



The gallery/guest house behind the main house serves as Brian Andreas' art studio. A louvered sunshade protects artwork from being damaged by direct light.



EASY BREEZY

Michelle Kaufmann collaborated with an artistic family of four to create a low-impact home that's high on style.

BY JANE ELLISON

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The home of Ellen Rockne and Brian Andreas is definitely the new kid on the block. Located in a Santa Barbara neighborhood known for its Spanish style architecture—white stucco arches and terracotta-tiled roofs—the house is a series of wooden boxes perforated by rectangular windows. Both the home and its owners are unconventional additions to the street, yet the openness of both offers a warm welcome to neighbors who watched in nervous silence as the gigantic modules were hoisted into place in 2007.

In a city that prides itself on its majestic natural beauty and idyllic weather, architect Michelle Kaufmann's Sunset BreezeHouse is the perfect ambassador for modern prefab housing. The second in what is now a series of six prefab home concepts, the BreezeHouse was created in collaboration with *Sunset* magazine as a follow-up to Kaufmann's immensely popular GlideHouse. Designed to be eco-friendly and easily customized around a central courtyard (aptly named the BreezeSpace), the design debuted around the same time that Rockne and Andreas were exploring the idea of putting a prefab house on their newly purchased property.

"I was perusing the website *fabprefab.com* and discovered the GlideHouse," explains Rockne. The couple's early conversations with Kaufmann coincided with the first public showing of the BreezeHouse in Menlo Park. "We were so in love with it that

we wrote a check the same day we toured it," says Andreas, who relocated from Decorah, Iowa in 2002 with Rockne and their two sons—Gabe, 20, and Matthew, 16. They chose Santa Barbara, not only for its good weather but also because

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LEFT: The library is furnished with modern classics from Design Within Reach and is accented by Andreas' paintings. ABOVE RIGHT: Glass accordion doors allow the dining room to extend into the BreezeSpace.



it was a city they were familiar with, having lived in Los Angeles some years ago. After purchasing property in the "perfect neighborhood," the couple removed a nondescript single-story home that didn't meet their needs. The nearly flat lot proved ideal for a prefab home.

Andreas, a painter, sculptor and writer, and Rockne, a singer-songwriter, were enchanted with the idea of creating a modern salon for their friends and family. Knowing they wanted enough space to live, entertain and work from home, the couple was also committed to the idea of building a green house, which is partly what drew them to Michelle Kaufmann Designs. An early proponent of sustainable

The kitchen island, which was customized with a limestone countertop, is spacious enough to serve as both a prep area and gathering spot during the family's frequent dinner parties.

residential design, Kaufmann relies on five "eco principles"—smart design, eco-friendly materials, energy efficiency, water conservation and a healthy environment—to guide the design of each of her homes. "This is a very interesting time, in which we are beginning to understand limits and the need to respect our environment. It's pretty exciting," says Kaufmann, whose mkSolaire model comes direct from her company's Washington state factory with solar panels embedded into the roof.

"We altered some aspects of the BreezeHouse—deciding, for example, to replace the butterfly-shaped roof with a flat roof to match the style of the local 1920s homes that also have a central courtyard,"



All of Kaufmann's designs utilize such eco-friendly elements as LED lighting, low-flow bath fixtures, no-VOC paints and concrete countertops containing recycled porcelain and fly ash.



Andreas explains. The Andreas/Rockne home fell just outside both the district boundaries of the architectural review board and the purview of the local historic landmarks commission. "We didn't have to submit for design review, but we had to complete an exhaustive review for the planning-and-zoning department, which turned out to be an excellent experience," says Andreas. "The city appreciates the low impact of prefab construction: A shortened construction schedule reduces the impact on neighborhoods and traffic flow."

Assured that they'd made the right choice in terms of sustainability, the couple then turned their focus to adapting the standard BreezeHouse layout to suit their lifestyle. Performance space was important to Rockne, who wanted an area that could

BELOW: A sunshade over the courtyard connects the house to the studio and offers a cool spot for alfresco dining. BOTTOM: Kaufmann (left) collaborated directly with Rockne and Andreas.



accommodate a large number of guests, so the rear courtyard and backyard were transformed into an amphitheater with the help of local landscape design firm Grace Design Associates. Andreas wanted a separate art studio/guest house with ample gallery space for his paintings. "This house merged the efficiency of preconfigured houses with the flexibility of custom choices in materials and layouts to fit the family's needs," Kaufmann says.

To make room for their sons, the couple added a second story to the original design, upping the house's area to 3,643 square feet. "Sometimes I feel guilty about having a home so large, but then I remember that there's not a single room that isn't used," says Rockne. "We enjoy having lots of friends around, so it was very important to us



to have large gathering spaces," Andreas adds. "The living room, kitchen and outdoor courtyard allow guests to gravitate to where they're most comfortable without removing themselves from the action."

The BreezeSpace is the family's favorite spot for reading, watching movies or just sitting around. Every part of the home relates to the outdoors, where views of the tall trees on nearby properties can be enjoyed. For Andreas and son Matthew—the cooks in the family—the favorite space is the kitchen, with its large multifunctional center island. "You know how everyone loves to congregate in the kitchen?" Andreas says. "Well, this kitchen can accommodate a large crowd."

The backyard was given a complete overhaul by local landscape designer Margaret Grace, who chose plants and ground cover that would help conserve water.

As for challenges, the couple cites only the delay in setting up the house on-site. Since it was the local contractors' first time working with a prefab installation, it took them twice as long as the expected six weeks. "The hardest part was having to wait to move into our new home until the contractors completed their work," Andreas admits. "Given that we are instant-gratification people, we would try to minimize the on-site work next time. But would we purchase another prefab home? Absolutely!"

In fact, the couple has just decided to build another prefab in Iowa for Rockne's parents, and true to form, they are first in line to try out Kaufmann's latest design, the pitched-roof mkHearth. ■