

OPEN HOMES

FEATURED PROPERTY *Townhouses, North Berkeley*

Tradition, fine detail meet in townhome trio



Liz Rusby/Liz Rusby Photography

Townhomes at 1352 and 1354 Neilson St., North Berkeley, by David Trachtenberg.

By Mark A. Wilson
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Most Bay Area homeowners are familiar with the phrase “Berkeley brown shingle,” which is loosely used to describe any wood frame residence covered in shingles.

But Berkeley architect David Trachtenberg is much more precise in describing how his use of brown shingles reflects the design philosophy of the First Bay Tradition, which has inspired his buildings throughout the Bay Area: “When you sheath a building in shingles,” he says, “it gives that building’s smallest gestures unique expression.”

Now he has applied this idea to three townhouses at 1350, 1352 and 1354 Neilson St. in North Berkeley, two of which have just come on the market.

Trachtenberg Architects was formed in 1991, six years after Trachtenberg graduated from Harvard with a master’s degree in architecture. His firm has

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The vitals

Address: 1352 Neilson St., Berkeley

Square footage: 1,889

List price: \$825,000

Bedrooms: 3

Baths: 2½

Address: 1354 Neilson St., Berkeley

Square footage: 1,617

List price: \$775,000

Bedrooms: 3

Baths: 2½

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BENNY KASS
Real Estate Mailbag

No need to refi gift home

Q: My husband and I inherited a home from my husband’s uncle, who passed away a few weeks ago.

Will the lender expect us to refinance the home, or can we just assume it even if it is a conventional loan?

A: Unless the existing loan was from a private person, it is most likely covered under the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act of 1982. This federal law puts restrictions on the ability of a lender to exercise the “due on sale” clause that exists in most mortgages (also called deeds of trust).

One of these restrictions reads as follows: “With respect to a real property loan secured by a lien on residential real property containing less than five dwelling units, including a lien on the stock

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FEATURED PROPERTY

Attention given to privacy and light

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designed homes and commercial buildings from Sonoma County to San Jose that have been praised for their aesthetic qualities by critics (including the late Allan Temko) and city planners. Among them: Berkeley landmarks Rose Grocery, Saul's Delicatessen, Cody's Bookstore on Fourth Street, Berkeley Bowl Market and the La Farine Building on Solano Avenue.

"So many modernist architects are given to grand gestures that hit you instantly," he says. "But I think we can learn a lot from older buildings, like those of the First Bay Tradition, with their more modest details and subtle beauty."

The Neilson Street townhouses are the result of a creative collaboration between

Trachtenberg and the owner/builder, Andrew Graham, whose family will live in the rear unit. This type of teamwork between an architect and his client is another tradition inspired by the First Bay Tradition, when designers like Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan worked closely with builders to tailor spaces to the needs of each client.

Contractor Marty Kaufman and project architect Isaiah Stackhouse were also an important part of the design process, applying the attention to detail and fine craftsmanship for which Maybeck, Morgan, and now Trachtenberg, are known. All three of the Neilson Street units have special design features that Graham wanted.

They are located on a quiet cul-de-sac with a footpath leading to neighborhood



Photos by Liz Rusby/Liz Rusby Photography

shops and cafes and the Ohlone Greenway. There are detached, separately framed walls between each townhouse with no connecting lumber except at the roofline. Exterior walls are framed with 2-by-6 (instead of 2-by-4) lumber and R-21 insulation; the upper floors and stairs use industrial adhesive and fasteners. The floors in each unit

are made of quarter-sawn white oak.

All these features provide for maximum sound insulation and energy efficiency. The units are side by side, with separate custom-built entry gates and private gardens for each, ensuring maximum privacy and indoor-outdoor living for all the occupants. Each unit has a unique

floor plan, and all the units have a light, airy quality. There are also separate garages for each unit, and the front two are attached with sealed entry doors to the living areas.

The middle unit, 1354, is approximately 1,600 square feet, with three bedrooms, 2½ baths and an office/study. Soaring, 16-foot ceilings and

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8-foot-tall glass doors and plate-glass windows in the living room provide abundant natural light. An open stairway leads to the upper level, where the kitchen and dining room overlook the living room.

A private deck adjoins the living room. The dining room includes a deep, built-in bench, and an adjacent office/study has a half-bath. The kitchen here, like all the units, has a single-basin, fire-glazed sink, a Viking range, custom cabinets and spacious counters. On the third level, there are three bedrooms and two full baths.

The bathrooms in all the units have 1-inch mosaic floor tiles, Carrera marble countertops and ceramic subway shower stalls. All the master bathrooms have stone Terrazzo shower basins. The spacious master bedroom in 1354 has two large closets and a south-facing window with a San Francisco view.

The bedrooms in all the



Liz Rusby/Liz Rusby Photography

The townhouses feature separate custom-built entry gates and private gardens for each unit.

units have closed-loop carpeting. The front unit, 1352, has about 1,900 square feet with three bedrooms, 2½ baths and a private office/

study. A raised, open kitchen overlooks the spacious, light-filled dining room. The dining room is on the ground level and has French doors that

access a private, walled patio.

The ceilings here are 9½ feet, and the tall windows flood the rooms with light. A custom mahogany entry door

opens into the adjoining, spacious living room. A handcrafted stairway, with a rounded base and wide banister, leads to the upper levels.

The second floor has three bedrooms and two full baths. The master suite has a walk-in closet. On the third level is a large multi-use room, with a view of the East Bay hills.

Professionally designed gardens are set aside for each unit, in addition to the extensive outdoor common areas. The front unit has a large private garden, with paver stone patio and raised planters. The middle unit, 1354, has a private deck and garden.

The gardens for both units are bordered by a 6½-foot shingled wall for maximum privacy, and each garden has a custom red cedar entry gate and trellis. The wide, level paver-stone driveway provides a common area that has the feel of a courtyard.

Says owner Graham, "The landscaping and site plan shows the influence and careful thought of David Trachtenberg."