

# OFF-GRID HOUSE ANACAPA ARCHITECTURE

Words by Vaishnavi Nayel Talawadekar • Photography by Mike Kelley • Architecture by Anacapa Architecture and Willson Design • Interior Design by Jessica Helgerson Interior Design





Designed as a summer house near the homeowners' main residence, Off-Grid House is a sensitively designed dwelling that serves to elevate the ecology of the verdant California ranch it inhabits. Anacapa Architecture mitigates the impact of the build by bringing the home into equilibrium with the landscape.

Perched atop a knoll situated inside a ranch on the central California coastline is a residence that is camouflaged with its landscape – at least at first blush. Off-Grid House coalesces into the natural environment, serving as an interlude between the hills and the ocean. Its environmentally sensitive design is the work of Santa Barbara-based studio Anacapa Architecture and co-designer Willson Design.

The site is part of a working cattle ranch, with herds often spotted grazing languorously across the property. “When we first visited, it was so spectacular that we almost felt a moral obligation not to build. We sensed that the next best alternative was to create something that was sensitive to the surroundings and authentic to a site in the middle of the wild,” says Dan Weber of Anacapa Architecture. “We were also concerned about the fauna. For example, the red-tailed hawk in the nearest tree should not have to feel threatened or displaced by this project.”

The vast site is dotted with majestic vantage points. Yet, this one was a particular favourite of the homeowners, offering sweeping vistas of the ocean. The firms were subsequently tasked with building along its steep

ridge, dividing the twin volumes – namely, the garage and the sleeping quarters – in a way that would afford views at both levels.

“Since the structure is located on a ridge top, it is visible from a distance. We did not want it to stand out or draw attention. We aimed for it to have the smallest possible impact on the natural environment and improve the ecological integrity of the property rather than degrade it further. That’s how we arrived at the configuration that we did,” notes Dan.

Responsive to the topography yet confident in its identity, the building cantilevers out of the cliffside, providing a direct view of the canyon below. In an effort to blur the line between the built and the unbuilt, the house was designed like a glass peninsula, with three-way operable glass walls that summon various ocean vistas depending on the time and the tide. Meanwhile, the garage was situated at a slightly higher gradient, to allow the ocean to stage a theatrical view upon descent. Yet, the glass walls are seemingly transient, appearing and disappearing to suit the season. Most evenings, they step aside to welcome the elements, uniting the interior and exterior and conjuring a sense of oneness with nature.





Views over the vast site, a working cattle ranch, are captured from three sides of the living space.





The material palette holds a mirror to the rugged, off-grid environs. Steel, concrete and glass were the primary materials of choice, mainly for their ability to weather the elements gracefully and earn a gentle patina. By the same token, the team let the steel elements rust and oxidise to match the ranch terrain and minimise the need for regular maintenance, repainting and re-finishing. Such interventions as a natural boulder retaining wall and a living roof were introduced to keep the structure in harmony with the site.

Since the community is rural and remote, with no electricity and little infrastructure, the home had to be relatively self-sufficient. In this vein, a photovoltaic system was introduced to generate power, as was a water treatment system to direct wastewater to a septic tank and dry well. Radiant floor heating ensures warmth during the winters, whilst cross-ventilation and the insulating green roof ensure clement interior temperatures during warmer weather. The team selected LED lighting and high-efficiency appliances that would reduce energy demands throughout the year.

The interior, conceived by Oregon-based interior designer Jessica Helgerson, is a warm antithesis to the exposed concrete shell. Ceilings are tamed with black walnut, whilst timber accents weave a leitmotif across the home. The decor is contemporary and minimalist, with gold and

Stygian tones serving as welcome counterpoints to each other. Each realm has a pièce de résistance – a sable fireplace takes pride of place in the living room, whilst a live edge table acts as the centrepiece of the dining area. Equally, the bedroom presents as a walnut cocoon that nods to the sylvan setting.

Due to the area's strict ordinances and review protocols, the project took six years to complete. "Getting approvals in this coastal zone entails multiple rounds of review and many bureaucratic hurdles. The process was onerous, and this has no doubt been my most challenging project yet," avers Dan. The challenges were multiplied by the remoteness of the site, which posed logistical constraints with respect to labour. "However, I would say the biggest challenge was to design something that felt not just sensitive but ethically and morally right. The hope was to create something in this rugged, wild, beautiful, natural place and be proud of it," he reflects.

In the six years it took for the architecture to take shape, the site's flora and fauna continued to thrive. The foliage thickened, whilst the familiar red-tailed hawk remained loyal to the nearest tree. These emblems are a fitting testament to Off-Grid House's sensitive ethos and its ability to be at one with nature.



