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To design their home in Laguna Beach, California, entrepreneurs Sarah and Thom McElroy enlisted Steven Ehrlich and Takashi Yanai of Ehrlich Architects. A minimalist walkway of marble-slab steps leads to the entrance of the house, portions of which are clad in teak; the landscape was devised by Sarah McElroy in collaboration with Larry Steinle. For details see Sources.

A chance meeting with architect Steven Ehrlich led
one couple to finally build their dream house—a modernist
temple to indoor-outdoor living in Southern California

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Perhaps Roy Lichtenstein

and *Architectural Digest* can share credit for the fortuitous encounter that resulted in the creation of Sarah and Thom McElroy's striking home in Laguna Beach, California. Several years ago, the pair was en route to an exhibition of the Pop master's prints at the Palm Springs Art Museum when they wandered into a concurrent show on Los Angeles architect Steven Ehrlich. The name and his work instantly triggered a memory. It was Ehrlich who had crafted the contemporary residence featured on *AD*'s October 1993 cover—a story that made quite an impression on the McElroys at the time.

"We loved that house's clean lines, big windows, and relaxed vibe," recalls Thom, a cofounder of the surf- and skatewear company Volcom. (He devised the brand's distinctive logo.) "We cut out the article thinking that if we could ever build our own place, we'd have Steven Ehrlich design it."

Fast-forward to the architect's exhibition in Palm Springs. It was a weekday morning, and the museum's galleries were lightly populated. As the couple surveyed the displays—which



included a model of the house that had so bewitched them—they heard two men speaking knowingly of the work, one addressing the other as Steven. Could it be? It was. Sarah and Thom introduced themselves to Ehrlich, and a convivial lunch followed, with a parting promise that they would one day collaborate on a house.

“People tell me all the time that they have a project they want me to work on, but the chances that it ever leads to anything are one in a thousand,” the architect says. “This was that rare time.”

The McElroys, who met when they were both graphic-design students, always had a clear vision of the ideal home for themselves and their two (now grown) sons, Colin and Tucker. “We knew we wanted a house with an open plan, lots of glass, and a true indoor-outdoor connection,” says Sarah. But to realize that vision they needed time and resources, both of which fell into place in 2005. “The day Volcom went public was the day we retired,” Thom says.

Of course, the McElroys’ definition of retirement—a mix of athletic, social, and philanthropic pursuits—required a suitable setting, and they eventually found the perfect spot on a half-

acre wedge-shaped lot in a private oceanfront community. “The challenge was how to get the most out of this property, and that’s where Steven really delivered,” Sarah says.

Ehrlich and Takashi Yanai, the firm’s principal in charge of residential projects, orchestrated a scheme that defers to both the magnificent site and the community’s construction restrictions, which limit building heights to 11 feet in order to preserve the views of the Pacific for all. First, the architects excavated the plot, tucking the garage, mechanical rooms, and gym belowground. They then built the main level as a low-slung modernist villa, with walls of glass that frame swaths of sea and sky. A flat roof extending in broad overhangs—Yanai refers to it as a “megaplane”—underscores the compressed horizontality of the structure. →

Above: A limestone fireplace wall anchors the living area; the floors are marble, the wood side table is from VivaTerra, the Éric Jourdan console and Pascal Mourgue table lamps are from Ligne Roset, and the wall paint is a Benjamin Moore light gray. **Opposite, from top:** The living area’s Roche Bobois sectional sofa mingles with vintage Milo Baughman chairs upholstered in an S. Harris fabric; the faux-bois stools and metal-and-glass tables are all from Cantoni, and the throw pillows are covered in Kravet fabrics. The McElroys on the beach near their home.



The 7,800-square-foot house is organized around a central open-air courtyard, with the living and dining areas and master suite situated along the ocean-facing side to capture the best views. Three additional bedrooms—each one accessible from an interior hallway and from the courtyard, via stepping-stones across a koi pond—enjoy oblique ocean vistas, even from the deepest part of the lot. Throughout the home, Ehrlich notes, massive glass pocket doors can be pulled aside to give the McElroys a feeling of “basically living on a protected, shaded lanai.” Marble floors continue from the primary entertaining spaces through to the courtyard, further erasing the boundaries between indoors and out.

The rectilinear structure and its restrained materials palette of pale stone and stucco create a soothing backdrop for the decor, which Sarah conceived. “To tie the house to the site, I chose components that represent earth and water,” she explains, referring to the preponderance of limestone, onyx, and marble, as well as fabrics with undulating textures and patterns. “And I kept the

pieces low and understated to preserve sight lines and the sense of openness.” Strategic shots of bright green—her favorite color—energize the largely neutral rooms, as do vibrant artworks, including a complete portfolio of Andy Warhol’s “Myths” series.

Good fortune and good taste have given the McElroys not just a dream home but a dream life. “We’re at the beach surfing and swimming all day, then it’s time for beers in the Jacuzzi,” Thom says contentedly. “This is the best party house in Laguna.” □

Above: A 1,000-gallon aquarium and Varenna by Poliform cabinetry distinguish the dining area, where ceiling lights by Jordi Vilardell for Vibia are grouped in a sculptural installation; the Delo Lindo dining table and Emmanuel Dietrich chairs are from Ligne Roset. **Opposite, from top:** The family room features a rug and a Michel Ducaroy–designed sectional sofa, both from Ligne Roset; the photograph of Marilyn Monroe is by Lawrence Schiller. In the kitchen, a wall and counters of pale onyx are complemented by more Varenna by Poliform cabinetry; the barstools are by Roche Bobois, the ovens, cooktop, and warming drawer are all by Miele, and the sink fittings are by Dornbracht.







The home's central courtyard has a suite of furniture by Ramón Esteve for Gandiabrasco and sconces by Louis Poulsen. **Right, from top:** Tammie, the couple's Boston terrier, stands guard in the backyard; the pool cabana is outfitted with more Gandiabrasco furniture and curtains of a Sunbrella fabric. The pool is lined with glass-mosaic tile and bordered by marble coping.





Above: The marble-clad master bath, which includes a Poliform vanity with a Caesarstone top, adjoins an outdoor shower with Dornbracht fittings. **Right:** A painting by Wolfgang Bloch hangs in the master bedroom, whose window wall slides open to merge the space with the landscape beyond; the beds are by Roche Bobois, and the coverlets and shams are by Ann Gish.

