rose noted how the architect’s role has evolved with shifts in the construction landscape due to the pandemic and supply chain issues, then rising costs and tariff concerns. “The architect’s role during construction is a little bit architect, a little bit client rep, and a little bit interpreter.”

Across the country, Kurrle echoed the sentiment. “We’re often the bridge between client and contractor,” he said. “The construction process is full of adjustments, and you have to help everyone understand what’s possible while holding onto the design intent.”



Marrowstone Residence,
Washington, by
Shipley Architects.

Part 4.

Windows, Materiality, and Performance

Few elements of residential architecture inspire as much conversation—or reveal as much about a designer’s priorities—as windows. Across the three dinners, architects described them not as background details but as defining features that shape light, mood, and experience. “Windows play a huge role,” Chia said. “The connection between indoors and outdoors is emotionally, psychologically, and physically important. We treat windows as a frame for the artwork of the landscape or the scene beyond.”

Windows also reveal something inward, Ulinskas shared. “There’s that saying that the eyes are the windows into the soul, and windows are basically the eyes into the soul of the house.”

For DePasquale, the goal is restraint and timelessness. “We try to make the windows disappear and feel somewhat timeless.”

Meek noted how windows also shape feelings of security and connection to the outdoors. “It’s always about proportion and balance—giving clients light, views, and connections while also providing a psychological feeling of security and enclosure,” she said.

And you don’t necessarily need an entire wall of glass, Chia noted. “Sometimes you achieve tremendous impact with a beautifully framed, curated moment.”

When windows and doors enter the design conversation

All architects said windows and doors come into play very early, right after basic programming. It’s a matter of balancing performance and aesthetics, von Dalwig said. “We start by casting out



a ‘window matrix’ of five or six companies early. They all meet the baseline performance [requirements], so from there, it’s aesthetics and budget. And yes, we always involve an energy consultant early.”

Research plays a big role given the window’s importance, von Dalwig said. “With sustainability, windows are as important as your closed wall. I couldn’t care less about windows maybe 10 years ago, but now it’s like it’s half the research we do—on windows and window manufacturers and lead times and price points.”

As codes tighten and performance expectations rise, specifying windows and doors has become a balancing act between beauty and efficiency. Kurrle noted, “As a studio, we have a threshold that’s 15% higher than Title 24. We automatically eliminate window systems from that. Glazing is one part, but we also have to know what the frame is doing.” The tension between transparency and thermal performance remains a constant challenge.

Others emphasized that well-designed operability can be impactful, too. “I have a few clients who will open their windows as

much as they possibly can rather than use the AC,” Meek said. “They’ll open the entire house.”

Innovations that generate the most excitement

For Ulinskas, innovation is often about the invisible details. “A lot of the time, it’s minimal frame conditions, whether it’s flush sills or pocketing walls—that sort of thing,” he said. “How much can you open the wall without feeling like it’s still part of a system, and how do you make it feel effortless?”

For large openings, clients often choose motorized options—even when the physicality of opening the window is part of the experience, something Motolik pointed to with a recent project’s 26-foot-wide, 6-foot-tall guillotine-style window, which is operated by a kinetic system with counterweights. “The kinetic designer offered manual operation with a decorative turning wheel,” he said, “but the client opted for electronic operation because he wanted to open and close this rather large window without a manual effort.”

Architects often get excited by the possibilities. “We’re designing with sliding glass doors you wouldn’t have thought possible years ago—12 feet tall by 15 feet wide,” Baile said. “Things keep getting better and performing better.”

Clients are more excited and engaged than ever, as well, architects in all three cities noted. “They have definitely become much more savvy,” Chia said. “They enjoy the process and they really think carefully about their windows because they want a great view and engaging indoor/outdoor experiences.”

Constraints or challenges often didn’t involve the window itself, but the need to incorporate window treatments, shades, screens, and hardware. “I would be really excited about better screen options or just different ways to deal with screens and hardware,” Lamaster-Millett noted. “That’s where it can become clunky.”

Architects use their education and experience to provide counsel. “I tell clients—even with more modest budgets—that windows are worth the investment,” Berman said. “They most directly affect the look and feel of a project. On paper, two windows may look the same, but in reality, the quality can be radically different.”

Lamaster-Millett agrees on the value of the investment. “In a high-end market, we’re very rarely going to shortchange windows,” she said. “They’re a lifetime part of the house.”

Left: Bremen Residence, Texas, by Dick Clark + Associates.

Above: Farah Residence, Florida, by Dasher Hurst Architects.

Part 5.

Titicus Residence,
New York,
by Worrell Yeung.



Conversations About Modern Design

What does “modern design” really mean today? Across the cities, architects wrestled with the term—part philosophy, part aesthetic, and, increasingly, a matter of comfort and context rather than minimalism for its own sake. Ultimately, modern design today is less about what it looks like and more about how it feels.

“Modern, for us, means clarity and context,” Kurrle said. “It’s not about cold minimalism—it’s about comfort, alignment, proportion, and how a house belongs to its site.”

In New York, Rose offered a similar perspective. “There are some tenets of modernist design that I really respond to, like taut surfaces and minimal detailing,” she said. “But people don’t seem to be interested in austerity anymore. Clients want textiles, colors, patterns, fuzzy things.”

She highlighted the influence of Danish designer Finn Juhl, whose soulful, colorful work feels less austere than other modernists. “There’s more emotion and a joy to his work—little touches that are so human and so beautiful.”

DePasquale sees it similarly. “People want modern amenities—things to be easy and secure, but not alien,” he said. “Sometimes modern feels commercial, so we translate it in residential settings to have a more approachable scale, touch, and wear.”

Hutchison in Chicago called “modern” a starting point rather than a conclusion. “When clients say ‘modern,’ it’s a gateway word ... you need to interrogate on images and lifestyle.”

Specific client requests of modern design

For some, the embrace of modern design often coincides with new stages of life, once families move beyond child-oriented practicality—and is often more prominent for a second home. “[Clients] want the family house to be a little more practical ... but when the kids are gone, that’s when they get the Porsche,” Ulinskas joked. Others see generational divides shaping the demand. “Younger clients tend to be more willing to take risks,” said Rose. “Older ones often want to play it safe.”

For others, true modern design comes from understanding people’s lives and crafting something responsive and original. “People think modern means flat roof, white box, glass walls,” McNeely said. “But modern to me is about problem solving. It’s about what the site needs, what this client’s life is, what the budget is, and how all of those things come together. That’s modern.”

Similarly, Baile described modern not as an endeavor to perfect function. “Modern design is not defined by any style,” he said. “It’s defined by the collaboration between the clients and us. Things become what they want to become.”

For the most part, clients are coming from a modern aesthetic, seeking out architects whose sensibilities already match their own. “People hire us because they like our work,” Baile said.

The pursuit of a clean, contemporary aesthetic continues to push the limits of detailing and construction. “A frameless glass corner is the ultimate cool modern detail,” said Ulinskas. “It’s harder to do, but we still do it.”

DePasquale said clients remain drawn to the drama of large operable door systems, but many are cautious. They want to see and test systems in person due to past negative experiences. “People still like the ‘voila’ or large operable systems, but they’re nervous, too,” he said.



Pinnacle Sky, Utah,
by Upwall Design.



Tranquil Abiding, New York,
by Studio MM Architect.

Part 6.

Halifax Residence,
Minnesota, by City Homes.

Modern Design as It Relates to Windows and Doors

If modern architecture is about clarity and connection, nowhere does that philosophy manifest itself more tangibly than in windows and doors. Across all three cities, architects described these elements as both the greatest design opportunities and the toughest technical challenges. They're the points where architecture must perform at its highest level while disappearing almost entirely from view.

In mid-century renovations, Peter Liang, founder and principal of Blue Truck Studio in San Francisco, noted that replicating the thin sightlines of single-pane stop-glazed units while meeting performance demands is a persistent hurdle. "It's the sight lines," he said. "It's impossible to get the thinness and elegance of a single pane."

Material choice remains both a creative and practical decision. Ulinskas, for example, often favors steel for windows and doors in his California projects. "You have all of these amazing custom artistic ways that you can work with steel," he said. "But wood can really bring a lot of warmth to a modern home. We've had super modern projects where we've done wood sliding doors and wood windows because it complemented all the concrete and warmed it up and gave it this very human touch."

DePasquale often favors wood, too. “Wood windows are beautiful, thermally effective, and show the hand of the craft,” he said. “We use it whenever we can. We love wood.”

So does Lamaster-Millett, but she considers other materials, as well. “I would say that by and large our clients still really like a good wood window,” she said. But in some cases, they can be persuaded to embrace more modern materials. “We’ve done a little bit with fiberglass recently,” she said. “It’s been particularly helpful in some of these rural areas where we have ancillary buildings, like a pool house or spa suite that has an enclosed hot tub. It’s really nice for a humid space.”

Meek’s projects use the full range of materials—wood, fiberglass, aluminum, steel—with choices shaped by client preferences, aesthetics, and cost. “We like having the whole 64 colors in the Crayola box,” she laughed. Performance tradeoffs are carefully considered. “We run products through energy modeling software to understand tradeoffs,” she said. “Triple-pane glass improves performance but adds cost and significant weight to the structure.”

Rose emphasized that beauty and feasibility must go hand in hand. “It’s always a balance of cost, structure, and performance when you’re specifying glass,” she said.

New considerations for color

Color reflects an evolving design philosophy. While white frames once dominated, many architects now favor dark finishes that complement the architecture rather than compete with it. “We rarely do white frames,” said Ulinskas. “We’ve always loved that kind of dark bronze and that warmth and weight.”

Meek, too, mainly sticks to neutrals, including white. “We’re not a practice that does a lot of color—we’re in the whites and blacks,” she said. “Sometimes a frame gets a yellow or green finish, but we’re pretty neutral. We let the architecture stay quiet so it can receive different interior finishes.”



Above: Portland Hills Renovation, Portland, Oregon, by Guggenheim Architects + Design Studio.

Right: Pratt Residence, California, by Joseph Farrell Architecture.

DePasquale noted that metallic finishes are gaining popularity. “We’re seeing more metallic paint finishes—powder-coated, but with a reflectivity that feels more alive than flat paint,” he said, pointing to a champagne color as a recent choice.

Lamaster-Millett described using a custom Marvin color to blend with the architecture and site of a project in Michigan. “It’s sort of a plummy brown,” she said “We picked a Benjamin Moore color and Marvin color-matched it. It looks really great.”



Part 7.



Maple Lane Residence, North Carolina, by Altura Architects.

Redefining Luxury

When the conversation turned toward the future, architects agreed that the definition of luxury is shifting—away from scale and opulence, and toward ease, craft, and personalization. The homes clients want today are not necessarily larger, but smarter, simpler, and more attuned to how people actually live.

“A lot of luxury homes are going back to the basics—simple scale, simple local materials, sustainability, and connection to the outdoors,” Motolik said. “People who can afford luxury and have accomplished something tend to go with something simple and quiet, not loud.”

Luxury can feel surprisingly practical as well. “Luxury is also about having a well-designed space that functions and makes life easier,” Meek said. “So, how you enter a house and where you drop your bags and your books and your coats and your boots. And if you’re coming from the garage, in Chicago, it’s the back of the house—and not making it *feel* like the back of the house. That whole sequence is why people come to architects—to help make their lives feel more organized.”

In San Francisco, Weichman offered a similar perspective. “Luxury can be tied to your day-to-day experience and the ease of moving about your life,” she said. “It doesn’t always need to be opulent. Sometimes it’s just about function and how it’s serving a family and making their life easier.”

In many cases, luxury means something distinctive. “Younger clients equate luxury with uniqueness and risk-taking,” Rose said. Liang cited a similar example. “We’ve had clients say, ‘I don’t want the typical,’” he said.

With windows and doors, that often comes with connections to the outdoors. “Luxury is still about being able to open your house up to the exterior and the corner that disappears,” Ulinskas said.

Architects in San Francisco again came back to the observation that hyper-smart homes seem to be cooling in the high-end market. “Clients don’t necessarily want an über smart home—just a somewhat smart home,” Liang said.

McNeely said that experiences, not square footage, defines luxury today. “There’s over-the-top luxury where people just build giant homes with no thought for the environment, but our clients want something enduring,” he said. “They want something that works for them and their families for the long term. They think about flexibility, they think about the land, they think about how their decisions affect future generations. It’s all about creating experiences—welcoming, comfortable, memorable experiences. That’s what people will come back to, not just how many bedrooms there are or how big the footprint is.”

Eliminating clichés about high-end residential architecture

Several architects were eager to dismantle old clichés. “If I could eliminate one cliché, it would be ‘less is more.’ Too often it’s an excuse for not designing fully,” Ulinskas said. Kurrle challenged another: “If I could eliminate one cliché, it’s that great architecture is unaffordable. Great design should exist at many scales.”

Jewett identified an architectural industry stereotype. “I hear from friends in civic and commercial work that residential is easier, and in some respects, it is—but you have to balance clients’ expectations more, and it’s a more emotionally driven pro-

cess,” he said. “The code might be easier, but other aspects make it just as complex.”

Architects also noted products and architectural features—lighting, finishes, even “waterfall” countertops—that are popular now but may eventually feel outdated. English even connected the idea to tech. “I think the fascination with automation and mechanical gizmos is not really part of what we’re doing these days—a lot of clients want a low-tech solution,” he said. “Even though the forms we design for these clients are very high-tech no matter what they say, because they want be able to control things in a certain way. It’s the wonder switch, and that’s where I think the creativity comes in. How do you find these very simple solutions for very complex, very integrated things?”

The group also discussed the inevitable tension between architectural purity and client desire. “It’s their house,” Ulinskas said. “Go to bat for what’s important, but ultimately it’s for them.”

Kurrle sees collaboration as a way to balance architectural integrity with client input, favoring inclusive design processes where ideas can come from anyone—clients, interns, or consultants. “Often an architect’s main job is to protect the client from themselves,” he said with a smile. “We don’t care where the best idea comes from—we welcome every voice. We’re the wranglers of that vision, making sure it’s carried through the entire process.”



Above: Dripping Springs Residence, Texas by Amy Pigliacampo.

Right: The Well House, Massachusetts, by Neubauer Ennis Architects.



VERBATIM

Katherine Chia, *Principal and Co-founder, Desai Chia Architecture, New York, on rethinking luxury:*

“Our clients want us to build enduring architecture—architecture that will continue to perform for the next generation. They want places that are inviting and welcoming, places people will want to return to and feel renewed every time. And what makes a place special is the combination of architecture, the surrounding natural environment, and how those experiences fuse with memories.”

Part 8.



Wandertree, Colorado,
by A21 Architecture.

Final Reflections

As the dinners drew to a close, conversations turned inward. Architects spoke about the homes that continue to teach them—projects that reshaped their thinking or revealed the quiet power of restraint.

Across the table and across the country, there was a shared understanding that architecture is never finished—it evolves with every home, every client, every mistake turned into insight. The projects that endure, the architects agreed, are the ones that give back long after construction ends. They remind designers to be patient, to stay curious, and to see every house not just as a finished object but as an ongoing conversation between people and place.

For Ulinskas, one such project was a renovation in Napa that he originally believed should be torn down but that he ultimately embraced. “It taught me to be more patient ... to be more considerate,” he said.

Motolik recalled a moment when a project took on unexpected meaning. “A pool building designed for recreation became the wife’s favorite place to live.”

Mark Sexton, founder and co-managing partner of Kreuck

Sexton Partners in Chicago, remembered how a seemingly fragile structure he designed in Florida proved its strength. “It was a minimal, mostly glass house, and it lived through a category five hurricane that wiped out every other building,” he said. “So that’s the lesson of investment—one that came off a very short time-frame, literally just as we were completing it.”

The value of balance emerged as a common theme. DePasquale looked back to a project called Shelter Island Avenue, the first he and his wife, architect Rebecca Garnett, worked on together, designed for a single woman who often hosts friends. “The house operates on an intimate daily scale, then flexes for gatherings,” he said. “Reconciling scale—time-wise and socially—is important. We tend to go back to that one.”

For Lamaster-Millett, the importance of balance came to light in a Michigan pool house. “We used a custom Marvin fiberglass system that checked every box for performance, cost, and aesthetics,” she said. “Those are learnings you carry forward.”

Meek pointed to a house where the clients shaped the layout by insisting on shared family space upstairs. “They wanted all family bedrooms together, with a shared space, and that shaped the whole design,” she said.

Others spoke of lessons found in materials. “The Surf House in Santa Cruz taught me the emotional power of material,” Kurrle said. “The entire interior was Monterey Cypress—its smell defines the house. That sensory layer is unforgettable.”

For Rose, lessons come through working alongside others. “Every project teaches us something,” she said. “Collaborating with builders on site is one of my favorite parts. Those lessons always shape the next project.”

This report is a synthesis of key findings and a testament to Marvin's ongoing commitment to building a dialogue with architects and supporting the art, craft, and science of architecture. For more, visit **marvin.com**.



Utah Music House, Utah, by
Sparano + Mooney Architecture.

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