CALIFORNIAN BUEN RETIRO
Craig Hartman, leading design partner in the American office SOM, is about to fulfill a dream of living amidst vineyards. On the large estate he owns in Sonoma County, he has already built a cottage and studio for guests – the first piece of what will be the family home.

**Blue Oak Cottage and Studio**
**Architect**
Craig W. Hartman
**Project team**
Jan D’Brien
Ametra Iran
**Structural engineers**
David Sheek, Skidmore Owings & Merrill
**Mechanical Engineering**
Paul McGraith, Meyers+
**Civil engineers**
Curt Munselle
Munselle Engineering
**Landscape architects**
Tom Leader Studio
**Grading and Land Form**
Ron Peters
**Water**
Matt Petersen
**Solar**
Rody Jonas
**Construction**
Fairweather Associates
**Year of completion**
2018
**Floor area**
78 sqm
**Location**
Chalk Hill Rd, Healdsburg, California

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Per Craig Hartman, partner dello studio americano SOM, sta per realizzare il sogno di vivere tra le vigne. E nella grande tenuta di sua proprietà nella contea di Sonoma ha già costruito il primo tassello della futura residenza di famiglia: il cottage per gli ospiti, con studio.
L’incanto per la campagna e la qualità della sua luce hanno convinto la coppia di architetti a comprare un terreno a Sonoma.

Ten years ago Hartman and his wife Jan O’Brien were persuaded by this agrarian culture and the qualities of its light to buy a plot of land in Sonoma County.

Il cottage è utilizzato dai due architetti e dai loro amici artisti come un rifugio per il relax. Ma anche per lavorare: all’aperto, nella camera da letto o nel garage, utilizzabile come studio.

The cottage is used by two architects and visiting artists as a retreat for work and rejuvenation, using the outdoor space, a convertible bedroom-studio and the workshop-garage as work spaces.

debutto con SOM a Chicago – ma all’inizio degli anni Novanta il suo trasferimento da Washington D.C. alla Bay Area per prendere le redini della filiale californiana ha cambiato la sua posizione in merito. L’incanto per la campagna della zona e per la qualità espressiva della sua luce ha convinto Hartman e sua moglie Jan O’Brien, a sua volta architetta, a comprare dieci anni fa un appezzamento di terreno nella contea di Sonoma, piena di vigneti come la vicina Napa Valley, e a cimentarsi con il tema della villa fuori città, in una dimensione fortemente bucolica. L’esperienza della natura in questa parte della West Coast era molto diversa da quella cui Hartman era abituato, prima nei suoi anni giovanili nel Mid-West e in seguito, agli esordi della sua carriera, come architetto di studio SOM, leggendario nell’East Coast come nel Mid West. Il carattere gentile del paesaggio è un invito dell’ambiente a un vivere contemplativo, il luogo è ideale per osservare i mutamenti del mondo organico durante il ciclo dei giorni e delle stagioni. In the past, beginning with SOM in Chicago, the American architect preferred to make his home in the city, but his move from Washington DC to the Bay Area at the beginning of the 1990s to take over the reins of the firm’s West Coast design studios in San Francisco and LA led him to a change of heart. Ten years ago Hartman and his wife Jan O’Brien, also an architect, were persuaded by their love of Northern California’s rolling rural land and agrarian culture – and by the expressive qualities of its light – to buy a plot of land in Sonoma County, a region filled with vineyards similar to the nearby Napa Valley, and to tackle the construction of a villa outside the city, in an marked bucolic setting. The experience of nature in this part of the West Coast was very different from the one to which Hartman was accustomed to at the beginning of his career in SOM’s legendary Mid West and East Coast studios. In the restful character of the landscape there is a poetic invitation to a contemplative life. The place is an ideal one from which to observe changes...
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All major fenestration is oriented toward the north, south and east, both for heat gain mitigation and to minimize nighttime visual intrusion on a westward, uphill, future dwelling.

in the natural world over the cycle of days and seasons. The organizational principle of the internal and external space is structured around the spectacle of nature and the desire to become an integral part of it through the architecture. This emotional engagement with the countryside was the springboard for the project. The first goal that the client-architect set himself was to restore the site to its original state, by repairing damage caused by the previous use of the land as pasture for cattle, something that had compromised the biological diversity of both the flora and the fauna. Immediately afterwards he built a cottage and studio for guests.

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Il progetto esplora la potenzialità di un’architettura minimalista che punta sulla qualità della luce, sulla relazione con il paesaggio, e sullo scarto percettivo tra la dimensione intima degli spazi e la presenza soverchiante della natura.

The project examines the potential for minimalist architectural form to inspire through light, the relationship to the land and perceptual contrast achieved through intimate perspective and sweeping views.

The cottage has a compact layout with two volumes set at right angles to one another: a Day Pavilion containing the public quarters and a Night Pavilion for the bedrooms.

The cottage, at 78 interior square meters, has a compact layout, with two pavilions set at right angles to one another: a Day Pavilion containing the public quarters (kitchen, dining room, lounge) and a Night Pavilion where two bedrooms with attached bathrooms are located. The only point of contact between the two places is an external canopy, a choice that makes it possible to maintain a direct and constant relationship with the surrounding nature. The forms of the architecture are inspired by agricultural sheds and are intelligible, anchored to the ground, mute and with no structural acrobatics. Here it is nature that speaks, and the architecture is merely supportive. The two volumes are oriented in such a way as to make the most of the natural light and panoramic views of the valley to the north-east. The house is immersed in an oak tree forest and its dark outer surface stems from the desire to blend in among the trees.

A counterpoint to an architecturally mute exterior is provided by an interior structured around the vistas of the lush vegetation, a spatial catalogue of ways of letting light and nature in. The perceptual contrast between close-up views of details of...
the bark of the oak trees and long ones onto the vine-covered valleys produces a varied range of domestic spatial experiences, in which light plays a particularly important role. Hartman's pursuit of the poetic union of light and space throughout his career has been honed by frequent collaborations with master lighting designer Claude Engle. In this small cottage, Hartman has orchestrated a masterpiece of illumination, with skylights set in sloping ceilings that reflect the intensity of the light and generate unexpected patterns and colours. A remote field of photovoltaic panels makes the house fully self-sufficient and even allows Hartman to sell clean energy back to the local municipality. The project as a whole represents a love affair between nature and architecture, in which heart and technique find an exceptional synthesis even by the high standards of California.