Traditional, in a new light

By Dorin Hiu

Modern or traditional? When speaking of houses, this is usually a simple question of taste or style. For Michael and Christine Coates, who see substance and virtue in old and new, the answer is clearly both. The couple designed their new home in the Orange County town of Rougemont based on time-honored principles and contemporary techniques. Their house would never be confused with a barn, but like the indigenous farm buildings, it rests comfortably like the indigenously designed Eichler homes of the 1940s. Though the house is unmistakably modern, its lineage can be traced to old farm structures around Rougemont. Michael admired the modest, functional structures that not only stood the test of time, but also displayed the qualities and virtues that they are trying to bring back to their late-season, multicolored bean crops, so I may become enamored with this beauty that I haven't seen before – a long-tailed skipper. The long tails on the hind wings are distinctive and combine with iridescent blue-green coloration and bright orange-yellow on the upper wings to give this skipper a very tropical look. My books say that long-tailed skipper caterpillars are a pest of bean crops, so I may become less enamored with this beauty if its progeny plague my garden next year. But for now, I'll just enjoy the exotic touch they add to my late-season, multicolored lantana extravaganza. Catherine Bollinger has been gardening in the Triangle for more than 40 years. Look for her diary entries every week or so. Meanwhile, drop in your own garden snippings – words, photos, seeds from your diary – at share.triangle.com.
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viewed through an existing clearing that rises 40 feet from the approaching drive. The area is distinctive, unexpected and beautiful.

Fourquare revisited

Some architects’ designs are known for innovative forms or new ideas. The Coates House, however, may be best described as a re-orientation, because it is based on a traditional Hawaiian pattern. The foursquare plan was popular in the United States throughout the early part of the 20th century. Since Rockefeller and Co. sold more than 300,000 kit homes, many traditional foursquare designs were built. The pattern is characterized by a square plan with four identical public rooms (living, din- ing, kitchen, study) on the first floor, and four bedrooms on the second floor. The homes were functional and practical and were intended pro- vides for an affordable, sizable neighborhood.

Michael Coates, who has a fascination with traditional houses only in his career, thought of developing a pattern that would catalog the four-square home and change the commer- cial plans. He imagine with traditional patterns is evident, but his house is not stuck in the past. The Coateses have made cleve- r upgrades to the foursquare pat- tern. They removed the walls that typically would have divided the kitchen and dining room from the living room, and the re- sulting open floor plan makes the house feel much larger. Interior windows — many operable — are framed to enjoy views of the sky and the way the house’s com- pose about the way the house’s com- pact, open form has family a greater sense of togetherness.

Material matters

The main materials are both durable and beautiful. Much of the house is clad in Corten steel panels and cedar siding. The siding is common among houses of similar style in North Carolina. Corten steel forms a protective coating that inhibits internal corrosion. This may sound like an exotic material, but several buildings in North Carolina have used it on exterior walls that change color. The State Capitol and many cam- pus buildings at N.C. State and UNC-Chapel Hill, for instance, are clad with bronze and copper that develop a soft green patina as they age.

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Beauty and efficiency

Accessibility and sustainable de-sign principles are inherent to the home. The color shape defines spacious interiors with minimal exterior surfaces. This reduces the amount of material needed to clad the house and minimizes the house’s exposure to the exterior environment. This was wanted in the Custom House, because the foursquare plan does not require hallways to connect the living, kitchen, and dining rooms. The couple carefully planned their house based on a 4-by-8-foot footprint, so that there would be very little wasted space. Building materials such as drywall and plywood are usually dimensioned in standard 4-by-8-foot sizes, so the couple rarely had to throw away material leftover. Michael Coates says they needed a single Dumpster for the entire project — a re- markable accomplishment for a three-bedroom, three-bath house. Coates designed the exterior wall with 4-by-8-inch framing rather than 2-by-4-inch studs. The extra 4 inches of wall depth results in a higher upfront cost, but adds a greater sense of thickness and horizontal stability. Many architects spend their time designing for other clients and will admit that their most difficult design project is their own home. Christine and Mi-