

# dwell

AT HOME IN THE MODERN WORLD

# Indoor Outdoor Living

HOMES THAT BLUR THE BOUNDARIES

SPECIAL PROMOTION / SUMMER 2012  
BROUGHT TO YOU BY  
WESTERN WINDOW SYSTEMS  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH DWELL



western  
window systems  
[westernwindowssystems.com](http://westernwindowssystems.com)



**western**  
window systems  
[westernwindowssystems.com](http://westernwindowssystems.com)



# Endless imagination

excellence

innovation

partnership



## WELCOME TO THIS SPECIAL PROMOTIONAL ISSUE FROM WESTERN WINDOW SYSTEMS AND DWELL

Dear Reader,

Join Dwell and Western Window Systems as we welcome the 2012 summer season by sharing a selection of favorite homes that embrace the out-of-doors by inviting it right in. In this special issue, *Indoor/Outdoor Living*, we feature four homes that each carve out one seamless living space by expertly blurring the boundary between indoors and out.

The modern structure is one that is moved by its environment. One sure sign of this is in beautiful—and intelligently designed—expanses of glass. When we conceived this project with Western Window Systems, we selected some of the finest examples of homes that are sensitive to their surroundings. These transformative spaces can be closed off or left entirely open to the elements. Whether such innovation takes creative shape in a 1,600-square-foot tent-like desert getaway with a corrugated-steel canopy or in a fluid interpretation of traditional Japanese architecture, the homes selected for this special issue are truly designed for indoor/outdoor living.

The Dwell mission has always been to source and tell the stories that inspire new ways to think about your home and the way you live in it. Our partner, Western Window Systems, shares in our passion for design and creates the tools to bring the projects you see here to fruition. Together, we encourage you to expand the horizons of your home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michela O'Connor Abrams". The signature is fluid and cursive.

---

**Michela O'Connor Abrams**  
President  
Dwell Media LLC

# Indoor Outdoor Living

4

## Operation Desert Shed

A canopy is all you need! For this private house and performance venue in the desert near Joshua Tree National Park, Lloyd Russell's ingenious idea was as basic as shelter itself. Built with Western Window Systems product.

**Story by Nate Berg**

**Photos by David Harrison**

**Reprinted from the July/August 2009 issue**

10

## Light Motif

Willful downsizing was never their intention, but Suzanne and Brooks Kelley were so pleased with Gray Organschi Architecture's design for their 1,110-square-foot, faceted and light-filled guest house that they pretty much moved in.

**Story by William Lamb**

**Photos by Mark Mahaney**

**Reprinted from the September 2010 issue**

20

## The Hidden Fortress

Behind imposing charred-cedar walls, the Wabi House hides in plain sight on an average San Diego suburban street. Pass through its gate (if you can find it), and enter a whole world custom-designed to fit Ken and Shino Mori's singular way of life. Built with Western Window Systems product.

**Story by Sam Grawe**

**Photos by Daniel Hennessy**

**Reprinted from the September 2011 issue**

32

## Welcome to the Jungle

On the outskirts of San Salvador, El Salvador, architect José Roberto Paredes designed a ground-level tree house for his family that favors texture over color, letting the jungle surroundings choose the hues.

**Story by Sonja Hall**

**Photos by Paco Pérez**

**Reprinted from the May 2009 issue**

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



Cover photo:  
Daniel Hennessy

dwell



# Operation Desert Shed

**Architect Lloyd Russell's design for this desert getaway passively mitigates the elements with a utilitarian solution, turning a modest modern retreat into a hardy, region-appropriate home.**

The desert is a study in ecological extremes—a place where the elements of nature and climate are inextricably intertwined with every form of life. In the iconic Southern California desert city of Palm Springs, these environmental factors have long been regarded as forces to be reckoned with and conquered in order to maintain a climate-controlled lifestyle. Beyond the golf courses and swimming pools, though, the desert still exists.

Up and away from the posh estates and casinos of greater Palm Springs is Pioneertown, a settlement surrounding a living set for Western movies and cowboy TV shows that was built in the 1940s by Roy Rogers and other Western actors. Hitching posts and old-timey wooden structures still stand here, a facade of an era long past. But the mentality of the cowboy persists in the area's residents. They embrace the land, doing what they

can to adapt to the environment, not the other way around. This principle was important to Jim Austin, a former San Diego surfwear entrepreneur who set out in 2007, with architect Lloyd Russell, to build a new home near Pioneertown that would reflect and embody the idyllic and resilient character of the desert.

"It's a very simple life, so you want it to be pretty simple architecture," says Austin of the two-unit, 1,600-square-foot home completed in 2008. "It doesn't have to be ugly to be simple."

The result is an unapologetically modern house that noticeably diverges from the standard Spanish- and ranch-style homes that dot the desert hills nearby, 4,500 feet above the sea. The house is basically rectangular. Its rusting, corrugated-steel-clad walls alternate with large sliding glass that give the home a rustic feeling, but one that's also very new. Aesthetics were

Story by Nate Berg  
Illustrations by Adam Hayes

The rustic look of surfwear entrepreneur Jim Austin's home both stands out and also conforms with its rough-and-tumble surroundings in Pioneertown, California.

Photos by David Harrison

# Open environment



- ▶ multi-slide door
- ▶ pocket door
- ▶ **bi-fold door**
- ▶ sliding glass door
- ▶ hinge & pivot door
- ▶ window wall



**western**  
window systems  
[westernwindowssystems.com](http://westernwindowssystems.com)

## OFF THE GRID

an important consideration as the home was being designed, but the idea of suitability took precedence.

Austin and Russell wanted to build a space that blended in with its desert surroundings, which meant accommodating the harsh climate, where temperatures climb into the hundreds and dip into the teens, with winds that top 90 miles per hour. So they took a low-tech approach, designing a highly adaptable house where many of the wall spaces can be opened or closed to facilitate heating or cooling. The main element of the passive temperature control is the steel canopy that shelters the house. It's a scaled-down version of the type of shading structure found covering bales of hay on farms, and it provides constant shade for the house and its patio areas, maintaining a relative coolness amid the heat.

"When you're out in the desert, shade is gold. It's the most valuable



asset you have, so to make more shade was such a sound strategy," says Russell. "That really resonated with me, because I didn't want any extra frills. I didn't want it to be complicated, I didn't want it to be expensive, but I wanted it to have that engaging contemporary space."

A musician with an affinity for the Americana of old Western music, Austin frequently hosts friends for concerts, parties, and other events. The house is oriented toward a center courtyard on the ten-acre property, which also holds four rental cabins and a garage that's being converted into a recording studio. All of the buildings on Austin's Rimrock Ranch surround a large open-air barbecue area, but the highlight is the stagelike patio that tucks into a nook next to the main kitchen. A roll-up wall of windows that resembles a garage door opens the kitchen onto the stage, transforming this zone into the soul of the home during parties. As a whole, the building is a very active space, sharply contrasting its passive design.

"I hate the idea of 'form follows function.' Form should transcend. It should do more than just function," says Russell. "Of course the house is going to work. But what extra benefit do you get from arranging it just right?"

Austin wanted his house to act as a canvas for the make-do culture of the area and its cowboy aesthetic. The interior is a compilation of reused materials from an architectural salvage shop, matching the rugged metal shell of the house—a strategy that reduced costs and environmental impact. From the old elementary-school drinking fountain he uses as a bathroom sink to the salvaged machined steel parts that form handles on his cabinets and drawers, Austin takes pride in the new life his home has given to the old things within and around it. He calls it "the ultimate desert structure," both inside and out.

"It's either recycled stuff or stuff that's going to last forever. And to me that's as green as you can get. It's going to be there, you never have to go back and retouch it or fix it," Austin says. "This place is bulletproof." ■



The steel shading structure and massive concrete foundation, not to mention sliding doors by Western Window Systems, help keep the home's temperature a comfortable 70 degrees.

In a climate where highs and lows can vary by 100 degrees, keeping temperatures stable would seem a huge energy drain. But the air-conditioning unit required by county codes still hasn't been turned on.



# modern space exploration



- ▶ multi-slide door
- ▶ pocket door
- ▶ bi-fold door
- ▶ sliding glass door
- ▶ hinge & pivot door
- ▶ window wall



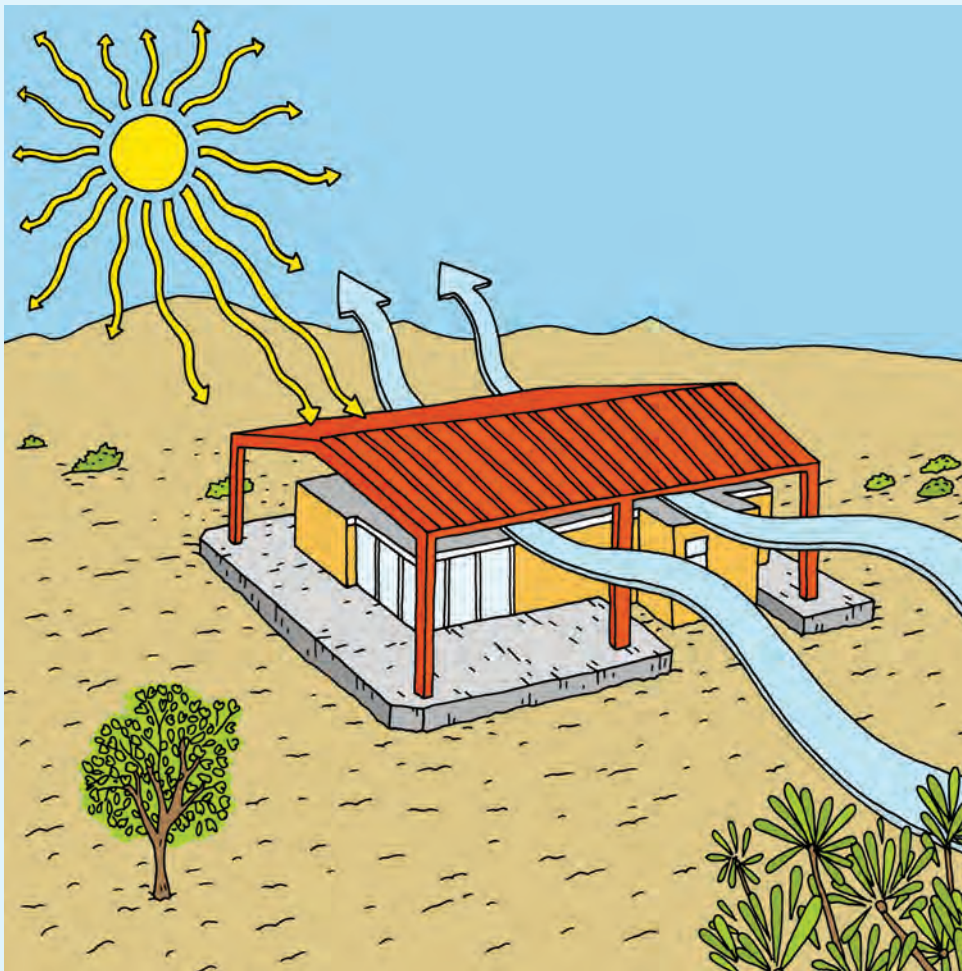
**western**  
window systems  
[westernwindowssystems.com](http://westernwindowssystems.com)

## Made for the Shade

The rusted red corrugated-steel canopy that covers Jim Austin's home at Rimrock Ranch is visually striking in its desert surroundings. The structure, produced by Braemar Building Systems of Colorado, is made from a preengineered build-it-yourself kit using steel from Recla Metals, which sells for \$20,000. Austin and Russell could have spent that \$20,000 on solar panels to power an air conditioner that ran all the time, but instead they opted for the low-tech approach. (County codes require an air conditioner in the house, but it's never been needed.)

Less noticeable but equally important to the regulation of the house's temperature is the massive concrete foundation. Taking 20 truckloads and nine pours, the foundation has a high

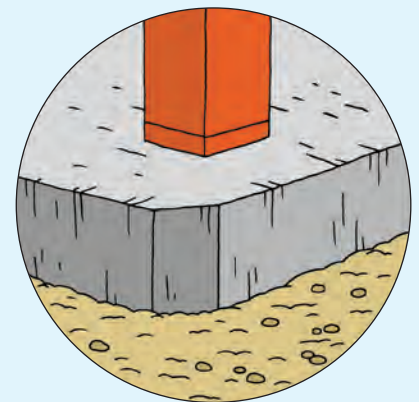
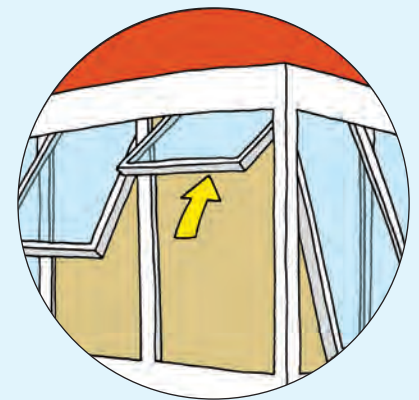
thermal mass. "It has so much mass it doesn't change temperature much. Kind of like the ocean," explains architect Lloyd Russell. The uncovered surface of the foundation also forms the concrete floors for the house, which help keep the rooms cool. Aside from these benefits, the massive foundation was a structural requirement, serving as a counterweight to the steel shading. At its peak, the steel shade has six feet of clearance above the house. This allows the breeze to pass through for additional cooling, but essentially turns the canopy into a kite in the high desert winds. The heavy foundation makes sure the steel roof doesn't fly off on windy days. Whether the climate of the desert is embraced or conquered, it can't be ignored.



## Windproofing

To keep the shade structure from taking flight during high winds, engineers had to make sure the supporting foundation was strong enough to withstand a 100-year windstorm. That translated into windforces of up to 90 miles per hour, requiring 25 tons of concrete to hold it in place.

Architect Lloyd Russell's familiarity with the desert made him particularly careful in selecting appropriate materials for the house. The movable glass windows were chosen because they slide on bars rather than tracks, which would have been quick to jam from the unavoidable desert dust and sand. ■■■



### Click here:

To learn about the corrugated metal used as siding, visit [reclametals.com](http://reclametals.com).

For more on the prefabricated steel shading structure, visit [braemarbuildings.com](http://braemarbuildings.com).

Rethink  
the possibilities



**western**  
window systems  
[westernwindowssystems.com](http://westernwindowssystems.com)



Wood ▶ Aluminum Clad

series 2600 multi-slide stacking & pocketing doors

# Light Motif

--  
 Project:  
 Guilford Cottage  
 Architect:  
 Gray Organschi  
 Architecture  
 Location:  
 Guilford,  
 Connecticut

--

What happens when the guest house becomes home? Retired couple Suzanne and Brooks Kelley found out when a pair of brainy New Haven architects breathed new architectural life into the property they've inhabited for over thirty years.

Suzanne and Brooks Kelley at the back of their 1,100-square-foot guest cottage (above). Sheets of unframed glass fill the spaces between the building's operable windows and the sloping eave of the roof, giving the house, as architect Alan Organschi puts it, "the feel of coming apart at the seams-of surfaces unhinged."



Suzanne and Brooks Kelley didn't set out to make a bold statement. When they hired Lisa Gray and Alan Organschi of Gray Organschi Architecture five years ago, they simply were looking for ways to make better use of their property, a 3.5-acre gently sloping lawn speckled with granite outcroppings and large oak trees overlooking Long Island Sound in Guilford, Connecticut.

Their to-do list consisted of relatively simple, mostly cosmetic changes, starting with the expansion of a small bedroom on the ground floor of their house, a onetime barn and servants' residence for a large mansion that had burned down in the 1920s. Once that was completed, the couple turned their attention to an unfinished space above the garage and a dilapidated clapboard cottage a short walk from the main house toward the shoreline.

"I needed more space for books," says Brooks, a historian, writer, and former archivist and curator of historical manuscripts at Yale University. "I thought, we'll turn the little cottage into a library, maybe have a little desk in there, and we'll take the big attic over the garage and put in an apartment for help when we need a caregiver, or whatever. Then it was Alan who said, 'Why don't you put the library up there and put the extra bedroom in the cottage?' I didn't see any reason not to make the switch."

There was, however, one major problem. The old cottage and its screened-in porch had been ravaged over the decades by carpenter ants. The structure, like

Story by William Lamb  
 Photos by Mark Mahaney







Large sliding windows retract at the corner, opening the living area onto a lawn overlooking Long Island Sound. The deck, fashioned from ipe, was built around one of the property's many granite outcroppings. An earthen roof was planted with the same varieties of sedum that were added to the front of the cottage.

which Organschi described as “rotten and decrepit,” was beyond repair and had to be demolished.

“It was really falling apart, and I think once that building was conceived as coming down, it really opened up the whole way that Suzanne and Brooks were looking at the site,” Organschi says.

Brooks, in particular, seized on the cottage's fate as perhaps his only opportunity to build something striking and modern. With the Kelleys' blessing and encouragement, Gray and Organschi set about designing a new cottage that would in every way be the aesthetic opposite of its predecessor.

The original building was “very traditional and quite introverted,” Organschi says. Its windows were small and poorly positioned, shrouding the interior in darkness while failing to capitalize on stunning views of the lawn and Long Island Sound. The Kelleys, who bought the property in 1981, had invested considerable time and effort landscaping. They wanted the new building to do a better job of engaging with its surroundings.

Gray and Organschi, a married couple whose firm occupies a three-story former brush manufacturing company warehouse in New Haven, were ideally suited to the task. The couple splits their time between New Haven and a house down the hill and around the bend from the Kelleys, so they were intimately familiar with Guilford's largely unspoiled coastal landscape. They also had a longstanding professional relationship with Betsy Burbank, a New Haven interior designer and Suzanne's daughter. The Kelleys didn't even bother with interviewing other architects. ▮



## DWELLINGS

Working with project architect Kyle Bradley, Gray and Organschi started with the simplest of designs—a shed-type structure with a steeply canted single-pitch roof—and, as Organschi puts it, “started blowing it open and filling it with large areas of glass.”

The approximately 1,000-square-foot building opens up, quite literally, to the southwest, where the hilltop meadow gives way to the sound below. Enormous sliding glass doors open at the corner onto a small deck made from Forest Stewardship Council-certified ipe, creating a seamless transition from the combined living and dining space to the yard outside. The architects placed an unobtrusive black steel support column a few steps inside the building, a feat of creative engineering that let them dispense with a corner door jamb, which would have sliced the view in half.

The architects feared that too much sunlight entering the house from only one side would produce an uncomfortable glare as it reflected off the laminated bleached bamboo surfaces on the floors, walls, and ceilings. So they carefully composed additional openings to let in more light while controlling less desirable views. The positioning of a clerestory window that hovers above eye level in the loft sleeping area, for example, neatly edits out an unappealing view of a neighboring house.

A skylight over the loft area was the product of the Kelleys’ wishes and Guilford’s zoning ordinance, which imposes strict height and footprint restrictions on “accessory” buildings. Raising the ceiling created yet another light source while carving out enough headroom to make a second-floor loft space more inhabitable. ▮







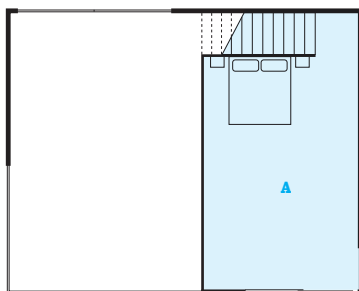
The floors, walls and ceilings are coated in FSC-certified laminated bleached bamboo. The bright, reflective surface amplifies natural light and bathes the interior in a warm glow even when the New England sun isn't cooperating. A lofted sleeping space furnished with a king size Design Within Reach American

Modern bed (this page) was made possible when the architects raised the ceiling to create a triangular skylight. The move carved out enough headroom to make the second-floor space usable, while still keeping the cottage in compliance with strict local zoning rules for "accessory" buildings.

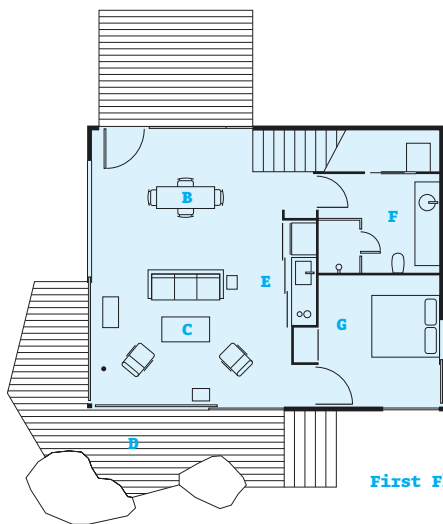


**Guilford Cottage  
Floor Plans**

- A Loft/Bedroom
- B Dining
- C Living
- D Deck
- E Kitchen
- F Bathroom
- G Bedroom



Second Floor



First Floor

“Suzanne really wanted a skylight,” Brooks says. “I think it makes the building. Alan was very enthusiastic about the idea. He punched the whole roof up, like opening a tin can, so from the outside it’s a much more interesting building than it would be if that hadn’t been done.”

“It’s funny,” Organschi says, “because in a way it was kind of an exigency. We had to do it, but we really loved what it did to the space, because otherwise it would have been a simple sloping ceiling, and it would have been a lot less interesting.”

Suzanne and Brooks also insisted that the building be efficient and eco-conscious. Brooks had developed a fascination with sod roofs on a sightseeing trip to Norway and suggested that one be installed atop the cottage. The architects selected the same species of sedum to be planted on the roof and line the walkway. Now the roof mirrors the landscape’s seasonal color changes, from red in the winter to a rich bluish green in the spring and summer.

The Kelleys also requested a ground-source heat pump system to heat and cool the cottage by drawing groundwater, which, Brooks says, hovers around 55 degrees year-round, from beneath the house. The system’s reputation for durability and efficiency appealed to them, so they arranged to have a similar system installed in the main house.

Suzanne and Brooks—healthy and active at 68 and 81, respectively—are a long way from needing the round-the-clock care that the cottage initially was conceived to accommodate. Instead, they sometimes use it for guests, but mostly they make ample use of it themselves, typically eating breakfast and lunch there before retiring to the main house for the evening. Suzanne’s bridge and book clubs meet around the dining table in the cottage instead of in the larger house, whose open layout makes such gatherings problematic.

“There was no place where I could seal us off,” Suzanne says. “So now I use the cottage for game playing, and we can enjoy ourselves and know that we’re not inconveniencing Brooks.”

The building, which is clad with reharvested Atlantic white cedar, is, in a sense, the product of a happy accident, born of necessity when it was determined that the old cottage could not be salvaged. Where the old building was dark, uninviting, and failed to engage with the landscape, the new one is airy and open, giving the impression that the relatively small space is in fact much larger. For Suzanne and Brooks, it has upended three decades of habit and routine, encouraging them to rediscover their environment as new views of the sound and the surrounding lawn, including a formerly unseen bed of daylilies, have opened up before them.

The Kelleys have grown so attached to the cottage that it’s not entirely clear if Brooks is joking when he suggests he and Suzanne may set up camp there permanently if and when the time comes to hire a caregiver. Let the help have the bigger house—Brooks and Suzanne are happy where they are. ■■■



The Kelleys furnished the cottage with help from Suzanne's daughter Betsy Burbank of Betsy Burbank Interiors. Classic modernist icons, such as a Saarinen Womb chair for Knoll, a Herman Miller Eames lounge chair, and an Eileen Grey E1027 side table look at home alongside present-day pieces such as an

Encore sofa (which handily folds down into a sleeping surface) from Room & Board and a Doka rug designed and produced by Stephanie Odegard. The Wohlert pendant lights from Louis Poulsen were designed by Vilhelm Wohlert in 1959, but grouped as such, they appear distinctly contemporary. ❶



**western**  
window systems  
[westernwindowssystems.com](http://westernwindowssystems.com)

A modern living room featuring a large wall of horizontal wood planks. A long, dark fireplace is built into the wall. In the foreground, two black chairs are positioned on a wooden floor. The text "Your view to the world" is overlaid on the wall.

Your view  
to the  
world

excellence

innovation

partnership

# THE

# FORTRESS



# HIDDEN

Story by Sam Grawe  
Photos by Daniel Hennessy

Project: Wabi House  
Architect: Sebastian Mariscal Studio  
Location: Carlsbad, California

If good fences make good neighbors, then Shino and Ken Mori are the best neighbors ever. They invite us past the charred cedar facade of their Southern California home.





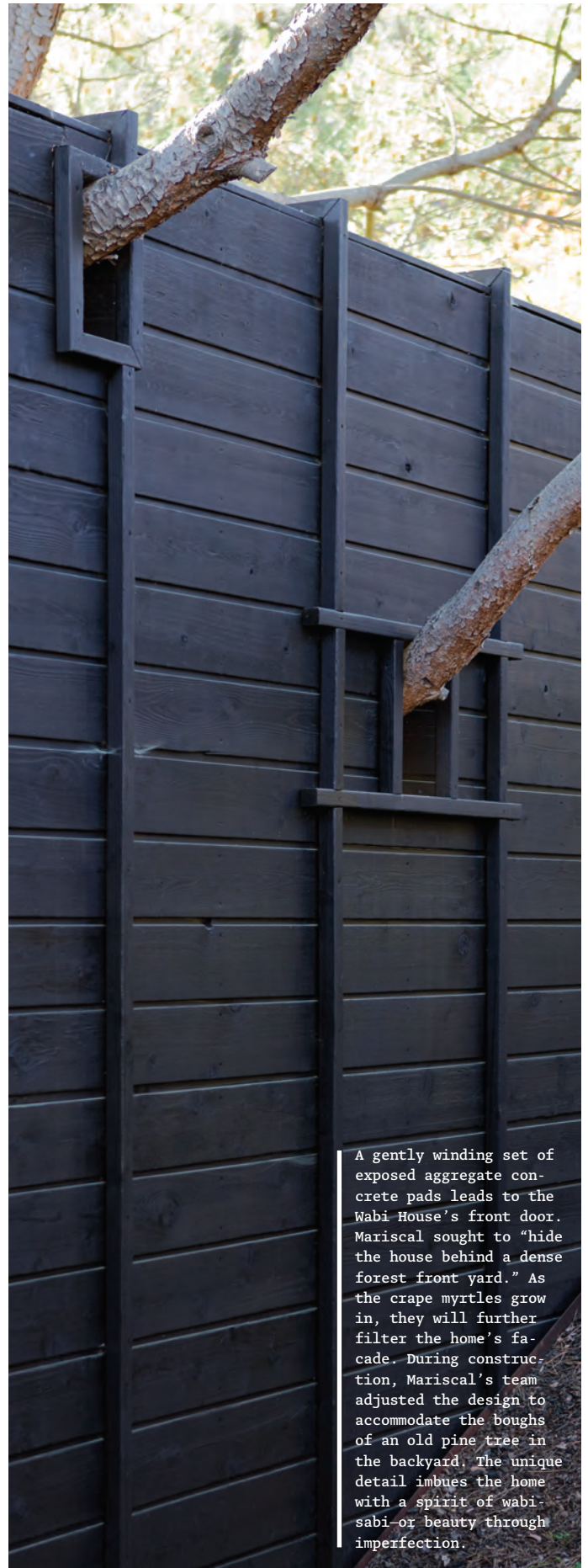
When I ask Shino and Ken Mori what the calligraphy hanging in their entry alcove says, it takes some back-and-forth to arrive at the answer—and even then, I suspect, it is only the closest approximation the English language could offer. “We don’t have much, but friends are welcome,” Ken replies. To which Shino adds, “This house is empty, that’s why you can get smarter.” Smarter? “If you don’t have things, you have to think to accomplish things,” Ken explains. “Basically, you don’t have to have much.”

And the Wabi House, which architect Sebastian Mariscal designed for the couple three years ago, is, on its face, not much. In fact, from the perfectly ordinary suburban street on which it sits, it’s little more than a white cube rising from a black rectangle. But just as the calligraphy encourages the home’s residents to find greater meaning within, so too does the Wabi House itself.

“From the list of what Shino and Ken wanted and didn’t want, I could sense that they were subconsciously requesting an introspective house,” says the bicoastal Mariscal, who has offices in Woodstock, New York, and San Diego, California. “They didn’t want a show-off house; they wanted somewhere they could live forever.” After finding out that the property was subject to neither design restrictions nor neighborhood reviews, Mariscal’s San Diego-based design-build team transformed the typical ceramic-shingle-roofed rancher (after completely deconstructing it) into a one-of-a-kind architectural achievement.

But while the Wabi House fits Shino and Ken’s lives like a perfectly tailored suit, the pair didn’t dictate any of the design. “We wanted Sebastian to come up with his own style and ideas,” says Shino. “We tried not to tell him too much—the minimum.” So after an initial series of discussions about what the home should and shouldn’t be, Mariscal (in Ken’s words) went dark. “It was slightly uncomfortable,” Ken chuckles, “but after a few months he pretty much came back with the house you see today.”

“It’s great when you find a client that challenges you to do something more meaningful,” says Mariscal. “They really trusted me.” And so the Wabi House serves as an object lesson in how the most spectacular creative results are accomplished: through the confident patronage of dedicated, willing clients. ▮



A gently winding set of exposed aggregate concrete pads leads to the Wabi House’s front door. Mariscal sought to “hide the house behind a dense forest front yard.” As the crape myrtles grow in, they will further filter the home’s facade. During construction, Mariscal’s team adjusted the design to accommodate the boughs of an old pine tree in the backyard. The unique detail imbues the home with a spirit of wabi-sabi—or beauty through imperfection.



After entering through the front door, visitors pass over the large koi pond on a cast-concrete footbridge chiseled to look like stone. A perpendicular walkway leads right to the garage and laundry areas (opposite) and left to the small office (this page). With the Western Window Systems doors open, Shino and Ken pull an Eames LCW chair for Herman Miller outside to enjoy the space. The entrance to the living room (opposite, far right) includes a seating area where guests can remove their shoes.

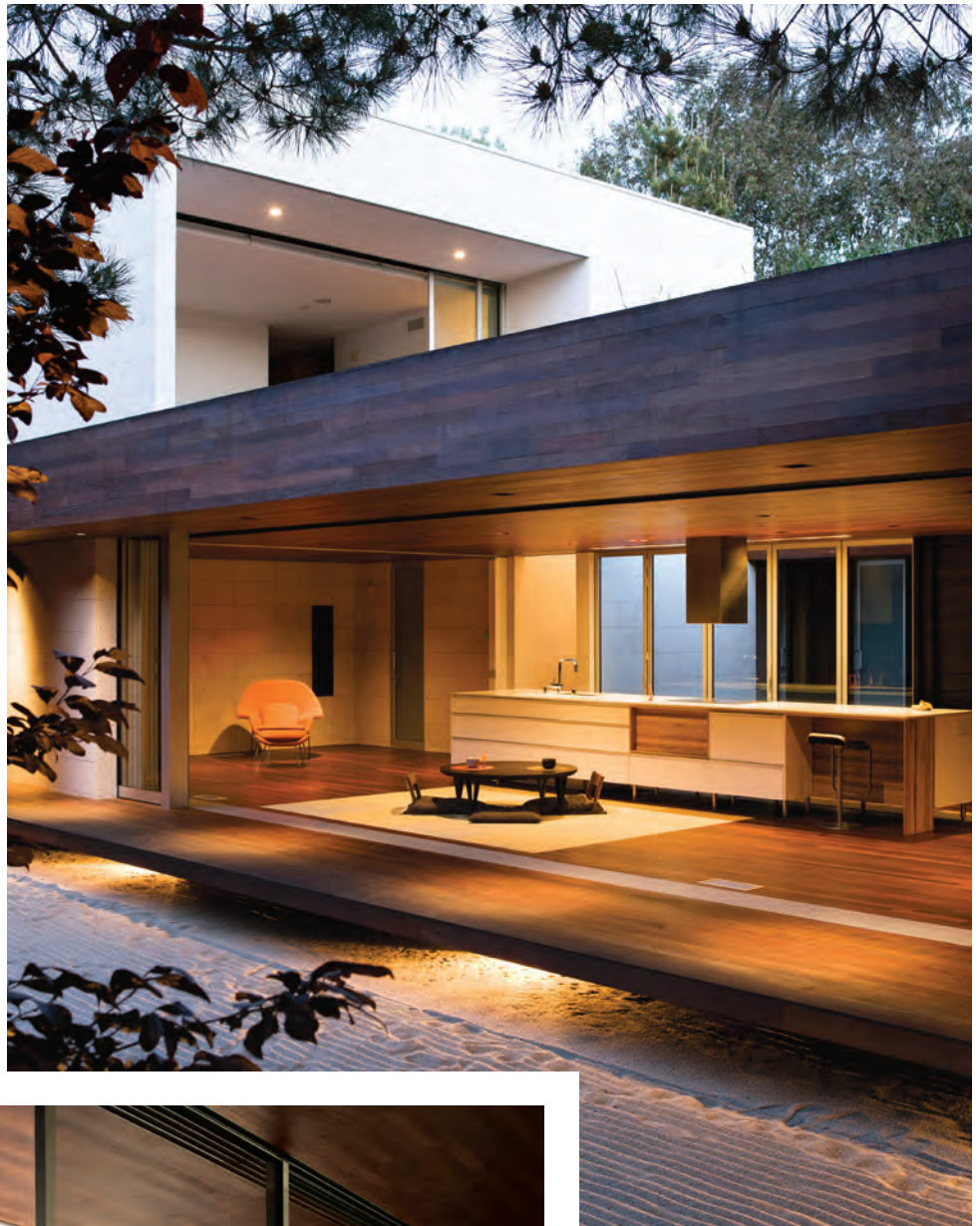


It's tempting to posit that all this happened simply because the Moris wanted a better place to take off and store their shoes, but in a way it did. One of their main desires for the house was to have one entrance where shoes could be deposited no matter if they entered through the garage or the street. Set back past the koi pond and an ipe walkway, the home's actual front door (and elegant shoe storage) lies within the imposing ten-foot-tall charred cedar walls that line the property's perimeter. In the words of the architect, these conscious transition zones act as "a series of layers and filters from space to space." ▮

In Tokyo, Shino's main living area was about the same size as the tatami flooring that serves as a multi-purpose space on the Wabi House's ground floor. "I only had one table where you would do everything—eat, work, sleep," says Shino, "so I know that it is possible to live with just one room." Ken was pleased that the design reflected elements he recalls enjoying from his grandmother's traditional Tokyo house—such as the large *engawa*—but also that it was more practically suited to their day-to-day lives. Before, he says, "the house had these rooms you wouldn't go in for several months," he says, "so they just ended up as storage space. Here you go through everything every day. It's all livable space."



A custom-tailored mechanism allows six floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors (below) to open along the entire width of the living space, creating a seamless transition from indoors to out (right). Protected by an overhang, and floating above ground level, this tertiary space is known in traditional homes as the "engawa." To sustain a unified look throughout, the floor and ceiling are clad in ipe wood. At the client's request the kitchen contains neither upper cabinets (Shino can't reach them) nor an oven (they only used the old one once—to reheat a pizza). A modular Roche Bobois Mah Jong sofa (opposite) adds a decorative flourish to the living area while maintaining as low a profile as the traditional Japanese furniture. »





While most of the ground level is given over to the large open living and dining area, it also includes a small pantry (top left), office (below), and Japanese bathroom (opposite). An integrated Sub-Zero refrigerator is almost unnoticeable behind its charred cedar cladding. In the cheerily outfitted office, a Herman Miller Embody chair lets Shino stay comfortable on business calls that can last for hours. At the opposite end of the house, the soaking tub gets almost daily use. The bath and shower fixtures are by Dornbracht. ▮





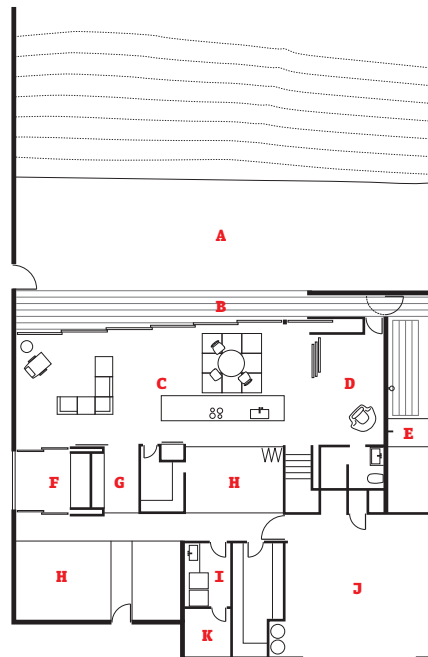


The limestone-clad volume at the east end of the house (this page) extends to the second story, housing Shino and Ken's master suite, which opens onto the planted roof deck. The couple asked for a "no maintenance, not low maintenance" backyard (opposite). However, Shino tends to "Carlsbad's largest public bathroom for cats" (otherwise known as their Japanese-style rock garden) about once a month. ⓘ

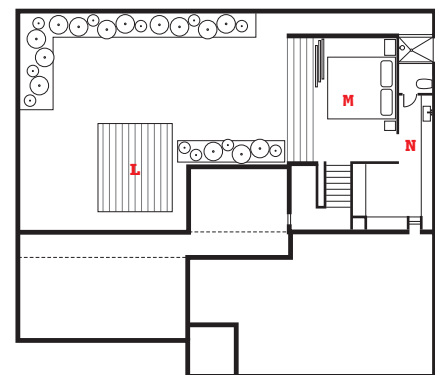


**Wabi House  
Floor Plans**

- A Rock Garden
- B Engawa
- C Living/Dining/Kitchen Area
- D Enclosable Guest Room
- E Japanese Bath
- F Office
- G Genkan
- H Koi Pond
- I Laundry
- J Garage
- K Clothes-Drying Area
- L Moon-Viewing Platform
- M Master Bedroom
- N Master Bath



**First Floor**



**Second Floor**





An atypical modern house that translates the language of traditional Japanese building into a Southern California context, the Wabi House is a compelling study in contradictions. “I was playing with an idea of opposites,” Mariscal says. “For instance, from the street you don’t see any windows, but once you go inside, it’s almost all open.” Although the roof deck affords a view of the surrounding area, the lasting impression of the Wabi House is of a building that focuses inward onto the very specific lives of its residents. It may be an average lot on an average street, but when Shino and Ken return home, they have an extraordinary kingdom to themselves. ■■■

# Welcome to the Jungle

As told to Sonja Hall  
Photos by Paco Pérez  
Illustration by Christine Berrie

In Central America, Spanish colonial architecture prevails. But the creeping tide of modernism—represented here by the home of architect José Roberto Paredes—is signaling that change is afoot. Paredes gives us a tour of his house, set in the rain forest outside San Salvador, El Salvador.

Dotted by potted plants and lined with a simple iron gate, Casa Tuscania's back patio aims to exist harmoniously with the wild environment just beyond.

For many of us, the childhood tree house was our first, albeit winsome, residential aspiration. For José Roberto Paredes and his wife, Patty, dreams of raising their family amongst the treetops never faded. Upon returning to El Salvador after studying in Spain, José Roberto left his father's architecture practice to start his own firm, Cincopatasalgato. Before long, he had harnessed the imaginations of his entire family to design an arboreal abode just outside the capital, San Salvador.



I never imagined that I would live in a house like Casa Tuscania. In fact, it wasn't until I saw it for the first time, in the light of the morning, that I realized it was my dream house. Just a couple of years before, I had left my father and brother's firm to start my own more modern architecture practice in San Salvador. We have broken down walls, literally and figuratively, to create the *Swiss Family Robinson*-like tree house we call home. It's pretty isolated here, outside of San Salvador, and those factors were important in deciding where to build and how to raise our two daughters, Pilar, 15, and Jimena, 4, in a natural environment.

While studying architecture in Barcelona, I learned a lot about spatial efficiency because I lived in a tiny little flat—well, it was more of a bachelor

pad, but that's open to interpretation. We didn't want to build a huge house. We wanted it to be cozy but open, making sure every room used its space wisely. Few walls separate the rooms and our dining table doubles as a homework desk and venue for Scrabble games. We did something strange and installed a bathtub right in Jimena's bedroom. She loves splashing around in there and would spend hours on end in it if she could.

Throughout the house I used concrete for its cooling quality and easy maintenance. It works well in San Salvador's sun-drenched climate. Patty grew up in Sudan, and I grew up here; we know an awful lot about finding ways to cool off inside when it is sweltering outdoors. But we didn't want to sacrifice the sensation of being

Banks of windows and translucent panels (top left) help keep Casa Tuscania nice and airy. Exposed beams and a cantilevered loft soar over the high-traffic eating area

(top right), giving the family a sense of spaciousness. José Roberto looks down on the secluded courtyard (bottom), where Pilar and Patty open things up.



in a warm home for having all concrete walls, which is why we lined one of the walls with polycarbonate sheets. I've always found materials much more interesting than colors, and therefore I wanted to use wood, concrete, glass, and the polycarbonate, which offers us a bit of privacy and filters the light.

If we're at home on the weekends, we paint, read, or play games at the big dining table. It's strange hearing myself call it a dining table, though. The times that we formally dine at it are so few! The living area receives the best sunlight in the morning. It is definitely Jimena's favorite place to

catnap on weekend afternoons with the gentle breeze flowing through the back patio area and up through the front entryway. It almost feels like a porch inside. On a typical weekend morning, I am usually the first to rise. I start the day by opening the big patio doors downstairs. One thing we never do is take fresh air for granted, especially since there is a huge air pollution problem in the city.

With all the open doors we often get asked if we have trouble with bugs. I usually say that although we get the occasional visitor, only every now and again do dangerous forest friends, like venomous snakes, actually find their way in. It's a minor drawback to living in a tree house on the ground, but I don't think they like it as much as we do in here—there aren't too many walls or hiding spaces.

The bathroom is one of Patty's favorite places in the whole house. It is like a little cabin retreat. To be completely honest, I don't know what women find to do in bathrooms, but I can understand why she likes it in there! The warm wood walls and the random patterns of light create a soothing effect.

The lofted mezzanine area inside was designed to be a lounging space. We strategically placed furniture atop a comfortable rug and expected the girls to do their homework up there. But the truth is we barely use it. I'd like to change that someday. If we made it more of an artist's studio, Patty could paint there and I could work from home on lazy Friday afternoons. We all seem to prefer revolving our lives around the kitchen anyway. It feels like we are constantly cooking something—breakfast, lunch, dinner, and the snacks between.

We love the outdoors, but we don't have patio furniture, which forces us to redefine the terrace on a daily basis. Sometimes we host other families for a barbecue in the late afternoons over the weekends, open a bottle of wine, and let the kids watch a movie inside. But other times it's like an underappreciated empty platform that we use to look out into the trees from the kitchen when the warm sun bleeds into a dark, bedazzled sky. ☀

The bottom level houses the bedrooms (top) where Pilar, José Roberto, Patty, and Jimena loll. Jimena (right) makes use of a giant chalkboard just outside. The family

room (bottom) contains furniture reminiscent of Ligne Roset's Togo collection and a CH 07 egg-carton lamp by Salvadoran designer Eugenio Menjívar.



José Roberto, who says his family is always cooking something, prepares a snack with Jimena on the Ariston gas cooktop installed on the custom table.



**Bed, Bath, and Beyond**

Modernists have long embraced flexible spaces, but José Roberto upped the ante by placing a bathtub inside his daughter Jimena's bedroom. The poured concrete tub—with fixtures by Ferco, a bathroom and flooring company in Guatemala—takes the multifunctionality of the abode to entirely new levels by combining hour-long bubble baths with playtime anytime she needs to cool off, rubber-ducky style.

[ferco.com.gt](http://ferco.com.gt)



**Glow Zone**

To maintain privacy without blocking out the tropical morning sun, semiopaque polycarbonate sheets were chosen to flank the family space. An affordable solution, the sheets minimize the sunlight that causes interior temperatures to rise quickly in the afternoons. Additionally, they provide a warm glow in the room to whomever can claim the couch first for an afternoon nap.



**MAACO Counter**

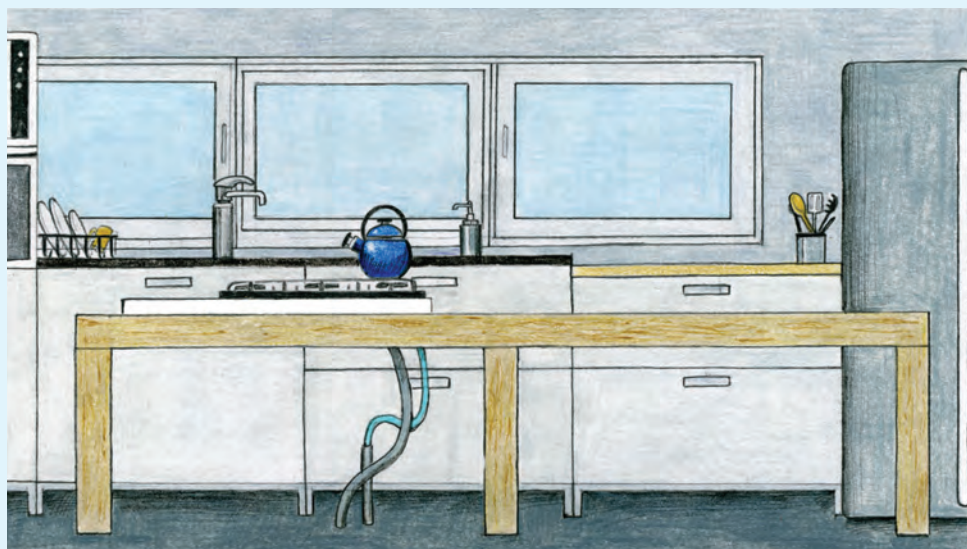
The bathroom counter is done up in a heavenly blue automotive paint, giving the space a relaxing gloss, which Patty adores as she prepares for, or washes away, each day. An inconspicuous shelving system next to the mirror shields unsightly bathroom items like extra rolls of toilet paper without detracting from the haven's simplicity.



**Baño Rustico**

The walls lining the shower draw in the sunlight thanks to a natural oil finish on the teak and neutral shades of Sherwin-Williams paint. According to José Roberto, the screws used to install the wood were purposely left exposed to differentiate this "miniature canvas" from their sleek modern home and give it an old-fashioned feel.

[sherwin-williams.com](http://sherwin-williams.com)



**Able Table**

José Roberto designed the extralong teppanyaki-inspired dining table, which also doubles as the kitchen island. Made out of yellow ipe wood (a tree native to much of Central and South America and best known as a durable decking material), the custom-built table includes a gas cooktop by Ariston.

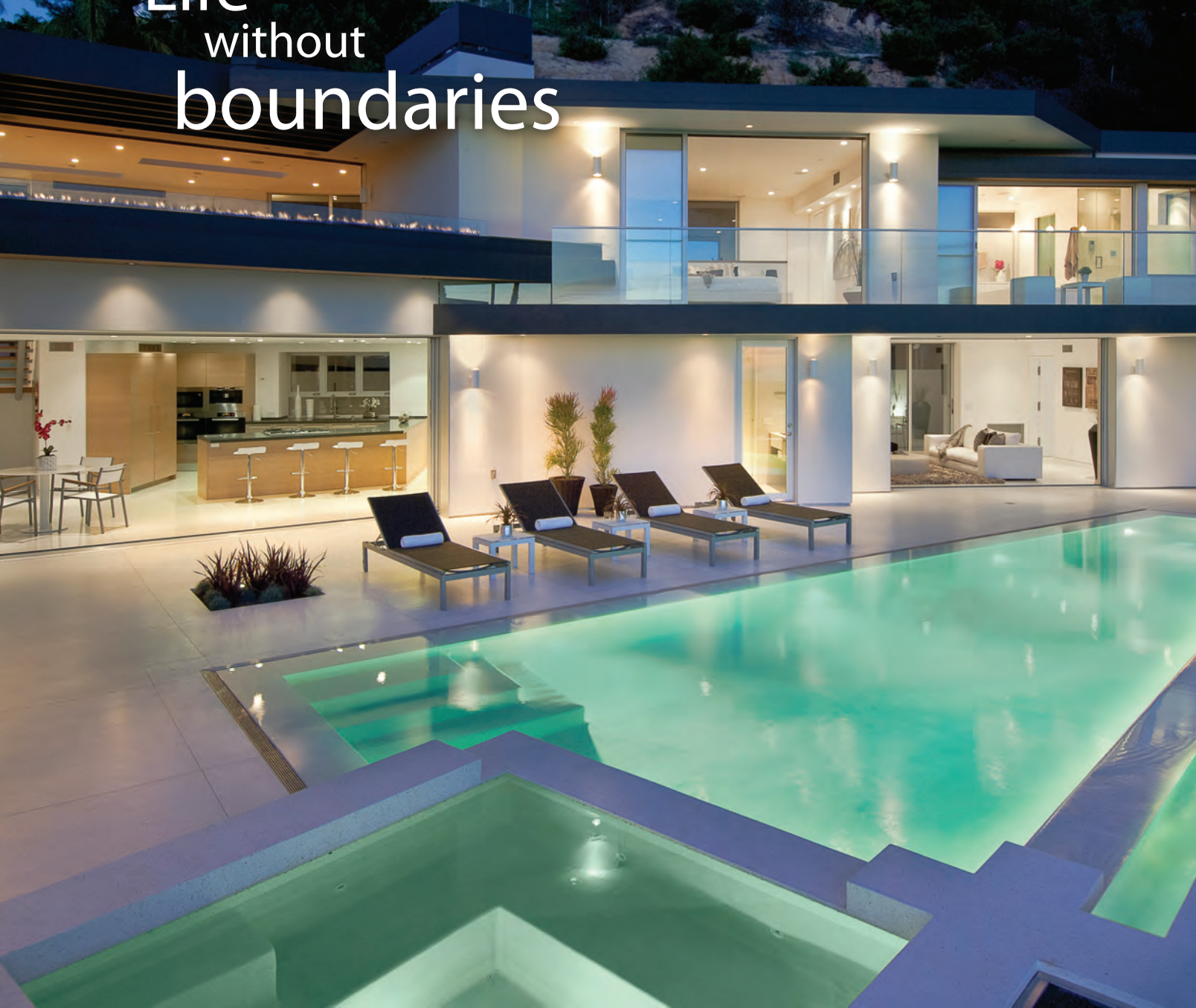
[ariston.com](http://ariston.com)

**Click here for more information:**

Polycarbonate sheets: [gallinausa.com](http://gallinausa.com)  
 Automotive paint: [paintforcars.com](http://paintforcars.com)  
 Concrete bathtub: [stonesoupconcrete.com](http://stonesoupconcrete.com)  
 Ipe decking: [ipedepot.com](http://ipedepot.com) ||||

**Make It Yours**

Life  
without  
boundaries



- ▶ multi-slide door
- ▶ **pocket door**
- ▶ bi-fold door
- ▶ sliding glass door
- ▶ hinge & pivot door
- ▶ window wall



**western**  
window systems  
[westernwindowssystems.com](http://westernwindowssystems.com)



western  
window systems  
[westernwindowsystems.com](http://westernwindowsystems.com)

excellence expected