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THE DESIGN ISSUE

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MARY MAYDAN:

Storytelling Through Modern Design

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Storytelling through Modern Design

BY DEBRA HAZEL

Moving from a career in journalism to one as a residential architect might not at first seem a logical transition. But Mary Maydan, founder of Maydan Architects, has moved seamlessly from crafting feature stories to crafting modern homes that work for their owners in Silicon Valley and now, New York City.

What Maydan calls California Modern, combining clean lines, lots of glass, open floor plans and bold shapes, is becoming a staple of Manhattan as it reflects the more relaxed lifestyle that appeals today.

“Modern, if you do it right, is incredible,” she told Mann Report.

Maydan was born in Israel and grew up in Tel Aviv. The daughter of a prominent editor in Israel, she followed in her father’s footsteps and became a journalist, eventually sent by financial publisher “Globes” as a New York City-based correspondent while still in her 20s.

“I specialized in feature stories, interviewing some of the most

inspiring figures of our time,” including Mikhail Gorbachev, Barbara Walters, Larry King and Jerry Seinfeld, she said. “I loved it. It was such a privilege to sit in front of people you think very highly of and have carte blanche to ask them questions. I considered myself the luckiest person in the world. I had the best job.”

Her personal life brought her West in 2000, when she met and married a tech executive, moved to Silicon Valley and began house hunting, even as she continued reporting. Maydan, who grew up in contemporary high-rises in Tel Aviv and lived in newer apartments in New York, couldn’t find anything that suited her modern tastes.

“I had never even thought about architecture,” she said. “Then we started planning our first house, and I realized I only liked one style — ultra modern.”

In Los Angeles in the 2000s, finding that style wouldn’t have been too difficult. Palo Alto was a different matter entirely, with most homes



MARY MAYDAN
(CREDIT: BEN MAYDAN)

distinctly traditional, Spanish Colonial or Mediterranean in style. They were beautiful, but were largely highly segmented, with closed-off rooms and smaller windows. There was no hint of an open floor plan.

“I wanted to bring the outdoors inside. I wanted our home to be light filled and uplifting,” she said. “What we saw was very compartmentalized — a formal dining room, a formal living room, pitched roofs and small windows. I really wanted an open floor plan and huge glass doors. I wanted a design that had clean lines and was free of unnecessary ornaments. I had a very clear vision of what I liked.”

Her realtor tried to dissuade her, noting that the lack of demand for modern architecture in the area could result in a price discount of 10% to 20% when it was time to sell. But Maydan and her husband knew this was their “forever home” — reselling wasn’t an issue. She began creating a vision and hunting for an architect who could make her ideas a reality.

“I found a really highly regarded architect in Los Angeles who agreed to work with us, but he

was older,” she said. “I found myself going to the planning department to research the code and find out information for him all because he couldn’t travel much.”

During the schematic design stage, in fact, the architect died, leaving Maydan once again on her own.

“Fortunately, I’m very good at 3D, I already had a clear vision and sketched what I liked,” she said.

Always gifted at math, she began studying how to translate those ideas, taking formal courses and working with a local consultant who could submit the plans as well as a builder to start construction.

The home was a revelation for the area and became the subject of an article in the Palo Alto weekly newspaper. People came from around the Bay Area to see the construction site and asked her to design for them.

What in the wrong hands could be cold and hard instead is elegant but livable. Maydan’s home boasts the strong,



MAYDAN'S FIRST HOME
(CREDIT: MAYDAN ARCHITECTS)



MAYDAN'S FIRST HOME BOASTS THE CLEAN LINES
SHE'S KNOWN FOR.
(CREDIT: MAYDAN ARCHITECTS)

straight lines that are her trademark. Large glass windows and doors blend the indoor and outdoor spaces, while soft furniture provide comfort. The style is warmed by softer furniture, accessories and texture to create a family home.

“I can’t have my four

kids live in a museum,” she said. “I had to give it life, make it softer and more inviting.”

Word of mouth brought Maydan business. Meanwhile, she took courses at the University of California, Berkeley and was supervised by an accredited architect for eight years before

taking her licensure exams.

Over time, the writing gave way to design. Her family saw that she was pursuing a passion.

“I was raised that journalism is a calling. But I know that I couldn’t keep two full-time jobs, with kids,” she said. “I



A BRIGHT NYC APARTMENT
(CREDIT: PETER KUBILIS)

told my parents that I was just taking a leave of absence and seeing how it plays out.”

With their and her husband’s support, her business expanded as word of mouth spread. The family did in fact sell

that first home, but their second, called Floating Boxes because its façade resembles three stacked boxes that are in fact interconnected, continues in that style.

Maydan even has done some commercial work,

including the design of Houzz’s headquarters in Palo Alto.

Now, Maydan has expanded to New York City, when an early California client turned to her for help as they searched for an

apartment for their son in late 2021. It turned out to be something of a homecoming.

“I searched with them and rejected so many apartments right away. Then I saw one that was amazing,” she said. “It

was a hard sell because it wasn’t that attractive to begin with, but I saw that if some walls came down, and with light and careful planning, I could make a smaller apartment very useful, spacious and uplifting. I could see the potential.



THE FLOATING BOXES HOUSE
(CREDIT: JOHN SUTTON)

And I lived two blocks away when I was in New York! I was in heaven.”

While remaining true to her modern tastes, Maydan's aesthetic has evolved a bit, inspired by her international travels.

“When I started, I had such an aversion to anything that seemed to be traditional. I just wanted gray and white. I was a lot stricter,” she said. “Now I look at the Italians, who always add a twist.”

And remaining fresh is a goal.

“I always tell my team, when you succeed in something, it's very easy to fall into the trap of doing the same thing,” she said. “I want to reinvent and do something new and fresh all the time. And

there's nowhere better than New York to be innovative.”

Finding the combination of historic exteriors and modern interiors awkward, Maydan does not work on older buildings and leans toward new construction projects or extensive remodels, where her vision can be implemented from the beginning, and she has the ability to “completely transform” a space.

Working on the two coasts are both similar and different. Sustainability is a focus in all of Maydan's work and she's accustomed to the different building codes of California and New York. But New York City does present other challenges largely because of the density of the buildings, including protecting other

new to us,” she observed. “I'm so happy and blessed to be working in New York. It's a dream come true for me.”

Home, however, will remain in Palo Alto, where the youngest of her children is still in school. Now with a team of five, Maydan is keeping her boutique firm small so she can remain hands-on. Three are now under construction.

Her favorite project: “I always say I'm in love with the last project I designed,” she said.

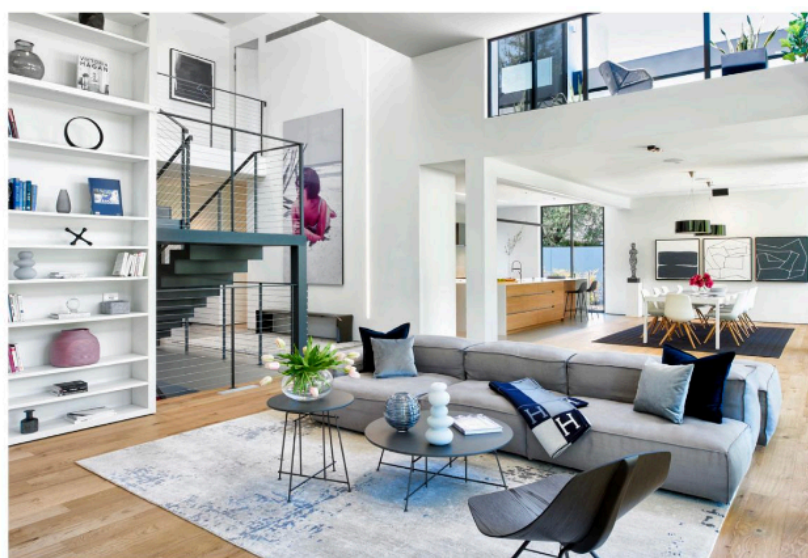
In a way, the shift from journalism isn't that surprising. Maydan is still interviewing people, learning their stories and telling them through design rather than words. And her parents have come to accept her new

calling.

“They live with us in an attached guest house,” she said. “They're happy about my career, and in the last few years, I have been doing more interviews and writing. So, when I consult with my father, he is in his element.”

So one home at a time, one story at a time, Maydan brings her vision of modern comfort to life.

“You never really set out to change the world,” she observed. “It happens more naturally. I was so passionate about modern architecture, and convinced that it was a perfect fit for our area and context. I was very lucky that I fell in love with a style that became so popular, and I became a leader in this niche.”



THE INTERIOR OF THE FLOATING BOXES HOUSE
SHOWS THE INTERCONNECTIVITY OF SPACES
(CREDIT: JOHN SUTTON)