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Fallingwater, Hawai`i-Style

SPECTACULAR OAHU RESIDENCE WAS DESIGNED AS A SALUTE TO
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S ULTIMATE MASTERPIECE...
BLENDED WITH A TOUCH OF SHANGRI-LA

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ABOVE: The dining room is adjacent to the kitchen and overlooks the family room, allowing expansive ocean views. All the wood in the home is light-colored teak. The flooring consists of crema marfil, a travertine whose milky, crystalline elements create an almost translucent effect.



The Latham estate is located in the southeastern quarter of Oahu, at the base of Diamond Head. Native Hawaiians called the promontory *Kopikō*, which means "raging sea," because of the rough surf. Today the area is known as Black Point for its abundance of lava rock.



ABOVE: "I wanted to make it appear that the entire rockscaping existed before the house was even thought of, and that the structure was built around this rugged yet beautiful terrain," Lancor says.


MANY ARCHITECTS CONceive A HOME AS A "DESIGN FOR LIVING," but architect Joe Lancor went one better with the oceanfront residence that he conjured up on Oahu for clients Larry and Marilee Latham. Inspired by Lancor's profound admiration for the works of Frank Lloyd Wright—and his reverent feeling for the mystical beauty of Hawai'i—the Latham estate combines design elements of Wright's modernist masterpiece, Fallingwater, with features suggestive of an ancient Tibetan monastery.

The final result could aptly be described as a *fantasy* for living.

"Grimly serious architects might turn up their noses, but we took an almost dreamlike approach to the design of the Latham residence," says Lancor (Lancor Architects Inc., Honolulu). "Our main goal for the Latham residence was to achieve one of Wright's central design principles: you should intimately involve the outside environment with the inside of the home. We also wanted to create the feeling that the structure was built long ago and that it gradually grew over the centuries, with an 'old wing' and 'new wing' feeling, in a pleasingly imperfect, picturesque way. So rather than seamless fits, we have walls and roof sections that don't always quite line up flawlessly."

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TOP: The owners entertain often, so the kitchen combines casual, guest-friendly elements (comfortable barstools, open spaces) with near-professional working components (the cooking island houses an eight-burner gas range with oven below).

A photograph of a multi-level courtyard at dusk. The courtyard features a central stream with stepping stones, surrounded by lush greenery and vibrant pink and red plants. In the background, a large glass-walled structure with a balcony overlooks the ocean. The scene is illuminated by warm, ambient lighting from the building's interior and exterior fixtures.

In the central courtyard, guests can traverse from one side of the house to another on the breezeway, or by walking over stepping stones, or by actually walking through the shallow parts of the artificial stream. Hidden in the courtyard is a six-person Jacuzzi with natural rock in the base of the uppermost waterfall.



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ABOVE: The home's oceanfront wing includes the family room, living room, and study downstairs.

O'ahu, at the base of Diamond Head. Native Hawaiians called the promontory Kupiki'ō, which means "raging sea," because of the rough surf. Today the area is known as Black Point for its abundance of lava rock. It's a favorite of divers and surfers. When Lancor first inspected the site, he found a narrow, sloping lot on rocky ground that offered incredible views of Diamond Head to the west, the endless ocean horizon to the south, and the ever-changing South Pacific sky above.

Lancor was determined to take full advantage of the site's stunning natural beauty. To do so, he conceived a two-story home built around a large open courtyard. A series of connected, glass-walled rooms—and that central, roofless atrium—means that almost every point in the house enjoys ocean vistas as well as opportunities to see blue sky overhead.

"The environment of Hawai'i, from the terrain and foliage to the ocean and sky, is unfailingly beautiful," Lancor rhapsodizes. "It means you can really love the indoor-outdoor relationships that Frank Lloyd Wright worked so hard at. In fact," Lancor continues, "it's actually tougher to perfect that indoor-outdoor blend in Wright's home base, Wisconsin, than in Hawai'i. Even his masterpiece, Fallingwater, would be a happier experience in Hawai'i than in Pennsylvania."

The Latham's home proves Lancor's point in spectacular style. The spirit of Wright's Fallingwater (famously sited atop a stream and waterfall in Bear Run, Pennsylvania) is deliberately and vividly present. At over 1,000 square feet, the courtyard's main feature is a rock waterfall at the northern, uppermost end. An artificial stream was created so that an endless flow of water cascades from this main waterfall, moving in a roughly diagonal sluice down and across the ground, splashing through a series of additional waterfalls and pools. The stream finally flows out of the house underneath the living room, only to spill over yet another artificially created rock waterfall just outside the breezeway.

"I wanted to make it appear that the entire rockscape existed before the house was even thought of, and that the structure was built around this rugged yet beautiful terrain," Lancor says. "We started with what was there and enhanced and reshaped it to achieve a seamless final effect: you can't tell which rocks were indigenous and which were planted. Rocks are carefully placed at key points in the courtyard, and some doors were shaped to go around certain rocks. Some rocks appear to have been partially chiseled away; others are left rough to suggest the feeling that they were simply too big to remove."

The theme of "flowing through" begins with the waterfall and the stream, but this flowing motif is visually echoed in many additional design elements of the house itself. From above, an observer can clearly see that the nine separate roof sections literally flow into each other. Inside the residence, the five bedrooms, living room, home office, kitchen, dining room, and family room visually flow into each other thanks to Lancor's radically open, glass wall design. "This makes the place feel huge," Lancor points out. "When you're in one room, you see parts of seven other rooms."

Light also flows from one room to the next, issuing from natural sources in the daytime and from a cleverly integrated lighting system at night. When anyone turns on a main light in one room, this action automatically activates small, dim lights in several other rooms that are visible through the glass walls.

Airflow is achieved as soft ocean breezes constantly waft through the Latham residence. Sea air enters through the open windows and sliding doors, and it circulates through the entire





residence via the roofless courtyard. "As a result of this flowing openness, the house feels grand and enormous," Lancor says. Estimating total square footage with any precision is tricky, given the variable elements of open vs. closed doors, the courtyard, etc. But Lancor remarks that the house "feels like 10,000 sq. ft. although it's actually not."

To ensure that the home is as rugged as it looks (despite those glass walls and the open structure), Lancor designed a steel frame structure. Visual echoes of Fallingwater are seen again in the staggered planes and cantilevered wings of the oceanfront face of the building. But to create the "Tibetan monastery" feeling he wanted, Lancor encased the vertical steel beams with molded, precast veneers fashioned by Honolulu sculptor Paul Harada. Architect and sculptor collaborated through several generations, experimenting with varied floral designs, colors and textures, until both were satisfied.

Harada's final veneer design features a central, bas-relief panel that depicts local flowers including bird of paradise, and heleconia. Above this panel, each veneer is topped with a sprouting Lawae leaf pattern. These paneled beams wrap around top of the inner courtyard upstairs, and are seen numerous times on the ground floor as well. "Paul's column veneers really define the interior space of the home," Lancor explains. The veneers also provide yet one more flowing, repeated visual element that leads the observer's eye from one end of the house to the other, and beyond.

Harada's veneers, the (seemingly) antique plaster walls, and the green-patina'd, sloping, Asian-style roof, combine to create that 1,000-year-old Himalayan monastery feeling. The home's art and furnishings further enhance the mood of an



TOP: Different ceiling fan designs are used through the home. Some feature fan blades carved like palm leaves. This bedroom opens into the central courtyard (above).

OPPOSITE TOP: To bring even more light into the house, Lancor designed some bedrooms with bow windows including two cantilevered windows in the corner of one bedroom. "It's almost like the nose of a B-25 bomber," Lancor chuckles, "but it's a pleasing effect that permits ocean and mountain views."

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: A ornately detailed four-poster bed adds Asian influence along with a Samurai suit of armor.



Upstairs are the master bedroom, master bath, and home office. Access to one of decks is gained from the office, which is casually but elegantly furnished. Two outside decks (right) are situated above the first-floor family room and entertainment room.

OPPOSITE TOP: The master bedroom features a large, teak-framed bow window and window seat. Center window panels are silicone glazed.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The master bathroom offers a "wall-less" shower and ample room with his and her sinks.

ancient and perhaps slightly mysterious culture. Marilee Latham, an interior designer, specializes in personally acquiring genuine stone objects d'art, wood carvings, and other exotic artifacts from deep in the jungles of Bali, Indonesia, and other South Pacific treasure-troves. A selection of these treasures, along with custom-made coffee tables, chairs, and additional elements, provide the finishing touches for the Lathams' version of Shangri-La on Black Point.

"Taking a fantasy approach to this project certainly made designing the home a lot more fun," Lancor smiles. "And it makes living in the residence palpably more fun for the Lathams and their guests."







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Evening brings gorgeous sunset silhouetted views of Diamond Head. Nearly every room shares the view and the open-plan allows the view and the breeze to enter the home freely.