

cambio

by carolyn brown

living in the letting go



Can a house bring you into a deeper experience of change? Can your home remind you every day that life is always in motion, and that only by surrendering to the currents of change can we find ease?

Art Busse has created a home high in the Oakland Hills called Cambio – Spanish for “change” – that defies conventional expectations, and provides a decidedly unconventional experience. I was first awed by the scale, then touched by the beauty, then opened by the unlimited possibilities that I had almost forgotten existed inside me. Without warning, I wanted to dance.

From the wide-open ridgetop of the Oakland Hills, you enter into an enormous curved space that pulls you down and around with an acceleration that is akin to a whirlpool, or a helicopter preparing for lift-off. A wall of window-slices provides dramatic glimpses of the green hills, the Bay and the vast blue sky. With an unbroken continuum of red-brown granite underfoot to ground you, you can let go into the freedom of all this space.

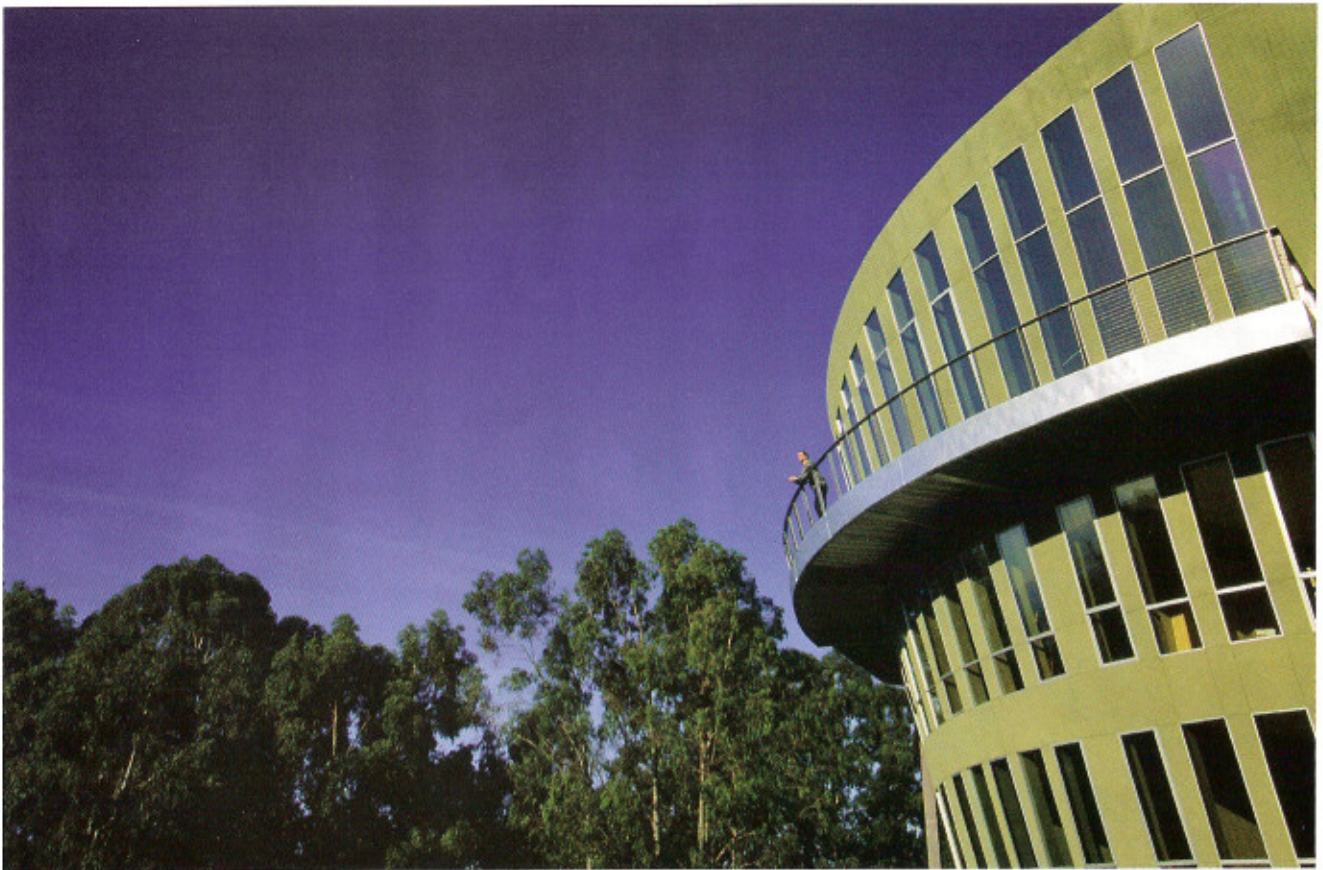
The house began with a gesture – throwing all the cards in an open spread, and come what may. The sweeping curve of the house that begins at the front door and continues out into the view, down to the master bedroom level and then down to the lower level, echoes this gesture. The two lower levels echo the vast spaciousness of the living room with the same configuration of space, but on a more intimate scale. You continue downward and inward, wondering if there might be a fixed point of stillness at the center of this great swirl of motion. And there is: a huge granite boulder from the Tuolumne River Valley that grounds the space. Silence.

And just like the surging Alaskan river Busse canoed down years ago, there is a miraculous eddy: a small alcove under the grand, curved stairway. A hide-out where every child visiting the house is magnetically drawn. An unshaped, unlit spot off the map of the ‘real world’ where the imagination rules.

Beginning at the granite boulder, I tour the wedge-shaped guest rooms and bathroom on the lower level, then up to the master bedroom, bath and office on the master level, then climb the curve up into the 1,500-square-foot main level. My bare feet on the rough granite remind me of my grounding, of myself, as I emerge into the vast, unlimited opening-up world and step into the full-on flow of life. I feel it in my whole body. I am alive. The world is alive and I am alive in it.

“The house allows you to live in the view,” Busse explains. “The curved walls angle out and project you out into the open space.” I notice the silver-green interior walls, echoing the eucalyptus swaying on the hillside. We are inside, we are outside. The leaves are ruffling in the morning breeze, my breath is ruffling inside me.

“Nature is always in motion,” he points out. “Especially here at the top of this canyon, where the Bay climate and the Valley climate collide. Some days you can watch the ocean fog spilling over the coastal hills and gradually filling the Bay. Other days, the Tule fog from the Central Valley climbs up over the eastern ridge. For most of our history, humans considered nature threatening. Our survival was at stake, and traditional architecture – and much of human culture – is working to reassure us of our own survival. But now we’ve moved beyond that. We can relax and trust nature, and enjoy architecture that allows us to live with nature rather than sheltering us from it.”



Standing at the kitchen counter of Absolute Black granite, I can look out the big slices of window and choose any vantage point through which to enter the natural world. The thirteen windows offer nearly infinite combinations of tree-covered hillside, bay and sky as I move around the space, and that is by design.

"It's easy for us to forget that in life all vantage points are available to us in every moment," Busse says. "There is no final choice we have to make in how we orient ourselves to the world. This house asks you, 'Who am I in space?' And each time the answer may be different."

Ah, change. The heart of Busse's creation. "Change is the constant state. It takes incredible energy to try to stop it. But if you stop trying so hard

to fight it, you'll find yourself in motion, with an abundance of energy at your disposal, and it will be okay."

Unwinding from the core, I am swirling across the rough granite, then leaping. I am earth, I am green, I am bay, I am sky, I am everything at once, and changing all the time. And as far as I can tell, I am okay.

For more information or to see the house, please contact Kim Marienthal at Coldwell Banker, 510.981.3036 or artbusse.com.

photography by jack gescheidt and donald stasenska

