

## Sleek and chic finds a place among the stately 19th century homes of Jackson Street

Stop the presses: Alta Plaza Park survives despite the fact there's a modern house *right across the street*.

Cypresses still stand atop posh Pacific Heights with grassy slopes on four sides. Tennis courts are busy; the matted playground hums. Streamlined women in their 30s discuss wedding plans and nearly everyone ignores the sign that says "Keep Dogs on Leash at All Times."

Life goes on in one of San Francisco's charmed spots — even though, on the 2600 block of Jackson Street, stately 19th century homes have a neighbor that is sleek and chic and as contemporary as can be.

"I've actually never noticed it," said Katie Kerr, a San Francisco State University student who lives nearby and was reading a book on a bench directly across from the structure with its flat walls of crystalline glass and charcoal gray stone. "It looks fine to me."

I focus on the house Kerr missed because it makes an elegant point about cities like San Francisco: they



### John King Place

evolve. Neighborhoods can absorb architectural changes as well as cultural ones, despite what would-be arbiters of taste might fear.

The new house on Jackson Street is best described as a burnished cube; instead of arches or gingerbread details for decoration, the two-story structure makes a statement by pulling back. At 50 feet wide and 36 feet tall, it's large but surprisingly subdued with panels of glass and slabs of basal sliding east to west.

► PLACE: Page F3



PAUL CHINN / The Chronicle

Architect Olle Lundberg turned a pair of nondescript 1950s homes on Jackson Street into a striking yet subdued modern structure that reclines behind a low brick wall.



PAUL CHINN / The Chronicle

From Alta Plaza Park across the street, the modern structure is a low-key horizontal cube with flat walls of glass and gray stone.

## Modern design takes its place on Jackson

► PLACE  
From Page F1

Everything's horizontal, everything's low key, and the tall broad house reclines behind a low brick wall adorned with Meyer lemon trees.

The outward gestures are few, such as a terrace on the first floor and a balcony on the second. The most assertive move is a structural wall that doubles as a canopy of sorts: it slides up the west side of the house and then snaps across to become the roof, cloaked in glass and extending 8 feet beyond the front wall.

Even the one fun touch — an airfoil-shaped stainless-steel column sliding from the roof to the driveway in front of the terrace — has a purpose. It helps hold up the building.

The architect is Olle Lundberg, who was hired by the owners to turn a pair of nondescript 1950s homes into a single structure that bears only a structural resemblance to what was there before. From the start, he was aware of the location — a block that includes a brick outcropping from 1895 by Ernest Coxhead and a Willis Polk exercise in palatial stone that was billed the same year as "the first Classical residence in San Francisco."

"I sort of feel like they had every other style of architecture on that stretch of Jackson," is how Lundberg describes his approach. "I just completed the chess set."

To be sure, not everyone's a fan.

Two doors away, the biggest building on the block — four stories high and smack to the sidewalk, a vaguely classical peach-colored box — is being renovated inside. I asked two of the contractors what they thought about the newcomer.

Both shook their heads. "It a nice building — an amazing building — but it's in the wrong place," said Barry Dalton. "It's like something you'd find South of Market," agreed Sheamus Eignor. "Or down along Third Street where everything's being redone."

That was also the view of some neighborhood leaders when Lundberg and his clients showed the plans to neighbors in 2001.

The Pacific Heights Residents Association filed papers to force a full hearing at the Planning Commission. The legal hook was the loss of affordable housing — two units become one! — but the association president at the time got to the heart of the "problem" by telling the commission the modern design "is not appropriate for this neighborhood," according to commission minutes.

The commission gave a blessing anyway. Four months later, on the last possible day, the association requested a hearing from the Board of Appeals.

Lundberg and the owners negotiated a set of changes, which made the association leaders happy, but the member who actually had filed the appeal refused to go along. So there was a 2003 hearing and — shocker — the Board of Appeals let the house go ahead.

Which brings me back to the start of the column: What was the fuss?

True, most Pacific Heights houses date from before 1920, but they're an eclectic blend that includes every architectural look imaginable at the time. And the story doesn't stop there. On the next block of Jackson, the three-story Town School stretches out in a style best called Institutional Icebox. Turn the corner onto Scott and there are 1960s (I'm guessing) relics that tried to be "contextual" by slapping square bays on the top floor and brick trim around the garages.

Lundberg's design is of our era, no doubt, but it doesn't put on a show. It radiates relaxed entitlement — just like the Polk and Coxhead landmarks on the block. They're a trio for the ages.

As I sat in Alta Plaza Park, enjoying the day and the drop-dead view, I leafed through a review copy of the forthcoming "Cables and Fables: A portrait of San Francisco's Pacific Heights." Former

San Francisco Examiner classical music critic Arthur Bloomfield collected vignettes written by his deceased wife, architectural historian Anne Bloomfield, updated with comments of his own.

After reading about the Polk and Coxhead buildings, I found an unexpected update — Arthur's tip of the hat to "Olle Lundberg's . . . dazzling Moderne statement with Asian overtones." He added a wonderful detail we outsiders would miss: "This house gleams at night like a giant FM radio receiver — dial your station!"

"I love it . . . much better than a third-rate Beverly Hills palazzo," Arthur said with a laugh, when I called to confirm that he felt such a contemporary design had its place in this well-established world. "I think Anne would have loved it too."

Don't take my word for it, folks, they're the experts. The best buildings are imbued with a sense of craft and care — no matter what the style might be.

Place appears on Tuesdays; "Cables and Fables" will be published in May by Heyday Books. E-mail John King at [jking@sfchronicle.com](mailto:jking@sfchronicle.com).