

West Hawaii Today
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at home

living with style in west hawaii

Modern House of Light

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At Home

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Cover Photo by Giselle Thompson:

Contemporary home made of
cedar and translucent
polycarbonate panels
lights up the night.



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House of Light



Pod Living at Puu Lani Ranch

By Kristina Anderson
Photography by Giselle Thompson

Near Puuanahulu at Puu Lani Ranch, the modern spirit of Hawaii dwells in the progressive vision of local architect Hai On. Understated yet dramatic, the contemporary home belonging to Michiko Sato features bold, clean lines, sleek finishes, passive lighting, warm woods, original details and perhaps most importantly, built-in sustainability.

What's more, choice of building materials — steel, cedar, polycarbonate panels and concrete — elegantly supports the goal to reduce or eliminate home maintenance. It's a minimalist vocabulary that speaks clearly to desires of a strong, independently minded, no-frills woman like Michiko.

Michiko was born in Japan and has been a U.S. resident for more than 30 years. She wanted a home that was as green as possible, but with a strikingly simple design.

"I don't like decorations," says Michiko, who works locally as a registered nurse ▶

The homeowner flew to San Jose, California, to purchase Italian-made Valcucine cabinets for her home. The kitchen is also outfitted with a convenient pass-through window that opens up to the adjacent patio, ideal for entertaining.

Photo by Hai On



Stronger than glass, translucent polycarbonate panels let the light in during the day and glow from the inside-out at night.



Carefully designed cross-ventilation, a double roof, wall-width sliding glass doors, passive lighting and hybrid solar energy system are among the elements that contribute to the homeowner's mission of sustainability. Sun grilles add another filter for light and ventilation.



Through long, horizontal windows, Michiko can see Mauna Kea on one side and Haleakala on the other while standing at her Valcucine cabinet and sink, imported from Italy. A glass-paneled cabinet hangs on the wall.



Paintings throughout the home include Michiko's personal collection of works by Italian painter Paulo DeMaria, whose wife is her friend.

and nurse practitioner. "I like everything simple and I don't want to paint. My architect Hai listened to me, understood what my needs were and made it work."

Unpretentiously at one with the landscape, the home succeeds in achieving the rarest combination of architectural nirvana — a homeowner's dream and architect's vision — perfectly melded, perfectly matched.

Hai says Michiko was the client of a lifetime because she gave him free reign to indulge his artistic sensibilities while incorporating the design inspirations that would fulfill her request for a green house. "She made it so easy for me," he says. "She told me, 'Just make it fun.'"

In describing the style, Hai explains his preference for design that's stripped down. "With a house in its most basic form, more

attention can be paid to the really important details," he says.

The 3,800-square-foot home is divided into several standalone sections, loosely inspired by Bali-style pod living and the ancient Hawaiian practice of finding shelter under canopies of trees. The approach of creating an outside space between each unit lends a rhythmic pattern to the indoor-outdoor/elemental relationship. Exterior walls are sided with durable cedar. A sloping "shed roof" adds a functional aesthetic, providing ventilation and rainwater catchment capabilities.

"By using wood, we bring the warmth into the spaces," Hai says. "That's the Scandinavian influence."

The living, dining and kitchen room (fondly called "LDK" by Michiko) is separated from the master bedroom, guest quarters and ►



Made in Florida and obtained from a company on Oahu, polycarbonate panels are durable, lightweight and affordable. Travertine flooring from Bella Pietra inspires a spa-like ambience. Extra-wide doors and hallways are wheelchair accessible.

"I wanted a house that would be as green as possible." — Michiko Sato



Michiko works in Waimea and Kailua-Kona as a registered nurse specializing in wound care, and as a nurse practitioner specializing in foot care for diabetic patients.



About the Architect

Hai On was born in Vietnam and was 11 years old when Saigon fell in 1975. He immigrated to the U.S. with his family as war refugees. After studying architecture at Texas A&M University, he worked for firms in Washington, D.C., Seattle and Alaska. Notable projects include two museums in Alaska. Hai was drawn to Hawaii for its climate, warm ocean and his love of outdoor living, opening his own firm, Fins Architecture LLC, in 2006.



Accommodating the homeowner's height, the bathroom counter is made of basalt, illuminated by natural light cast through translucent polycarbonate panels. Pendant lighting from Sunlights Hawaii.



Views of Mauna Kea can be enjoyed while soaking in the Japanese cedar furo, which Michiko purchased from SeaOtter Woodworks in Alaska.

"The idea is to allow the homeowner to live outdoors as much as possible, in tune with the changing light of the day — no matter what time it is." — Hai On, architect



In the master bedroom, Brazilian teak flooring and unfinished cedar ceiling and walls juxtapose with polycarbonate paneling, glass and aluminum to create an organic feeling while allowing for as much light as possible. Fleetwood doors open up to a private courtyard with Japanese bath (furo).

garage by a covered walkway. Facing east, the house is sited on the lot so that one of its corners tucks into a large rock berm on two sides while giving Michiko simultaneous views of both Mauna Kea and Haleakala.

Low, horizontal windows also frame the views outside, showcasing nature's own art: Zen-like rock formations, a small bamboo patch or the evening sky. Custom-positioned windows accommodate Michiko's height so she maintains a continuous personal relationship with the outside. Says Hai: "The scale is not overwhelming, it's comfortable. Using simple lines and the right scale, we can devote more thought to what she can see and touch."

One of the most engaging design elements in Michiko's home is the unique "bedroom box," a self-contained room

constructed of translucent polycarbonate panels. Stronger than glass yet more lightweight, these panels play off the juxtaposition of modern materials blended with the organic. Once darkness falls, the breathtaking glow from within the house casts a warmth outside that is at once contemporary and in tune with the night.

Home is also a place where Michiko recreates her Japanese heritage. Her outdoor furo (box of hot water) reminds her of Tokyo, where she grew up and where her parents still live.

The guest quarters create a whole other world, connected to the main house by way of a simple wood bridge. Impressionistic artwork dresses up the two bedrooms. The entire house is wheelchair accessible to accommodate ►



The positioning and width of the windows lead the eye to the desired view. While seated on the sofa, one will easily be able to gaze at the planned koi pond through the low, horizontal window.

visitors with physical needs. (“And later as I get older, possibly myself,” Michiko says with a laugh, although seeing her today, that seems unlikely anytime soon.)

Noting he used 45 sheets of drawings to detail the house, Hai says that by design, many of the elements, though orderly, were not meant to be symmetrical — for example, the placement of the windows.

“A little imperfection is a thing of beauty,” he muses, while concluding: “It’s been a satisfying process to design green while being able to keep only the essentials.”

Certainly there’s beauty in that idea for Michiko. “I got exactly the house I wanted,” she says simply. **AH**

STATEMENTS; 4.7383 in; 5.25 in; Black plus three; 000003794r1

ELECTRICAL SUPPLY COMPANY; 4.7383 in; 5.25 in; Black; 000003473r1

Clamshell Packaging Deserves its Bad Wrap

I’ve heard of tamper-proof, but this is ridiculous. Chainsaw anybody?

The other day I darn near sliced off my finger trying to open some AA batteries packaged in one of those impenetrable plastic containers. Frankly, a circular saw or sledgehammer would have been a better way to free the product from its annoying, indestructible encasement, otherwise known as clamshell packaging.

Which makes me wonder: Why does the Oral-B Sonic Complete Toothbrush warrant the packaging equivalent of Fort Knox, when a dozen eggs or a fragile pair of light bulbs come in the most flimsy containers known to man?

If you’re like me, here’s what you’ll need to pry open your purchase from its heat-sealed, plastic display carton:

- Welding gloves and gear
- Heavy machinery
- Protective eyewear
- Well-supplied first-aid kit
- A few sedatives

LAMBRECHT WOODWORKING INC; 4.7383 in; 5.25 in; Black; 000003022r1



Or simply contact the nearest SWAT team for battering ram assistance.

Last Christmas, I purchased a Polly Pocket doll for my niece. Turns out I needed to be smarter than a demolition specialist (much less a fifth grader) to open the package. Once I hacksawed the outermost layers of plastic, come to find out the doll was lashed to its casing with dozens of titanium twisty restraints.

Who packages these things anyway, former Gitmo employees? I’m telling you, Polly came with more strings attached than an adjustable rate mortgage.

Maybe if the economic stimulus package were wrapped in clamshell packaging, we wouldn’t worry so much about where all that money is going — ’cuz nobody can get the dang thing opened anyway! **AH**

Karen Anderson is the editor of “At Home in West Hawaii” and the author of “The Hawaii Home Book, Practical Tips for Tropical Living.” She can be reached at: kanderson@westhawaii.com

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