

Breaking the Rules

Predictability seldom makes for the best



WINDOWS AND ENTRIES don't always have to follow a predictable pattern. Windows should correspond to what's going on inside (guess where the stair is in the top photo), and entries need to respond to the site.

results in architecture. Beyond inducing boredom, design by rote often compromises usefulness and efficiency. For example, if you build your house directly at the end of a driveway, there's no way to see the site for the garage. And if the public side of a home always faces the street, the site's views, slope, trees, and other natural features may be shortchanged.

It's not just the hackneyed old saws of mindless replication that get in the way of good home design. When a custom-built house slavishly follows its occupants' preconceived wishes, the square pegs of preformed ideas are often forced into the round holes of site, budget, common sense, and even beauty. The only reason to hire a professional designer is to see the forest for the trees—to actually use the architect's inspired perspective.

On the other hand, if the architect writes all the rules, a house can end up being a sculpture that just happens to be occupied, dealing more with abstractions of shape, space, and light than comfort, accommodation, and usefulness. A building born solely of an architect's imagination is unlikely to delight its occupants. It's when all parties tweak each other's predilections in the design process that homes take on a life of their own.



THE WALLS OF A SCREEN PORCH don't just keep the bugs out, they can also work as art. Here, simple trim pieces are cut to botanical shapes and applied to the outside face of the framing.

Like the proverbial omelet's broken eggs, it's the unexpected positive result from banal beginnings that has the most impact. We are forced to deal with the tyranny of rules every day, and home design rules are not just mannerly and aesthetic any more. It used to be that rules like "The house must always face the street" and "Bedrooms should always be on the same floor" were all homebuilders had to respect. Increasingly, rules are being applied to building design by the government in well-intentioned efforts to protect us and our environment from ourselves.

There are millions of rules manifest in the stock plan homes that surround us, but they all follow one basic canon: They go along with the tried and true at the expense of the thoughtful to create a marketable product. The rule breakers presented in this book (otherwise known as architects and their clients) take the best that convention has to offer (economy, surety, and availability) and give those "safe" qualities life.



A CHIMNEY DOESN'T HAVE TO BE CENTERED on a façade. "Dynamic balance" can be a more effective way to organize a façade when it must respond to the home's interior and the way it sits on the land, breaking the "rule" of symmetry.