

WHEN THESE HOMEOWNERS OUTGREW THEIR ranch house in Sebastopol and acquired a piece of property nearby, the wife knew just what kind of house she wanted to build.

"I was inspired by one of the Point Reyes' visitor centers," she recalls. The visitor center, designed by BSA Architects of San Francisco, was in turn inspired by the wooden barns that dot the rolling hillsides of Sonoma County.

The homeowners turned to renowned East Bay designer Fu Tung Cheng, who created a simple rectangle with a three-story tower jutting above the north façade, constructed of redwood and roofed in corrugated, galvanized metal.

Although the exterior pays homage to barns—so much so that a barn owl moved in during construction—this rustic shell encloses a highly sophisticated interior. The gutsiness of unfinished wood beams and supports, industrial light fixtures, and sturdy metal window frames is balanced by fine marble countertops and the gleam of polished concrete floors.

"I started using concrete about 18 years ago," says Cheng, a specialist in the use of concrete and

author of *Concrete Countertops and Concrete at Home*. "For me, it's not just an understudy material but something that can be crafted and refined to bring form and expression." In the Sonoma house, he balanced the expanse of charcoal-gray polished-concrete floors with curving, acid-washed sections of concrete in



shades of deep blue-green. He stamped the wet concrete with Indonesian batik wood blocks, leaving a seemingly random pattern of leaf motifs.

Of course, concrete also has much to recommend it as a background for a busy family with four active children and two large dogs. Cheng says with pride, "That house is ten years old, and it's wearing very well." The only major change that the family has made so far is the building of a loft computer room in space Cheng deliberately left open for such expansion.

In another bow to practicality, the house is powered by 60 solar panels that form a dark, slanting rectangle in the field below the house. "Basically, we're off the grid," the owner explains. "In the summer, the dials spin backwards." This is one more way the house fits seamlessly into both the rural landscape and the environmental ethos of Sonoma County.



On the outside, this Sebastopol house is as rustic as a barn. Inside, East Bay designer Fu Tung Cheng combined wooden beams and supports, gleaming polished-concrete floors, and metal-framed windows for an interior that's both sophisticated and sturdy enough to stand up to dogs and children. A horizontal window extending the length of the kitchen frames a view of a garden of native grasses.

Practical Beauty