

WESTERN VISTA

RENDERING: MARMOL RADZINER

From restoration and design-build to its own prefab and furniture divisions, these L.A. innovators represent a new breed of architectural firm

WRITTEN BY Laurel Delp



On a nondescript street in Venice, California, where squat houses serve as the backdrop to car-filled driveways, architect Ron Radziner's home seems like an act of subversion. Behind high hedges and a heavy wood gate, his stunning Modernist haven is another world. The house is a significant step beyond its California Modernist and international style inspirations; a mix of elegant geometry with natural landscaping and a warmth that's led his young daughter to describe her home as "cozy."

Leo Marmol and Ron Radziner met as students at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and opened their firm in 1989. Today there's tremendous excitement around Marmol Radziner and Associates. They are architects' architects, innovators on many levels. They are pioneers in a burgeoning design-build movement, a full-service firm that does everything from design to construction to interior design, cabinetry, furniture and landscaping. In 2005, the firm launched a prefabricated housing division. In a factory in Vernon, California, it constructs fully finished rectangular modules in graduated sizes that are then shrink-wrapped, transported by truck, lowered onto already-finished foundations and connected together. This minimizes significantly the environmental impact of construction. And the homes are ambitious — one in Las Vegas is 12,000 square feet.



Opposite: The entrance to Ron Radziner's Venice, California, home gives little indication of its range. Photo: Joe Fletcher | Principals (from left) Ron Radziner and Leo Marmol met as students and have worked together for more than two decades. Photo: Jack Coyier **This page from top left:** Wood warms the recessed kitchen in Radziner's residence, which is the connection between the home's rectangular wings. Light reflected from the pool plays across the kitchen ceiling. | Radziner's pool is flush with the sliding glass doors of the living room. Photos: Joe Fletcher





The firm has always been occupied with environmental concerns, whether the clients are particularly interested or not. As Radziner puts it, the client probably doesn't care that walls are insulated with recycled denim, but they are. "If we can use formaldehyde-free plywood, why not just make the choice?" he asks. That carries over to elements such as recycled steel frames and photovoltaic panels.

The firm itself occupies a sprawling space in a warehouse on Los Angeles' west side. The office has no cubbyholes, no dividing walls, just a sea of desks that promotes a muscular synergy between the firm's many creative workers. Because Marmol Radziner is a builder, it's able to keep the standards on construction extraordinarily high. Building experience keeps the designs, however innovative, practical. Most of its construction crew has worked for the firm for years.

The buzz around Marmol Radziner has drawn celebrity clients such as designer and filmmaker Tom Ford. But oddly, its first renown came not for design but for its brilliant res-

toration of Richard Neutra's famed Kaufmann Desert House in Palm Springs.

Marmol Radziner was a three-year-old firm mainly occupied with small projects when it got the call from Beth Harris, who, with her husband, Brent, had bought the house (which was built as a vacation home for the same family that commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece, Falling Water).

"We were excited just to get a chance to see the house," Radziner says. As they learned, the house had more than doubled in size through a

series of additions by a succession of owners, and was unrecognizable. In addition, there were no construction plans in Neutra's archives at UCLA — they were probably lost in a fire in the 1960s.

"I always remember one day after we'd taken all the additions down and all that was left was the carcass, really, but boy! Was it a beautiful skeleton! Just a beautiful piece of architecture from every side, the proportions, just the scale of how that piece sits in the desert is magnificent."

The firm has always been occupied with **environmental concerns**, whether the clients are particularly interested or not.
