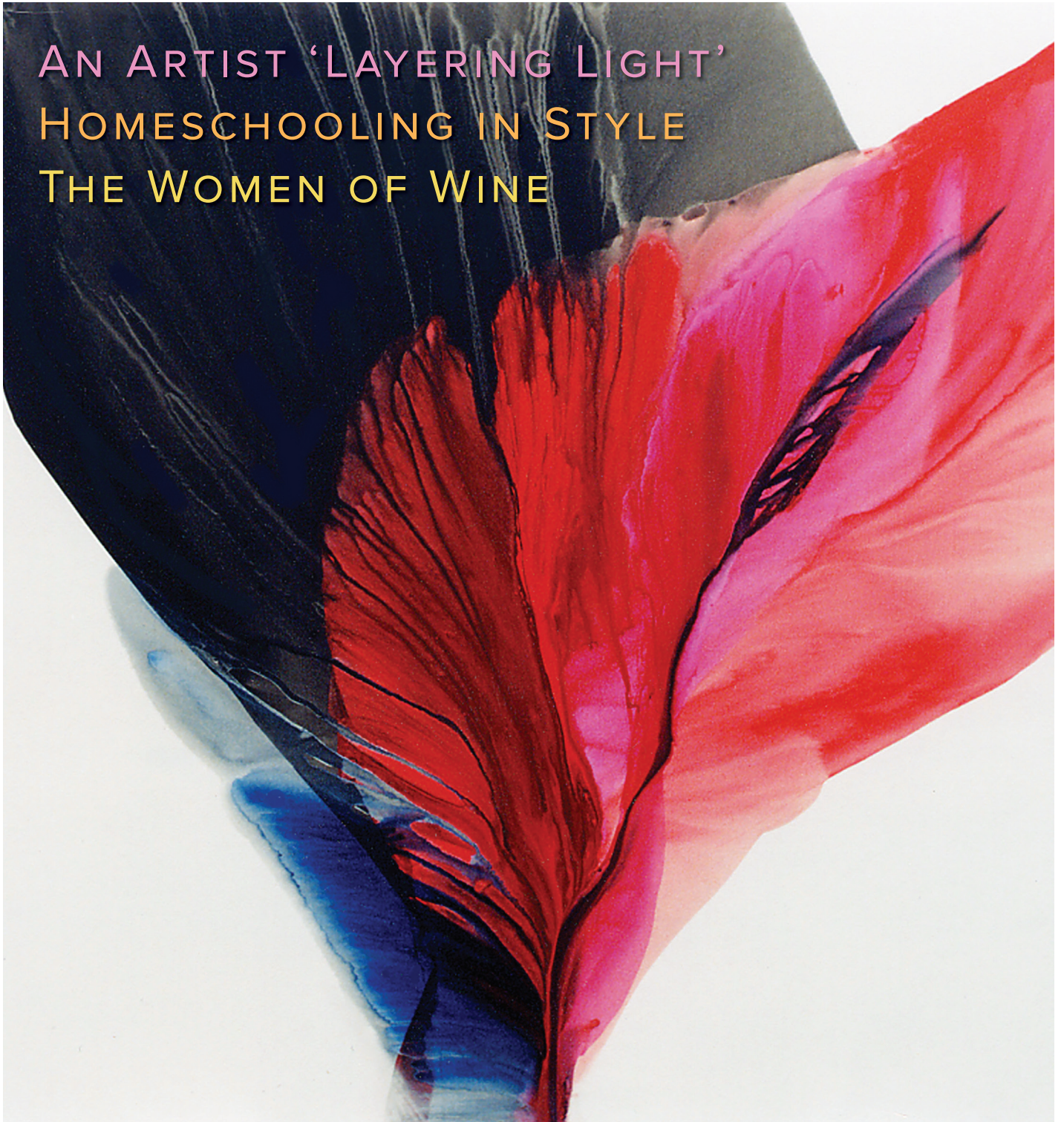


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California Modern

Meet Silicon Valley's Maven of Contemporary Design

By Jessica Decina

Mary Maydan's design story has a rather surprising beginning — but it's one that she still relies on today.

The founder and principal architect of California-based Maydan Architects started as a journalist for an Israeli newspaper, interviewing dozens of influential figures, from Barbara Walters to Mikhail Gorbachev. Interior design was the last thing on her mind, she admits. In fact, there was a point in time when the idea of picking out fabric for furniture left her “dumbfounded,” she says.

“I was with my boyfriend at the time, who was trying to choose a pattern for the fabric,” she recalls. “He asked for my opinion.... I had no idea what I liked more. [Others] were oohing and aahing, and I thought, I really don't have an eye for this!”

So how exactly does a New York journalist wind up paving the way for modern architecture in Silicon Valley? For Maydan, relocating to California ignited the initial passion. As she and her husband started planning their custom home, Maydan suddenly realized no style at the time captured the look and feel she wanted.

“In my wildest dreams, I never thought I would be a designer,” she says. “Then I started dreaming of a house with bigger windows where I would see the beautiful backyard. But there was no ultra-modern architecture in Silicon Valley — none at all. If I wanted something like this, I would have to design it myself.”

Maydan knew the concept seemed alien to Silicon Valley — after all, who would want to live in a house that seemed too much like an office? But Maydan persisted, even as she ventured into opening her namesake firm in 2004.

“I didn't let other people stop me. A lot of people didn't get it, but I was passionate about designing the style I loved,” she says. “At the beginning of my career I had potential clients who wanted modern and sleek interiors, but then wanted Craftsman on the outside so it would blend more. I'd always decline. You can't design a house that hasn't decided what it wants to be.”

Maydan has coined her firm's style “California modern,” which she describes as “a lot of natural light, an open floor plan, bringing the outdoors in.” This open, airy feel is a nod to the difference in the pace of life between the East and West



Mary Maydan

PHOTO BY LISA DENEFFE

HOUSE PHOTOS BY CHERIE CORDELOS PHOTOGRAPHY
COURTESY OF MAYDAN ARCHITECTS

“Our philosophy is to make the most of every square foot. Always maximize the functionality,” Maydan says. For this Atherton, California home (above, right), the goal was creating a space that was “large and open and uncluttered.”





The Southampton residence in Palo Alto, California (above) drew attention from several design magazines and paved the way for Maydan Architects to become a leading contemporary architecture firm in Silicon Valley.

Coasts, she explains.

“When I lived in New York, I used to see all the Wall Street guys going to work in a suit and tie. California modern is a house without a tie. The shirt is pressed, neat and clean-cut, but free of unnecessary ornaments. [It’s] a house that’s unassuming and comfortable in its skin,” she says.

Maydan still leverages her journalism roots when she’s at work — each project tells the client’s story. And, she says, the ability to ask the right questions at the right time is more useful than she thought.

“I find the leap [from journalism to design] is not all that big,” she says. “You almost interview a client to understand what it is they really want. There is so much psychology in how you get people to agree. Sometimes you’re in the middle of family discussions, and you have to disappear — and also help them get out of it!”

Maydan says her journalism roots also allow her to pinpoint inspiring moments and places, she says, which is why traveling (pre-COVID-19) was always important to her craft.

“[I’m inspired by] fairs, such as Salone del Mobile in Milan, and buildings. I love visiting buildings. The experience in a space is very powerful and teaching. My family jokes that I become wide-eyed visiting a non-working gas station, while the kids and my husband care much more about the Swiss Alps,” she says.

While luxury has always been a mainstay in her contemporary designs, she sees modern architecture moving more in the direction of spaces that can be both simple and beautiful — with less emphasis on ostentatious features and more focus on creating a functional sanctuary.

“As a firm, we never want to design a house that tries to attract attention.

We look for beauty and serenity, but not for noise,” she says. “I think this is the direction architecture is taking now. The pandemic will have a huge impact on how we build and how we design. Everything is back to basics. It makes people realize what they really need in a home. What you need is comfort and tranquility and a well-designed layout.”

And although she has remained true to her design philosophy after almost two decades, that doesn’t mean more can’t be achieved. In modern design, Maydan says, she’s found a way to add to the quality of her clients’ lives — something Maydan Architects will continue to chase.

“I saw [how] power of architecture shapes the way we live our lives,” she says. “It’s still very much what we are striving to do here — to leave our comfort zone and discover the next extraordinary idea.” 