DAVIDS/KILLORY

Towers are common in San Diego, ranging from architect Bertram Goodhue's ornate circa-1915 Spanish Colonial spire in Balboa Park to the cylindrical cupolas of several Queen Anne Victorians. Architects Rene Davids and Christine Killory took the tower to a new level of abstraction, jolting their sleepy San Diego neighborhood wide awake with this library addition to their 1930s stucco bungalow.

Davids and Killory have a love/hate thing going with Southern California, where movies, television, and assorted beach phenomena long ago replaced books as the most significant cultural forces. Educated in England, they came to San Diego in 1987 because it was a place where young, progressive architects could make a mark in a rapidly growing city.

Dedicated to architecture as an intellectual pursuit that requires constant study, the architects played up their new library as a highly visible icon for literacy along their conservative, palm-lined street.



The library tower gave a radical facelift to Davids and Killory's traditional stucco bungalow. Joan Vanderschuit



A ladder leads from the second level of the library to rooftop deck. Joan Vanderschuit



Black marble covers the observatory cube, a place for reading, writing letters, watching cars, and people. Joan Vanderschuit

In San Diego, old Spanish-flavored bungalows, like theirs was before its facelift, are often remodeled in pseudo-Mediterranean styles intended to blend in. Often, however, these makeovers are poorly proportioned and suffer from a lack of proper detailing.

Davids and Killory opted for a radical departure, altering their home's identity with a new stucco- and marble-clad tower and a salmon-colored front wall that encloses the original porch and camouflages the old house. Rectilinear forms generate a tension reminiscent of abstract expressionist paintings by Mondrian or Kandinsky.

The tower is a two-story box, augmented by cantilevered shading devices, a projecting second-level reading room, and a diagonal stair that connects the second story with a rooftop observatory. Rows of small, rectangular openings punch through the sides of the tower, admitting natural light, adding fine-grained scale, helping to organize the exterior. A vertical slit window and skylight bisect the top of the tower, aligning with the interior stairs, providing light that draws visitors up through the tower.

Inside, the architects selected solid, basic materials and handled them with care. Reading room walls are paneled with basswood, neatly attached with countersunk screws, the holes covered with plugs of exotic African padouk wood. A single round steel column at the center of the tower is painted red, which adds a splash of color and accentuates its importance as a