

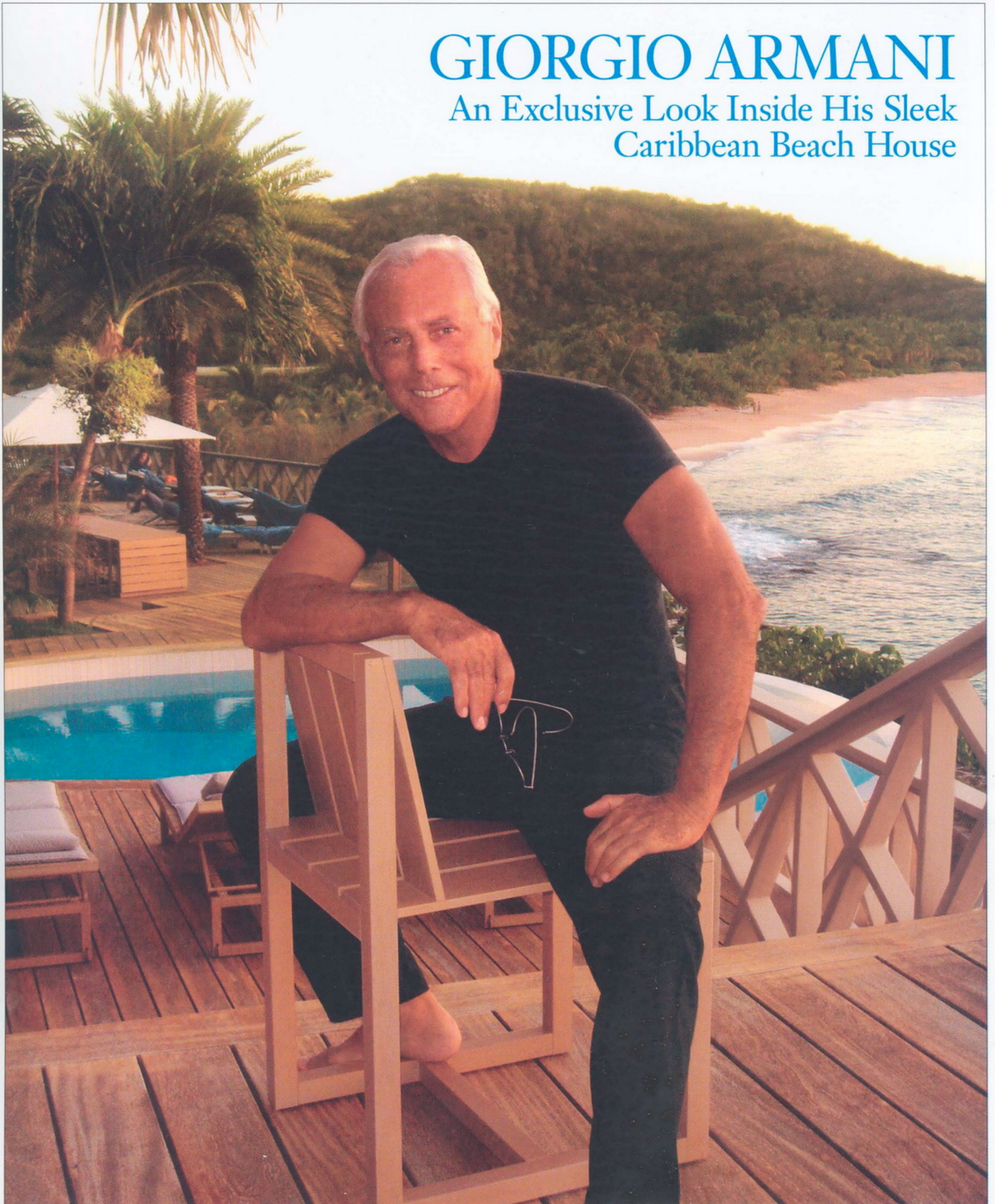
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

NOVEMBER 2006

GIORGIO ARMANI

An Exclusive Look Inside His Sleek
Caribbean Beach House



A Not-So-Simple Plan

BASED ON A PINWHEEL, A CONTEMPORARY PALO ALTO RESIDENCE OFFERS A UNIQUE OUTLOOK ON CALIFORNIA LIVING

Architecture by Steven Ehrlich Architects /Interior Design by Mike Witt
Text by Therese Bissell/Photography by Matthew Millman



Biomorphic, cast-resin modern it isn't," Asher Waldfogel says of his residence, stating not so much the obvious (its geometrically precise massing is vastly divergent from the computer-modeled free-form spaces and surfaces of trendy "blob" architecture) as his allowance for the traditional design mien of the neighbor-

hood in which it was just built.

Waldfogel, a technology industry entrepreneur, and his wife, Helyn MacLean, had known since attending school in Massachusetts—where they were exposed to architecture of the Bauhaus school—that someday they would have a modernist house: "It was," he says, "never a question." They moved to Palo Alto, California,

The massing of Asher Waldfogel and Helyn MacLean's Palo Alto, California, residence "is complex and utilizes taut horizontal and vertical planes, clad in charcoal-gray Rheinzink, that extend beyond the building envelope, seamlessly moving from interior to exterior," explains architect Steven Ehrlich. ABOVE: The front entrance. OPPOSITE: Glass bridges on the first and second floors link the wings of the house, which was planned as a pinwheel.



“In the juxtaposition of
a late-19th-century rug
and a Nakashima bench
and Kjaerholm chairs in
the living room, you see a
dialogue on modernism.”

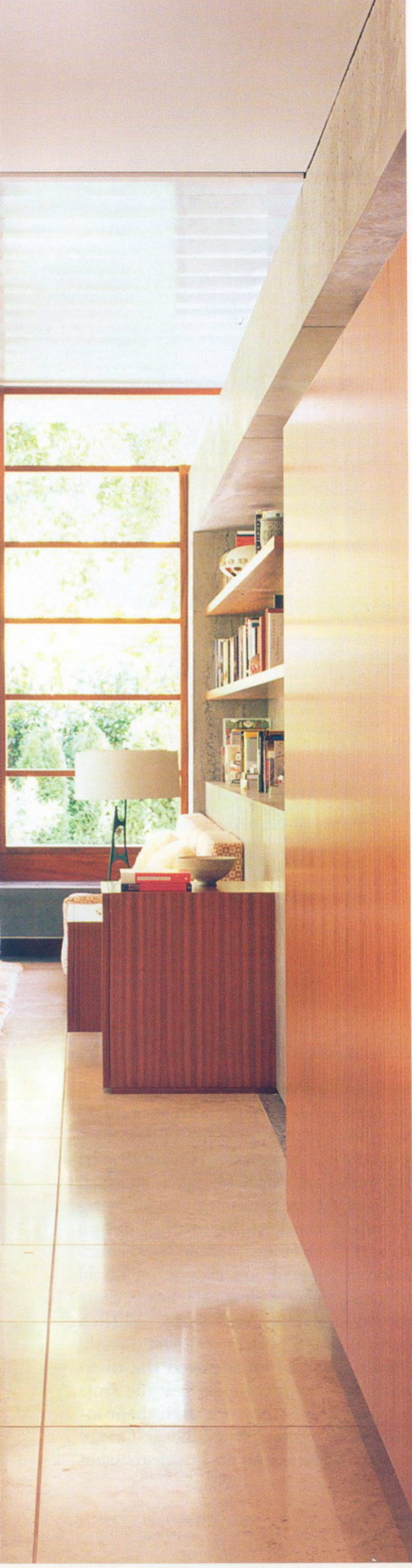


ABOVE: Mike Witt selected furniture, including a George Nakashima bench and a Claude Conover stool in the living room, to serve as “pleasant interruptions to the rigid edges and surfaces” of the house. Above the Edward Wormley sofa hangs Robert Motherwell’s 1972 oil *84A*; a 2002 sculpture by Antony Gormley is on the hearth. RIGHT: Running past the dining room, a poured-in-place-concrete wall forms “the spine of the house,” says Ehrlich.









"Alternately grand and intimate, the interior spaces wrap around to frame a series of varied perspectives," remarks the architect. **LEFT:** The kitchen can be separated from the family room by a pocket door. Cabinets from Bulthaup. **BELOW:** Besides serving as the horizontal axis of the house, the concrete wall—roughly three feet thick—also provides space, in the family room, for built-in seating and display areas for the couple's collection of ceramics.



a university town that, Waldfogel comments, had been "fairly receptive" to the new architecture of the 1950s and 1960s. "But there's a limit to what you can do in the name of modernism in older communities. For ourselves, we had to build in this idiom. For the city, it had to be contextual."

California modern. Contextual. The portfolio of Culver City-based Steven Ehrlich Architects, studded with allusions to West Coast demigods R. M. Schindler and Richard Neutra (the firm had done a sensitive addition to a Neutra house in Santa Monica nearly a decade ago), aptly found its way to the couple. "The ideas of both architects ebb and flow in my work," Ehrlich says. "Schindler had more interest in exploring materiality is-

sues, while Neutra focused on indoor-outdoor relationships. I like to think that, as with theirs, my buildings follow a clear logic."

The 8,000-square-foot house that Ehrlich designed for Waldfogel and MacLean radiates outward in a pinwheel plan, opening on all sides and graciously breaking down in scale as it approaches the street. Two parallel wings with end quadrants—a motor court, an entrance/dining court, a large garden off the living room and a pool terrace extending from the kitchen and family room—fulfill the desire of the couple, who have a young daughter, for discrete formal and informal living zones. The plan is highlighted by interior spaces that engage the landscape through the architect's

Rheinzink flat roofs—the “spatial connective tissue”—cantilever from the façades and become softly reflective ceilings in the interior.



ABOVE: In the master bedroom, as throughout, Ehrlich used mitered-glass corners and large sliding windows “to extend internal space visually and physically.” RIGHT: Landscape architect Willett Moss notes that he was “inspired by and bound to the architecture: The pool and garden experiences are inseparable from those of the building.” Janus et Cie rattan lounge chairs. OPPOSITE BELOW: The first-floor plan. Four distinct courtyards radiate from the pinwheel.



use of pocketing glass doors, mitered-glass corners (a Schindler device that emphasizes the pinwheel concept), metal overhangs of various depths and limestone floors that continue from inside out.

The north (living room, study) and south (kitchen, family room) wings are linked by a translucent glass bridge situated between the double-height dining room and a dynamic stainless-steel stair, which leads to a finished, light-filled basement. Overhead, the stair and another glass bridge

separate the master suite, and a second study, from three bedrooms and baths. The upper-level rooms are encased in two white-stucco boxes that appear to float above blocks of mahogany below; the horizontality of the wood, especially where it frames and articulates several series of glass planes, acts to relieve the complexity of the house’s massing. Rheinzink flat roofs—the “spatial connective tissue,” in Ehrlich’s terms—cantilever from the façades and become softly reflective ceilings in the interior.

Aspinelike, poured-in-place-concrete wall that is first seen flanking the front door runs perpendicular (north-south) to the wings, bisecting and organizing the circulation of the residence. As well as providing space for built-in seating and cabinetry, the concrete axial wall, with its platforms, perforations and shelving, makes generous display areas for art and objects. Waldfogel saw the concrete itself as “structural mud—a nice reference to the California adobe.” Noting that it is composed

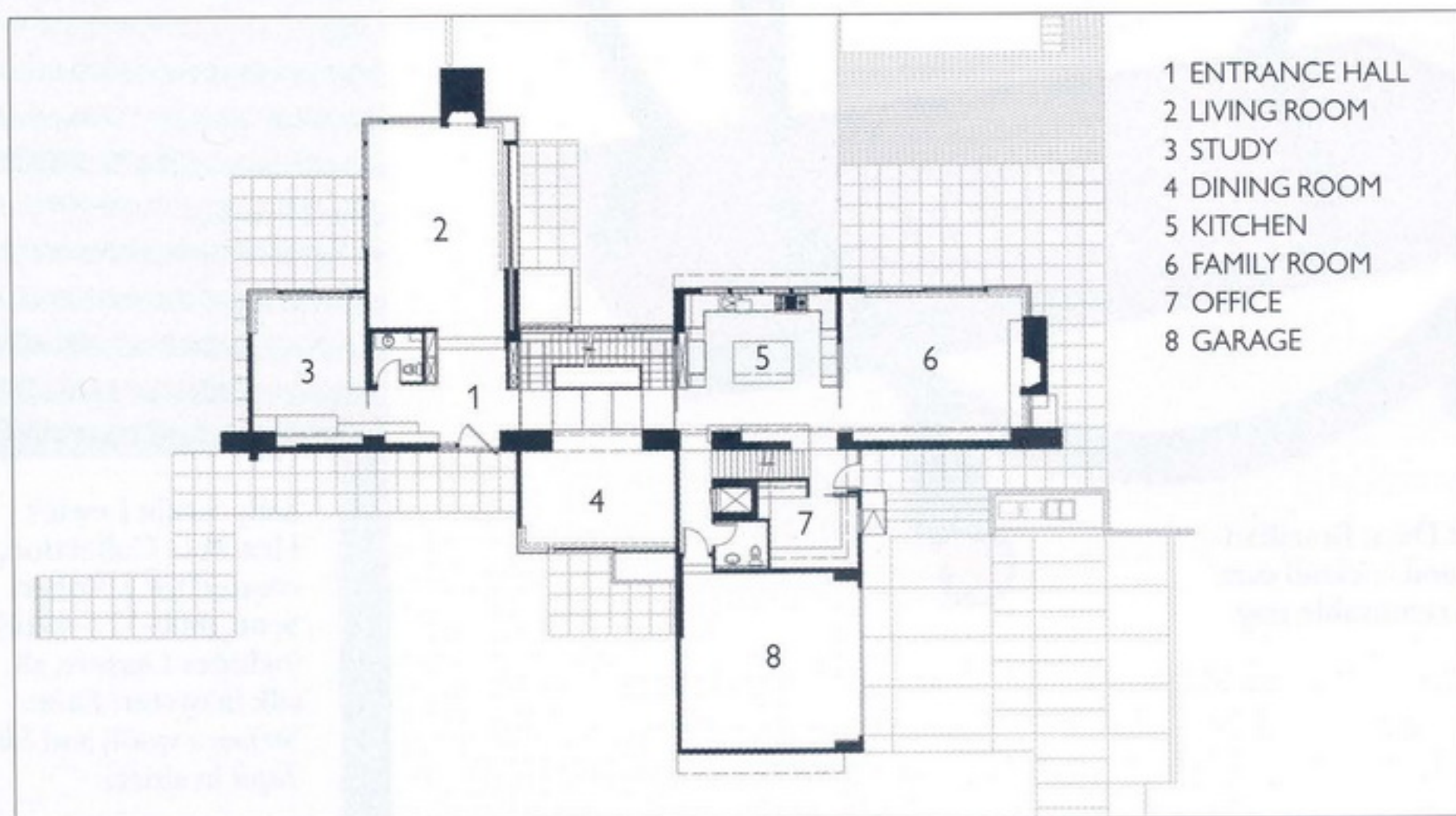
of sand, he says: “Building in Silicon Valley with silica always struck me as appropriate.”

Waldfogel reveals that he and MacLean spent so much time studying and drawing the building during design and construction, they “anticipated how everything would play against each other, every detail, every seam.” Ehrlich and project architect Takashi Yanai encouraged the owners’ involvement; at the same time they prepared them for certain inevitabilities. “One of the big points I made to Asher



in particular was that there are aspects of materiality that you can't control fully, whether it's the liquid-stone nature of the concrete pour or the expression of the grain in mahogany," Ehrlich says. "Even the Rheinzink is a natural, weathering surface. Both he and Helyn came to appreciate that the materials, in their variations, have an unpredictable kind of beauty."

MacLean and Waldfogel are collectors who had long been clients (acquiring largely American ceramics and furni-
continued on page 261



COURTESY STEVEN EHRLICH ARCHITECTS

BREATHING LESSONS

continued from page 190

homage to human toolmaking, the other to primal muscle power.

The antique-chestnut paneling—made of wood salvaged from a barn—was, in this context, an inspiration. “We found the beams in the collection of a midwestern restorationist,” Sills explains. “and he remilled them to our drawings.” The Ionic columns carved into the paneling “are a nod to the kind of prestigious

“If you look at the past with a fresh but well-educated eye, it clarifies your sense of the present,” Sills says.

woodwork you would expect here,” he adds, “but we bleached the wood and preserved the wormholes and the rust stains from old nails. Our client was as passionate about the craftsmanship involved as we were, and he followed its progress on a computer.”

A digital image, however, is like a literal translation: useful but flat. One can only appreciate the poetics of the living room by crossing its threshold. Sills and Huniford skim-coated the walls with gossamer—tissue paper squares applied directly to the wet paint (a pale honeydew green) that wrinkled as they dried—and hung the windows with two layers of unlined taffeta to heighten the translucence. The effect, in Sills’s words, is “magically watery and ethereal.” A custom needlepoint rug in Hermès orange, designed by the firm, French alabaster lanterns and a serene, architectural abstraction by Robert Mangold contribute to the glow.

“The volume and light are so dramatic,” Sills says, “that we made them our focal point. The décor alludes to the museum streetscape below—an American fantasy of 19th-century Paris—but reimagined in a timeless way. Most of the furnishings are antique, although we chose them for their graphic simplicity. We wanted the endow the room with a richness of texture without making it precious.”

“What is most precious to me,” their client says, “is the combination of beauty and comfort with a feeling of home.” □

A NOT-SO-SIMPLE PLAN

continued from page 199

ture) of Mike Witt’s 20th-century decorative and fine-arts business in Boston. After having started, without success, with two other West Coast interior designers, the couple asked Witt, who had never taken on an entire residence, to resolve the furnishing of their house. “Going in, the pressure was enormous,” he admits. “But because of our previous explorations together, they knew that my solution wasn’t going to be a Mies daybed and Le Corbusier lounge chairs. We were all after something far more thoughtful, far less automatic.

“Integral to my design plan were our ongoing discussions about what modernism is: about what it means for an object to be, or be perceived as, modern. In the juxtaposition of a late-19th-century tie-back rug and a Nakashima bench and Kjaerholm chairs in the living room alone, you see a dialogue on modernism—which concludes that objects of integrity, no matter what century they’re from, can be congruous. The onus on me was, here’s a structure that could exist in the world as a beautiful thing without anything in it. Every piece I brought in had to address

The house radiates outward in a pinwheel plan, opening on all sides and graciously breaking down in scale as it approaches the street.

the owners’ day-to-day needs and be personally meaningful to them—as well as add a sensitive layer to the architecture.”

Also complementary to the overall design is the work of Willett Moss, of Conger Moss Guillard Landscape Architecture. “Again,” says Waldfogel, “we didn’t want the spiky yuccas, the clichéd modern plants. Willett developed his own vocabulary, a much more natural, less serious garden plan than you would expect for such a rectilinear building. The landscape exists in and of itself and goes beyond being a response to the architecture. Parts of it, including what is seen from the street, are more traditional than not.” Or, put another way: contextual. □

PROMOTION

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

architecture days

The anticipation is building.

This fall marks the return of Architectural Digest “Architecture Days”—a three-city, three-week celebration of great design.

Stops in New York, Los Angeles and Miami offer rare access to private spaces, lectures by top architects, expert-led tours of notable districts and much more.

For tickets or more information, visit www.ArchitectureDays.com.

NEW YORK CITY

October 9-15, 2006

LOS ANGELES

October 23-29, 2006

MIAMI

November 6-12, 2006