



An ordained Zen Buddhist priest, Paul Discoe studied art history and philosophy as an undergraduate in the United States and Buddhist temple design and construction in Japan. He became a student of Suzuki Roshi at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center in California, and, after four years, Suzuki sent him to Japan to train under a traditional master builder for five years. Upon returning, Discoe founded Joinery Structures in 1988. His projects include the Kojin-an Zen temple in Oakland for Akiba Sensei, the founder's hall and kitchen at Tassajara, the Lindesfarne guesthouse and Wheelwright Center, and the abbot's house at Green Gulch, as well as several prestigious homes and projects internationally. His current project is a system of prefabricated building parts, made of salvaged and recycled materials, that can be assembled in many forms.

The featured Zen architecture of Paul Discoe:

- Tassajara Zen Mountain Center
- Green Gulch Farm
- City Center
- Felsentor
- Kojin-an-Zen Temple
- Occidental Road House
- Wall Road House
- Northern California Guesthouse
- Woodside Home and Garden Complex
- Manhattan Loft
- Rikyu Kit of Parts
- Cardboard Zendo

Alexandra Quinn is a freelance arts management consultant, writer, and editor living in San Francisco. Her publications include *Candy Story*, translated from the French novel by Marie Redonnet.

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ZEN ARCHITECTURE  
*The Building Process as Practice*

DISCOE

PAUL DISCOE  
with  
Alexandra Quinn



ZEN  
ARCHITECTURE  
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Photographs by Roslyn Banish

In *Zen Architecture: The Building Process as Practice*, Paul Discoe shares the result of over forty years of study, design, building, and Zen Buddhist practice. From simple hand sketches to the completion of Zen temples, residential projects, grand estates, and modular structures, this book illustrates a singular vision influenced by traditional Japanese woodworking, contemporary life, and Buddhism. With a commitment to the environment and a deep respect for wood, his primary building material, Paul Discoe's work incorporates sustainable practices and recycled materials. Experience the architectural process as an embodiment of Zen practice through skillful craftsmanship, ancient woodworking techniques, and the integration of contemporary engineering and living standards.





## WOODSIDE HOME AND GARDEN COMPLEX

Indoor plumbing was not available in pre-Meiji Japan, but most houses had a water source nearby. A covered walkway, or wataridoko, is used in formal buildings in Japan, where it rains so much, and you don't want to get your fancy robes wet. Here it serves the purpose of tying the buildings together but keeping each one on a smaller scale. Houses on flat land had a well and then a basin or jar to store the water. I used this concept here to create a feature where water could be accessed from inside and outside.



## San Francisco Zen Center



SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER, FOUNDED IN 1962 by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi (1904–1971) and his American students, is one of the largest Buddhist *sanghas* (communities) outside of Asia. Zen Center operates three practice places in northern California: Tassajara Zen Mountain Center at the south end of Carmel Valley, Green Gulch Farm on the edge of the Pacific Ocean in western Marin County, and City Center in San Francisco. Buddhist practice at Zen Center is expressed through the Soto Zen tradition established by Dōgen Zenji in thirteenth-century Japan, which was brought to the West by Suzuki Roshi and other teachers.

I arrived at Tassajara in the mid-1960s, shortly after Zen Center purchased the property. I had recently sold my possessions, including my house, my truck, and all of my household belongings. With a background in Western construction and a desire to learn more, I was on my way to Japan to study traditional Japanese woodworking. I had no contacts in Japan, nor did I have any knowledge of the Japanese language.

It was my intention to stay at Tassajara for a three-day weekend before leaving for Asia. Instead, I stayed a part of the Zen Center community for many years, including the five years I spent in Japan studying traditional temple building. During my years at Zen Center, I was involved in a number of building projects at Tassajara, Green Gulch Farm, and City Center.

All the Zen Center projects described in this book were undertaken as a group effort with the participation of many people, including members of the Zen Center sangha as well as volunteers from the lay community.

The kai sando is used without its dividing screen, making it one room. When you open the front door, Suzuki Roshi is looking at you. One thing Tassajara has in abundance is beautiful rock; we used one of them for the front step. Suzuki Roshi pointed out that rocks are sentient beings, but their respiration rate is simply a lot slower than ours.



## WOODSIDE HOME AND GARDEN COMPLEX

ABOVE The building housing the kitchen also includes the great room—a thirty-six-foot-square room that is open on three sides. The floor is two feet above the waterline with a five-foot-wide engawa (deck) cantilevered over the pond. The challenge here was to support the large roof without sheer walls on three sides. Once again, our Shin Buddhist engineer's creativity led to the solution. We needed a basement for all the utilities, and by making it just a little deeper, we could vertically cantilever the post out of the basement and through the floor to the keta above. Port Orford cedar was not strong enough at 8 x 8 inches, so we had to use glue-lams, which we veneered with half-inch-thick Port Orford cedar boards. The cupola on the far end of the roof is both a clerestory light source and an equipment loft.



BELOW Traditionally, a building for this purpose would have a simple roof, a high gable, and a single-story unadorned façade. All the material for daily life would be hand carried through a slightly oversized door. In the modern version, the garage doors in the wall below lead to the basement, which is used for supply deliveries.