



Meeting the Horizon in California

SURROUNDED BY SKY, A HOUSE NEAR SAN FRANCISCO
DRAWS ON—AND IN—THE VIEWS

Architecture by Lautner Associates, Helena Arahete
Interior Design by John Wheatman & Associates
Text by Alan Hess
Photography by Alan Weintraub/Arcaid



Glass houses have long beguiled architects. As a building material, glass can be artfully ambiguous: solid yet invisible, present yet transparent. It can enclose spaces, or it can open them up. Expressionist architect Bruno Taut conceived a glass pavilion as a mystical multicolored crystalline dome in 1914. Since then, Philip Johnson imagined his Glass House as a terrarium in the middle of a meadow, and Pierre Koenig saw his as a cockpit soaring high above the lights of Los Angeles.

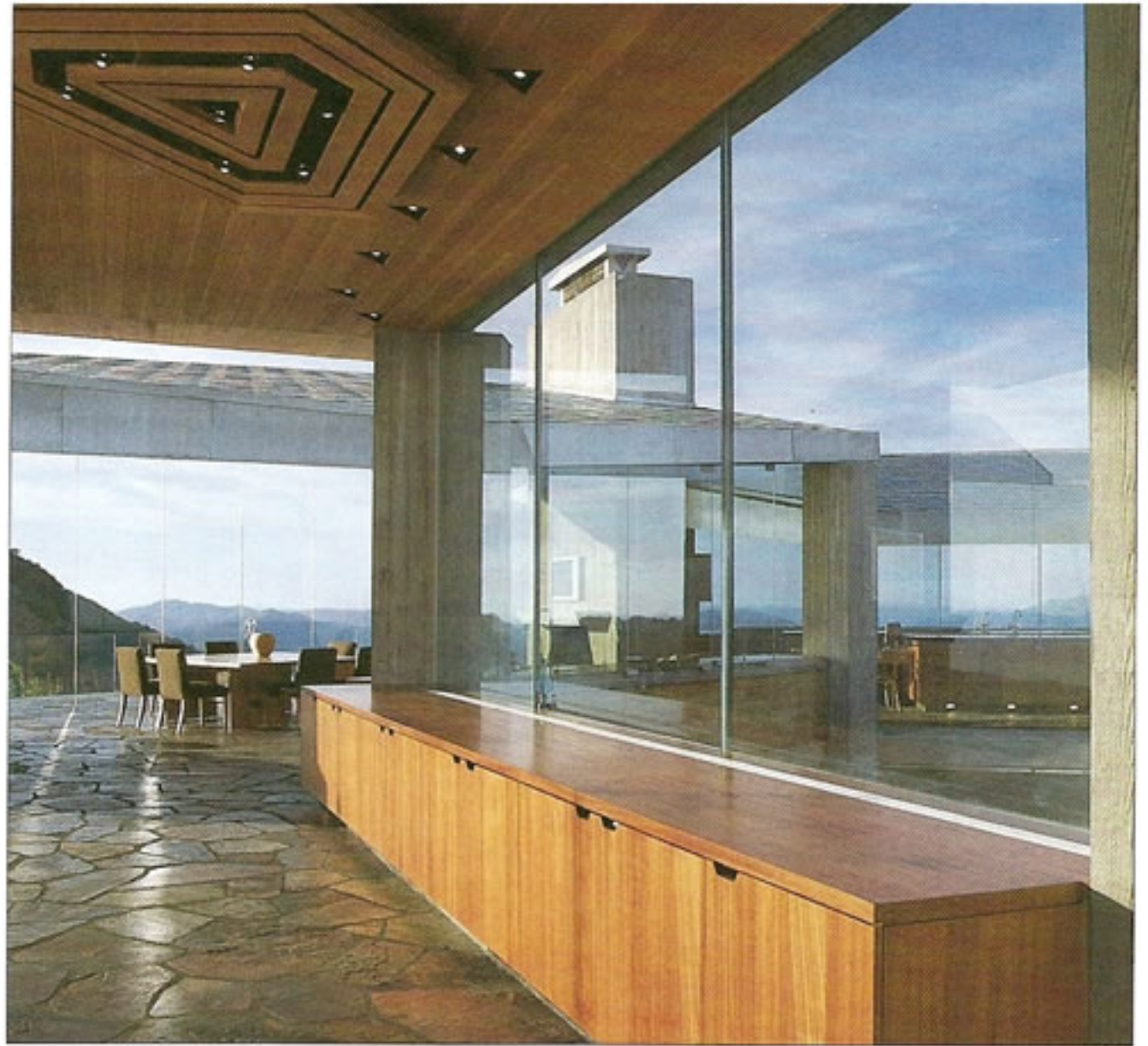
Now architect Helena Arahete takes this modern classic in an entirely new direction. Northern California's Roscoe house is an Expressionist lantern with shards of glass wall and jutting roofs scintillating like a frozen sparkler. It is a

LEFT: Architect Helena Arahete, of Lautner Associates, cantilevered a 50-foot swimming pool and slate-covered deck off the south side of a house in Green Valley, California. The 13,500-square-foot residence, created for John and Marilyn Roscoe, sits on the crest of a mountain.

TOP: Concrete-and-slate stairs lead to the entrance. **ABOVE:** The living room. In the spirit of John Lautner's architecture, the house is composed of expansive spaces and is respectful of its surroundings. The interiors are by Siobhan Brennan, of John Wheatman & Associates. Glant sofa fabric.



Designed for ease of entertaining, the dining room and the kitchen are separated by a fireplace. "The frameless glass and minimal partitions contribute to the concept of open and continuous spaces," explains Arhueté. Glant dining chair fabric. Sub-Zero refrigerator and freezer.



fantastic terrestrial observatory perched atop a mountain peak. The house is at one with a magnificent panorama that stretches from the Golden Gate Bridge on one horizon to the Sierra Nevadas on the other.

For years John and Marilyn Roscoe loved hiking this hilltop site near the northern shore of San Francisco Bay. Slowly purchasing adjoining parcels, they gathered 1,700 acres, including the Twin Sisters, paired 2,200-foot sugarloaf peaks that command the immediate region. Far below are the rolling hills of Napa's wine country; a carpet of fog furls and unfurls over this scene through the days and seasons. The picture through the vast glass windows never repeats.

Arahuete, Belgian-born and Argentine-raised, has the right background to design a house so consummately sensitive to nature. She worked for virtuoso Los Angeles architect John Lautner (the Hollywood Hills' mushroom-shaped Chemosphere house, Malibu's wavelike Beyer house, Los Angeles's ultramodern Silver-top house) from 1971 until his death in 1994. Her expertise in concrete served her well in supervising many of Lautner's most daring home designs. Her house for the Roscoes confirms that organic architecture is as vibrant today as ever.

This glass house follows from the Roscoes' initial request: "We now have a 360-degree view. We'd like as much of

ABOVE: "Sloping roofs, which are high on the outside and low on the interior courtyard side [at right], capture the vistas and pull them into the house," Arahuete notes. "The views are a constant presence; the transparency between them and the interior is always evident."

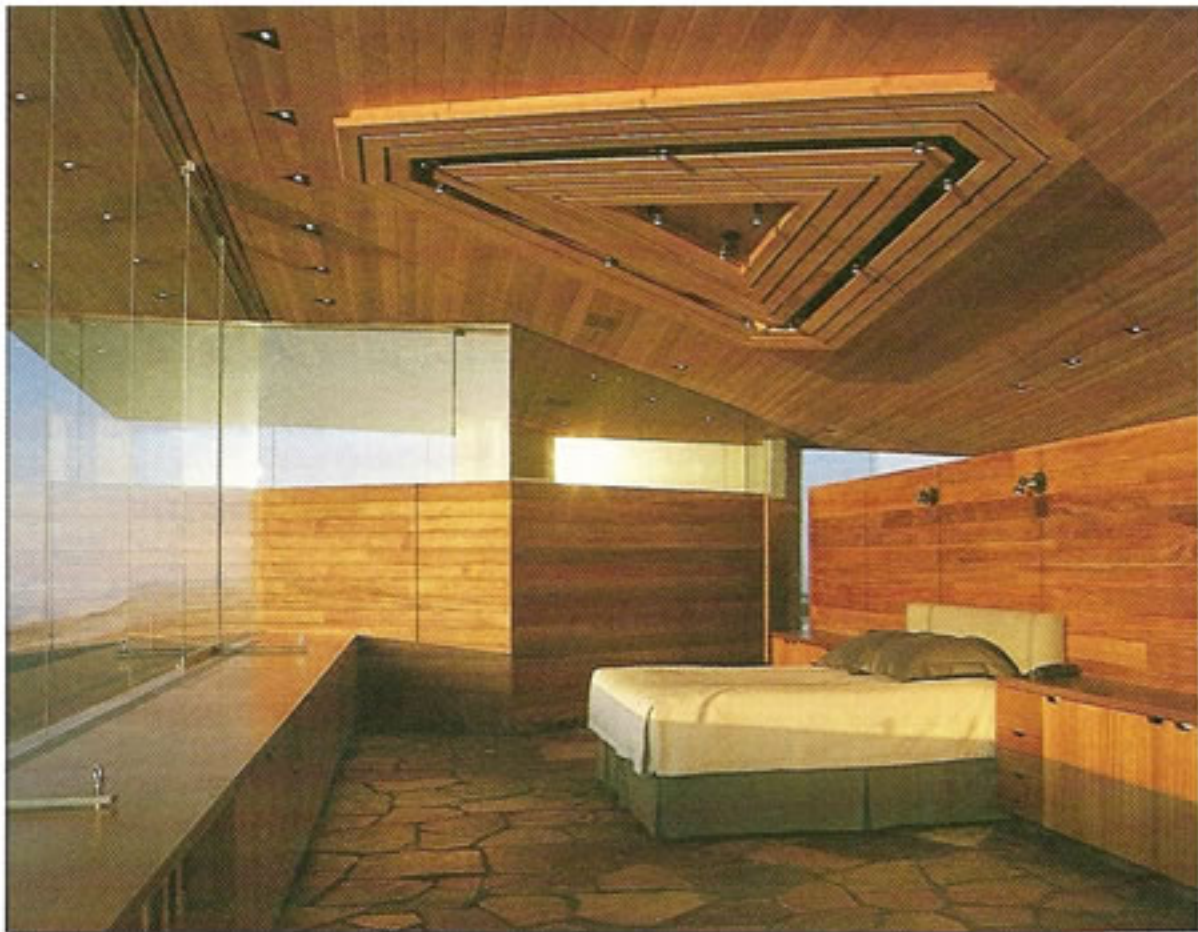
this as possible when the house is completed. We want to be able to see sunrises and sunsets, want to feel as if we are living on top of the world."

Thus the design gives them an unobstructed view from every room on the main floor. Stand in the kitchen, and the vista is filled with the neighboring Twin Sister peak to the north. Turn around, and you can see all the way through the house to an equally spectacular stretch of San Francisco Bay to the south.

The horizons are the home's only outer boundaries. Skillfully, the architecture directs us to the landscape and then steps deftly out of the way.

This is a muscular house built of concrete poured in place, with a steel-beam roof. Yet it is as sleek as an athlete. Its main floor floats lithely above the ground; its terraces jut out into space. The wedge-shaped roofs soar upward, feathering out to a knife edge as they meet the sky. "The perspective of each angle changes as you move," Arahuete points out.

She launched her design with a few ba-



TOP: Mahogany walls in the master suite enclose a bath and a dressing room. The lighting in the fir-paneled ceiling was designed by the architect. A lower floor, recessed into the mountaintop, houses two additional bedrooms. Pindler & Pindler headboard and bed-skirt fabric.

ABOVE: Surrounded by 1,700 acres of wooded landscape, the six-sided house "has a feeling of lightness in response to the owners' desire to 'live on top of the world and be inspired to think great thoughts,'" she says. The angular rooflines echo the shapes of distant mountains.

mic questions to gauge the Roscoes' sensibilities. Did they prefer angles or curves? Did they prefer to be out in the open or in sheltered spaces? The answers (angles and openness) set the course.

Yet for such a spacious home (13,500 square feet), the proportions are masterfully balanced to create spaces both grand and intimate. This is essentially a two-person house, with no servants' quarters. Marilyn usually does the cooking, and John helps to sweep up. "We're very simple people," John Roscoe says. The main floor is, in fact, a single space. The kitchen and dining, living and pool rooms blend one into the next, separated by the massive, richly textured concrete piers that stand strategically out of the way of the view; the master suite is also on this floor.

But the same spaces comfortably hold 300 people for a catered party. The ceilings (clad in vertical-grain Douglas fir) pitch and sweep, dipping down to a cozy seven feet over built-in sofas and climb-

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Motorized 15-foot-high sliding glass doors open to the indoor portion of the pool and to the pool room, which is flanked by the living room at left and the master suite at right. Beyond is the open two-story courtyard. The lap pool is used for exercise every day of the year. Summit chairs.

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ing up to 15 feet at the tallest windows. Downstairs, partially sunken into the hill-top, the library, utility rooms, exercise room and two guest rooms (primarily for visits by grandchildren) circle the small garden and pond.

Nowhere is Arahuete's skill in composing the unwieldy scale of sizable pillars, roofs and walls more evident—or delightful—than in the 50-foot indoor-outdoor lap pool. Engineered by Andrew Nasser (the creative engineer who structured some of Lautner's most challenging designs), the pool, complete with the wa-

The proportions are masterfully balanced to create spaces both grand and intimate.

ter's tremendous weight, is astonishingly cantilevered out over the sloping hillside; its supporting concrete beam tapers, lessening its apparent heft. Arahuete makes even this enormous structure appear gracefully poised.

The extraordinary hanging pool solves two problems, one practical and one aesthetic. When the Roscoes could not agree on an indoor pool (John Roscoe wanted to indulge his love of swimming year-round), Arahuete designed a pool that passes beneath the glass wall. Two glass panels over the pool slide aside on motorized overhead tracks for good weather; otherwise, John Roscoe can enter the pool on the coldest winter day, swim under the glass curtain, finish his lap outside and then return to the warmth of the house. Problem solved.

The pool also captures the site's ineffable poetry: Viewed through the glass walls, the elegant plane of water, flush with the earthy slate terrace, visually echoes the distant bay and flatlands beyond.

Such effortless simplicity belies, of course, the tremendous collaborative effort required. The task of marshaling a small army of workers and materials to build a house atop a mountain would test any builder or architect. To also make it a work of art elevates the feat into the Olympian. But that's what it takes to live on top of the world. □

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

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evitable clutter of daily life. Yet even here the couple accentuated the horizontal, in the bench, tables, ceiling beams and well-ordered open shelves.

The bedrooms are modestly more sybaritic. The master bath features a free-standing tub, which Quiros calls "one of those pregnancy impulses—I stood in front of the window and said, 'This is where I must bathe.'" In the "mother-in-law" bedroom, Cavagnari designed a bed that cleverly incorporates a bench at its foot; Quiros draped its architectural form and set down a fluffy Moroccan rug alongside. And in the girls' room, she let loose—in the terms of this house at least. After Cavagnari designed a platform bed with a contemporary twist, Quiros infused the space with color and pattern: two director's chairs with a red toile fabric, a vibrant straw rug and a white lampshade trimmed in red.

The heart of the house remains its covered outdoor spaces. Upstairs on what the couple call the "opium deck," Quiros made use of the *bisuoli*, adding a paisley throw, tribal rugs and sparkling lanterns, in which, as dusk draws on, candlelight flickers against a violet sky. In classic Aeolian mode, the couple entertain regularly outside, projecting movies on the crisp white screenlike walls of the opium deck, or dipping into the tiny pool Cavagnari calls a "wet sofa," or they dine

Aeolian houses weren't planned so much as they evolved, growing according to changing needs.

downstairs on a separate terrace, where Cavagnari designed a table that, when the chairs are tucked into place, becomes a solid rectangular block.

Outdoors and in, this marriage of form and function, rigor and abandon, box and—yes—bow, simplifies and enhances life in a place where, as Cavagnari describes it, time expands in a "fantastic" way. "On Salina," he explains, "10 minutes lasts two hours, and sending a fax can take three days. It's the ideal antidote to city life." □