

Abstract

1 Belvedere Avenue artfully weaves together a challenging 146' of steep grade change, dramatic views, and complex circulation requirements. An innovative and restrained design vocabulary brings the site's topography to life, both visually and functionally. Seeking to create a series of landscape experiences while descending through the garden, the landscape architects designed a sculptural landscape where dramatic site walls shape a nature-forward landscape of transitions—views, movement, views, movement. The project feels at once fresh and new, and entirely integrated with the site.

Narrative (part 1 of 2)

Context

Located on Belvedere Island, CA, and overlooking Richardson Bay with views towards Sausalito, 1 Belvedere Avenue sits on a west-facing hillside with 146' of steep grade change.

The scope of the project included the removal of the existing house and select trees, an intense review and approval process, the careful siting of the new house and a landscape design that addressed a challenging site and complex environmental considerations.

Design of Place

The design capitalizes on the dramatic site topography and iconic views towards the Golden Gate Bridge. Utilizing an intentionally crafted minimalist design vocabulary, the design team created an iconic landscape that is both functional and inspirational. It is environmental art; it is performative land art.

Dramatic site walls shape a landscape of transitions—views, movement, views and vistas, then more movement. This sculpting of the land responds not only to the dynamics of the landform but also the context of a nearby bay and the environmental considerations that the site design must address.

Entry Garden

One of the main challenges for the design team was choreographing pedestrian and automobile descent down the 44' of steep grade change from the street to the main living level of the house. Driven by a vision to connect the owner and visitors to the site in a beautiful and unique way, the experience weaves together moments of expansive views of the scenic bay with spaces of poetic respite.

Simple sculptural concrete walls frame the entry drive and a dramatic linear integral-colored concrete staircase contrasts with the textural foliage of water-conscious native and adapted plants. The walls and stairs do not feel like infrastructure carrying the weight of 44' of grade changes because they are so integrated into the site.

Narrative (part 2 of 2)

Entry Courtyards

After descending a plant-lined staircase, visitors are embraced by a pair of small walled courtyards. The North courtyard, distinguished by its seamless relationship with the adjacent interior living space, is anchored by a Japanese maple and a substantial bench made of wood salvaged from a tree removed from the site. The sunken courtyard and its concrete walls are a backdrop to the expansive view through the house towards the bay.

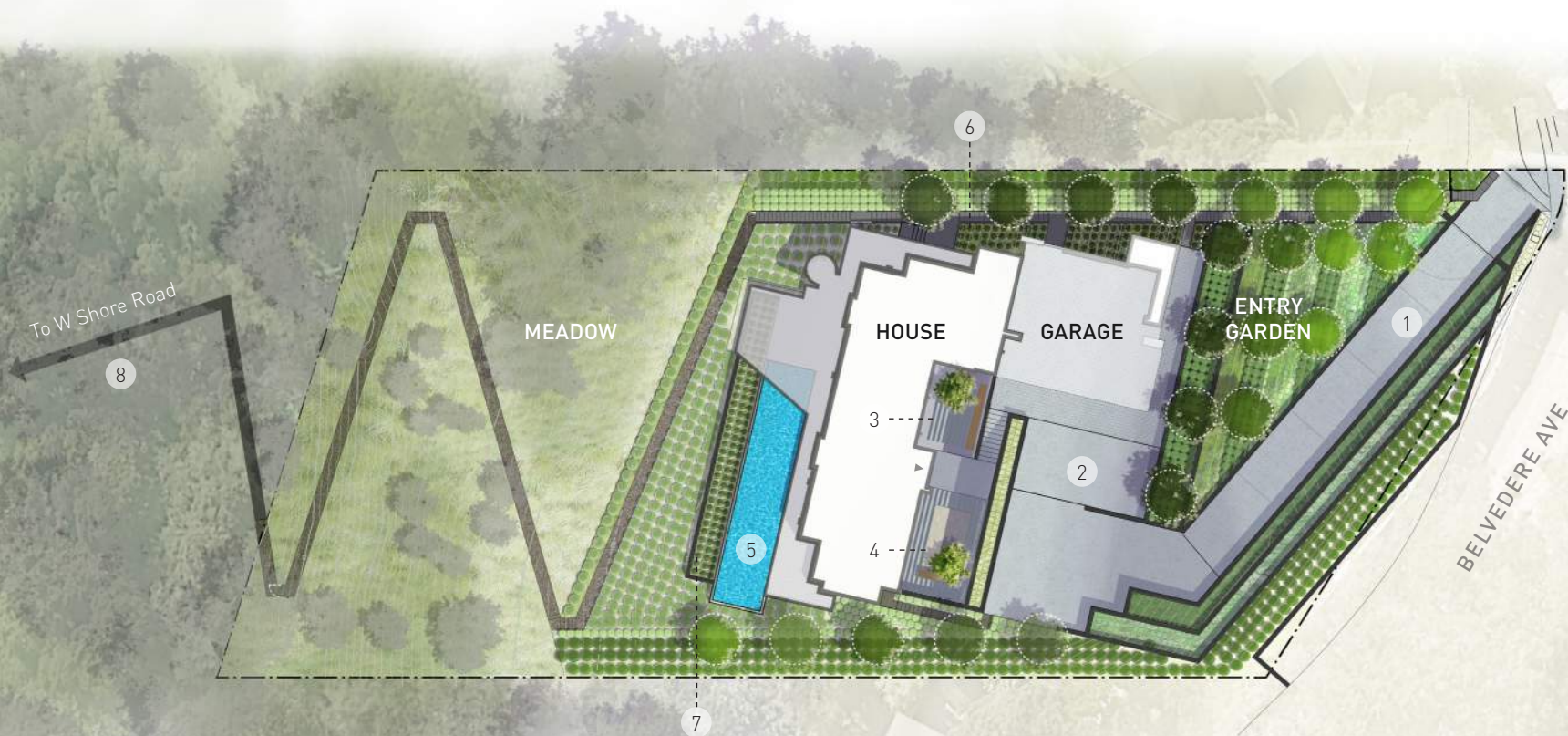
The South courtyard includes the same materiality but is a complementing design. Here, another bench and Japanese maple sit within a small carpet of gravel which serves as a location for the homeowner's pet to relieve itself. Both courtyards evoke a sense of simple calm in their poetic and linear forms—relating to the architectural language to create a seamless transition between interior and exterior spaces. Domestically sourced stone pavers extend across both courtyards and mimic the stonework of the interior flooring.

Meadow and Hillside Grove

From the house, access to the rear meadow and hillside grove is via a continuation of the linear staircase that provides pedestrian access to the house. The rear terraces, pool deck and meadow provide expansive views of the San Francisco Bay area. Continuing the Entry Garden's design language of pure geometric form, but utilizing a "quieter" palette, the design team grounded the meadow and grove with timber stairs, zigzagging gravel paths and a selection of California-native plants. The landscape walkways and steps provide the homeowners access to the street and neighbors below.

Site Challenges

Richardson Bay, home to the Richardson Bay Audubon Sanctuary, is listed as an impaired water body due to pathogens. The bay is especially sensitive to pollutants as it is relatively shallow and enclosed with little tidal action. The design program included capturing stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces (drives, rooftops, parking areas and courtyards) and directing that water to a structured and architecturally-integrated stormwater bioretention planter where the water is retained and filtered. Additionally, the concrete-walled entry gardens serve to contain and slow stormwater runoff of the steep slopes. Native and adapted planting are lushly planted to minimize site runoff.



- 1. Entry Drive
- 2. Landing / Parking
- ▲ Entry to the house

- 3. Entry Courtyard (N)
- 4. Entry Courtyard (S)
- 5. Pool
- 6. North Stairs

- 7. Stormwater Bioretention Planter
- 8. Connection through City-Owned Land



Site Plan illustrating the Front Entry Garden, Entry Courtyards, Meadow, and Hillside Grove.

PROGRESSION OF THE LANDSCAPE



STREET

To W Shore Road

WOOD / GRAVEL

MIXED MEADOW

HOUSE + COURTYARD

ENTRY GARDEN

CONCRETE WALLS

**MINIMAL PLANT
PALETTE**

STREET

To Belvedere Avenue

Photo diagram illustrating the continuous relationship of materials and design geometries and yet the distinct feel of each space as one passes through the landscape.

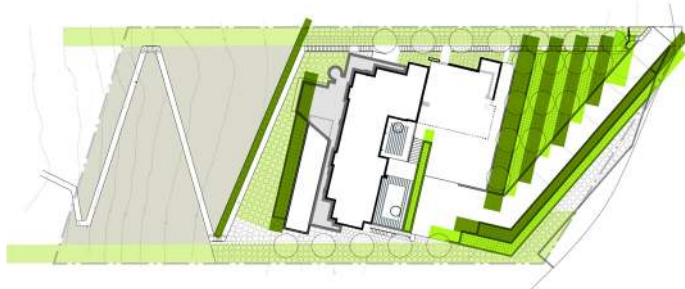


 RUNOFF SPEED

 TRENCH DRAIN

SLOWING STORMWATER RUNOFF + RETENTION

[INFORMS]



 LINEAR PLANTING

 RESTORED MEADOW

PLANTING STRATEGY

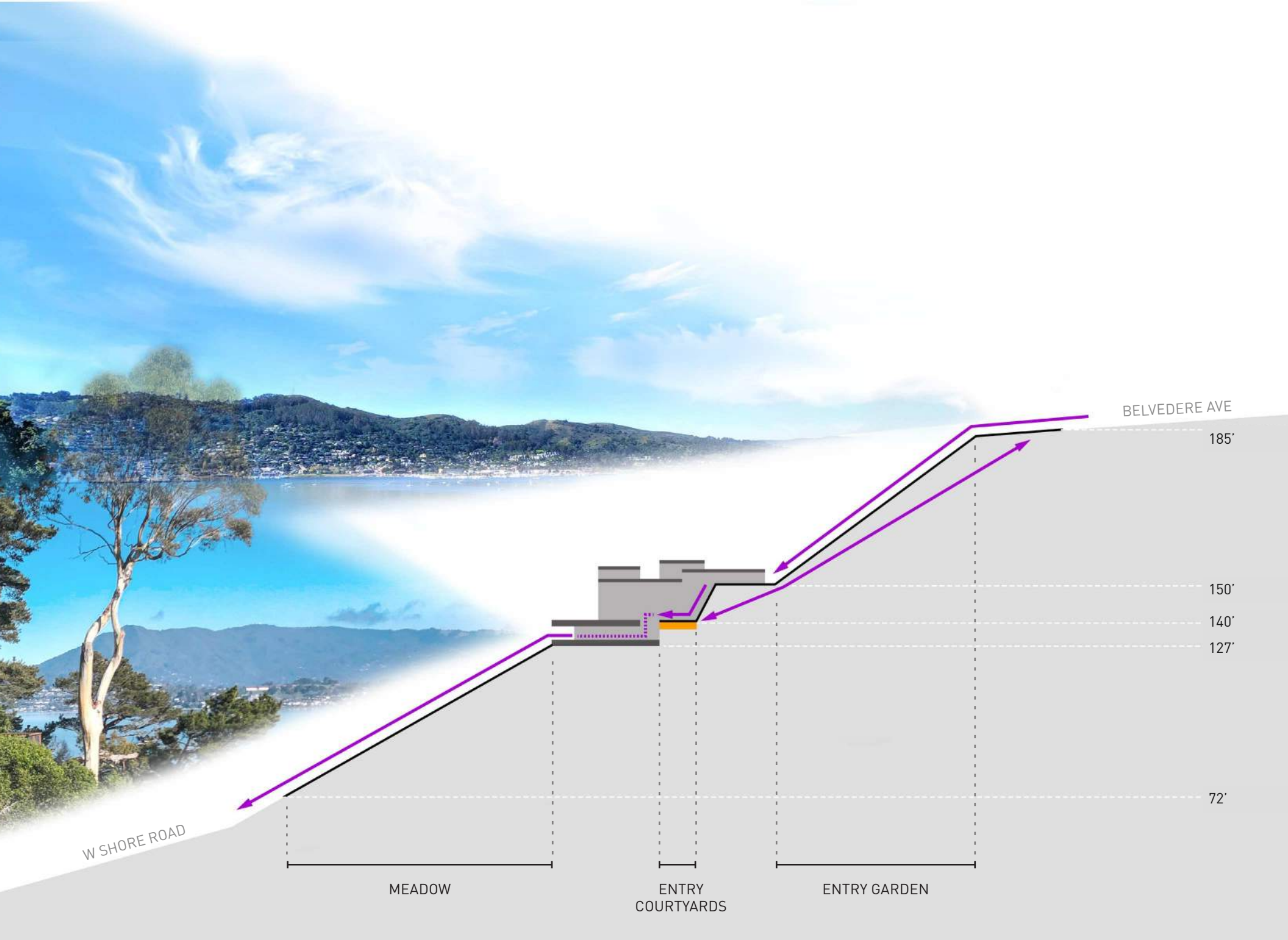
[REINFORCES]



 MOVEMENT

 ENTRY COURTYARD

CIRCULATION



A site section illustrating the challenging site topography; steps taken to minimize stormwater runoff and iconic views.



Bird's eye photograph illustrating the strong geometry of the upper entry garden and the related, yet less structured, landscape of the meadow and grove hillside.



Viewed from the street, sculptural retaining walls frame the view of the driveway and bay beyond. The pedestrian walk and gate are to the right.



The interplay of concrete paving, site walls, railings, and textural plantings create a simple but dramatic entry sequence. The retaining walls, a necessary requirement, do not read as such; rather they create an artful sculpting of the site topography.



A refined minimal palette heightens the relationship of site elements where foliage textures and shadows against the smooth-finished concrete walls become art.



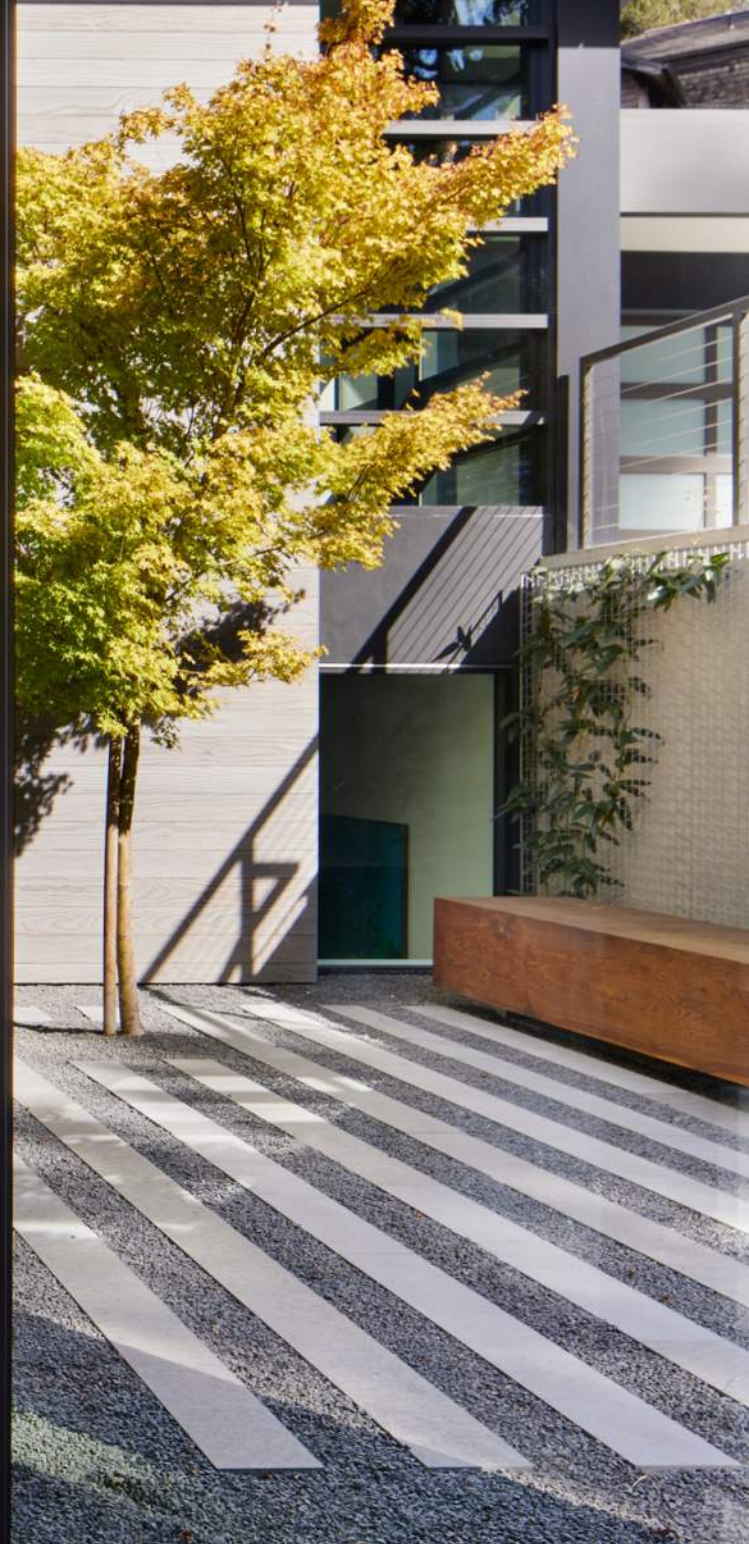
The entry stairs and courtyard, featuring stone detailing and a bench fabricated of wood salvaged from a tree removed prior to construction.



The view from the north courtyard to the south courtyard highlights the relationship of materials and the unique character of each.



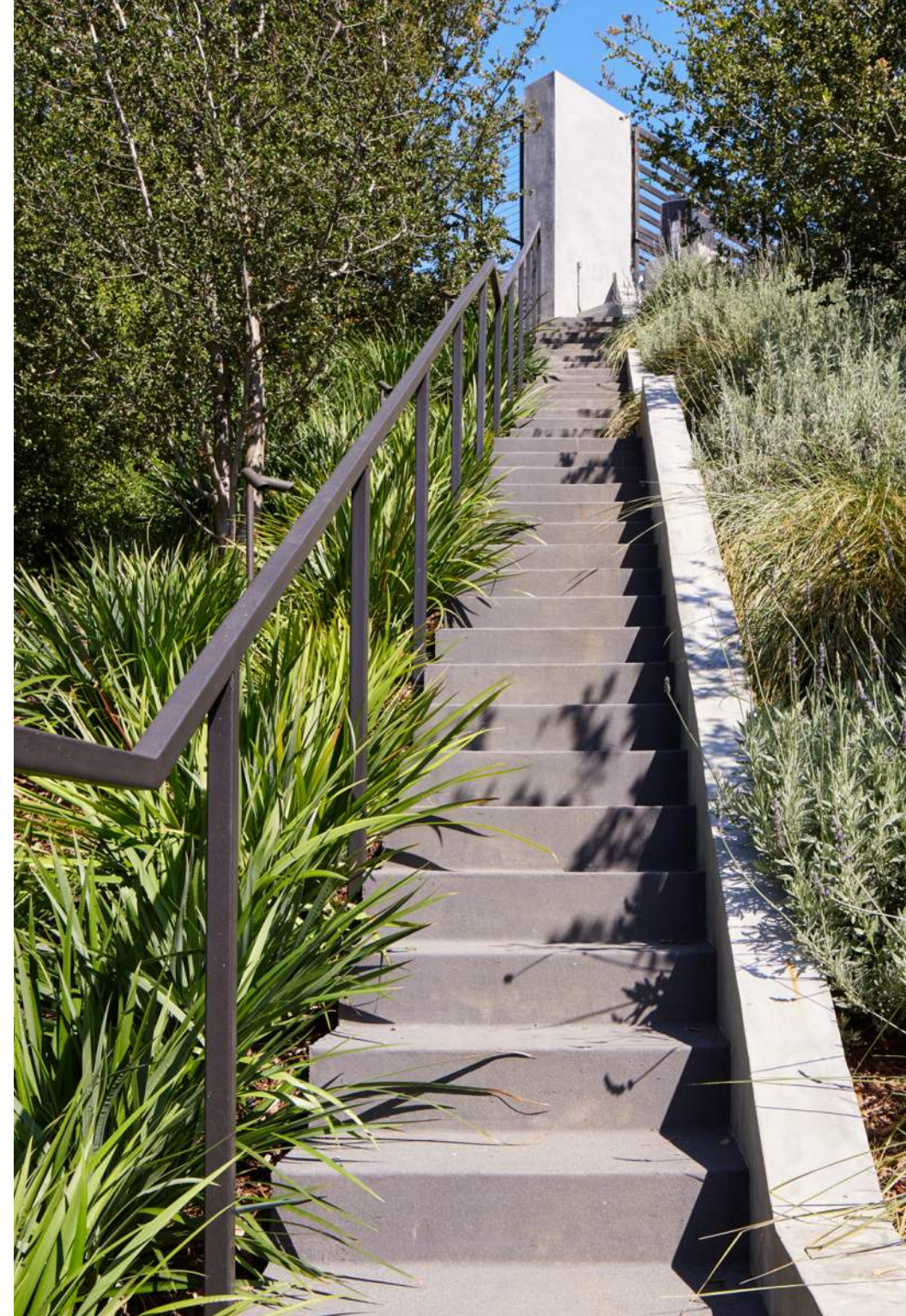
View of one courtyard from the dining room. The color and texture of the interior flooring continues into the exterior courtyards with a domestic stone.



View from front entry door showcasing the interior/external relationship.



Planted with *Pennisetum spathiolatum*, the Stormwater Bioretention Planter (to left of pool) accepts stormwater from the site's impervious surfaces.



A concrete staircase (R) traverses 75' of grade change and is used by the homeowner for exercise. The meadow path and steps (L) have a similar vocabulary but are crafted from a more "natural" palette.