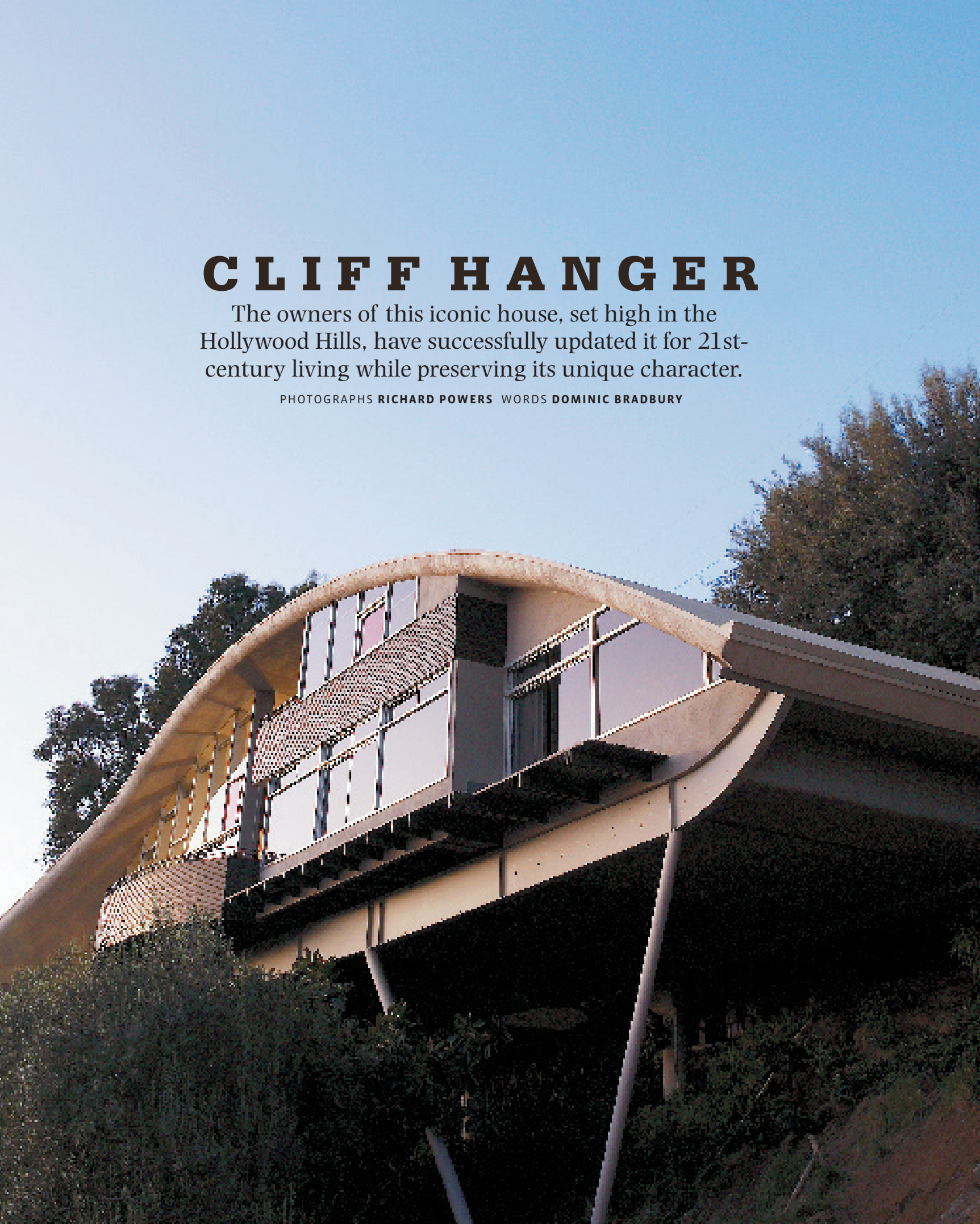


CLIFF HANGER

The owners of this iconic house, set high in the Hollywood Hills, have successfully updated it for 21st-century living while preserving its unique character.

PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD POWERS WORDS DOMINIC BRADBURY



THIS PAGE A corner of the guest bedroom, where a goat-hair rug from Sharnelle in New York adds luxury to the scene. The chairs by Twentieth Modern are from Twentieth Art and Design in Los Angeles. The coffee table was bought from a vintage store. OPPOSITE PAGE With its swooping concrete roof and stained glass windows, the house, designed by John Lautner in the early 60s, appears as a “weird jewel box standing on stilts”.



THESE PAGES The living room was redecorated in a way that felt natural to the house. The custom-built cabinets and sofa are by Marmol Radziner. The day bed, also a custom-made design, was upholstered by Ty-tek Upholstery in California. The lucite coffee table is by Charles Hollis Jones, and the Flos 'Arco' floor lamp, from Design Within Reach, is by Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni. The rug, made from angora, is from Woven Accents in West Hollywood. OPPOSITE PAGE Owners Bill Damaschke (left) and John McIlwee.



More than anyone, John Lautner was the great architectural dramatist of his age. His chief partner was geography itself, as Lautner created a series of gravity-defying statement houses in California and beyond. Rather than attempt to tame or temper a site, Lautner worked with nature, anchoring his futuristic sculpted houses to hillsides and cliff tops, as he did with this one, the Garcia House on Mulholland Drive.

Here, in 1962, Lautner completed the mesmerising home for jazz musician Russell Garcia and his wife, Gina. The design, pitched up on the Hollywood Hills, clings to the steeply sloping terrain, while drinking in the epic views of Los Angeles.

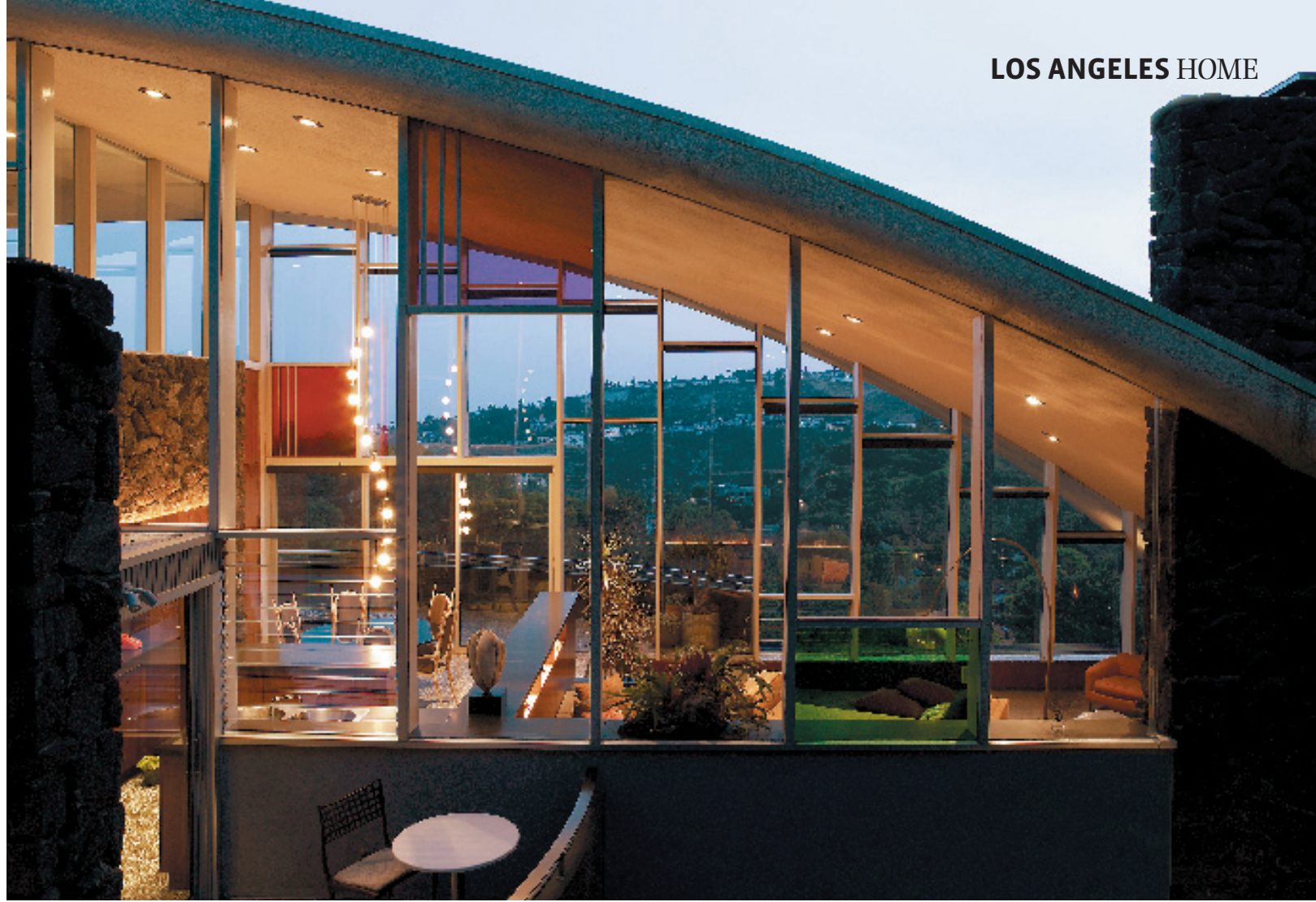
Rugged steel V-shaped beams anchor the building to the ground at the front, while concrete supports rest on the flatter ground to the rear. The shape of the house is typically bold and vibrant – a vast vaulted roof encloses the entire building, which is largely on one level, and is punctured by a semi-transparent core holding the entrance to the rear and a terrace to the front overlooking the canyon below. A sweeping spiral staircase ascends to a guest suite on a modest second storey at the apex of the arching roofline.

Because the site was so rugged and barren back in the early 60s, the story goes that Lautner decided to pepper the glass walls of the house, front and back, with panes of coloured glass to give a friendlier, warmer feeling to the place. Still, Russell and Gina didn't last long in the house. In 1966, they sold up, bought a boat, and went sailing around the world, becoming philanthropic 'travel teachers' and finally fetching up in New Zealand.

While the house became a floating landmark on Mulholland, winning a bit part in *Lethal Weapon 2* along the way, it was not always well taken care of. Upheavals in the 80s meant the



THIS PAGE A light fixture original to the house hangs over a table by Warren Platner and chairs by Karl Springer in the dining room. The cabinetry was custom made by Marmol Radziner. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP A view from one side of the home through to the other. BOTTOM Detail of the living room, including a lucite table that once belonged to the Learjet founder and his family.



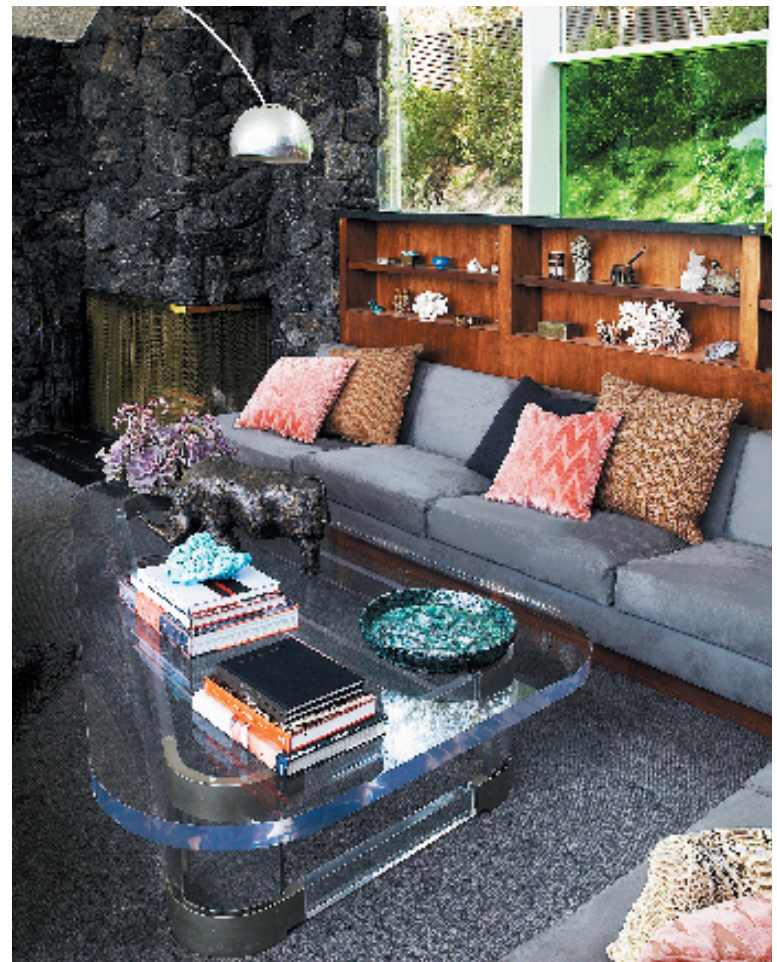
loss of many of Lautner's original fixtures and fittings, and by the time the last owner, actor and director Vincent Gallo, sold up, the Garcia House needed some healing. New owners John McIlwee, an entertainment business manager, and Bill Damaschke, president of creative at DreamWorks Animation, embarked on a sensitive restoration, balancing the need to update the house for 21st-century living with preserving the unique character of the house.

"We feel that the whole thing was tremendous kismet," says John, who saw the house advertised in the property pages one morning. "We have a friend who lives just up the street and we would drive by and knew the house. I remember looking at [it] thinking, 'There's no way we could spend that much money on a house that needed so much work.' But in retrospect, we can't believe we got the house for the price we did, with all the resurgence of interest in the art and culture of mid-century design."

Bill came across the work of architects Marmol Radziner in a magazine and realised they would be perfect for the work needed on the Garcia House. As well as designing original houses for clients such as fashion designer Tom Ford and comedienne Ellen DeGeneres, the practice has restored a whole series of modernist classics by Albert Frey, Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra.

"When we decided to embark on this we did a lot of homework," says John, "and we looked at a lot of architects. Marmol Radziner were best suited by far. They were so responsive and their attention to detail was meticulous. It had to be custom fixtures, custom furniture, custom everything to make it feel as special and as unique as it is. We realised that it would be a challenge, although we didn't realise quite how much of a challenge."

While Lautner's structural engineering had largely stood the test of time, with the steel anchors holding up well, other parts of the house had not. The roof was leaking, there was dry rot, and nearly every original element of built-in furniture had either been removed or ruined.



THESE PAGES beneath the arched rooftop, the home splits into two parts, divided by a sweeping outdoor spiral staircase that leads down from Los Angeles' Mulholland Drive to the living areas below. Glass walls close in both sides, providing a view through the house and out over the Los Angeles basin. The outdoor living soaks in the view and features a coffee table by Eero Saarinen and 'Lulu' chairs from Janus et Cie in Los Angeles. Rug from Rugs Direct (rugs-direct.com).



"WE SIT OUT THERE, HAVE A GLASS OF WINE AND TALK," SAYS ONE OF THE OWNERS. "AND THE NEXT THING YOU KNOW IT'S TWO HOURS LATER."





“Worst of all, the transparency through the centre of the house had been lost to a great extent,” says architect Ron Radziner of Marmol Radziner. “Working with Bill and John, we were really able to bring that back while still providing some privacy from the street, given people stop to look at this house.”

Marmol Radziner were able to restore elements like the terrazzo floors and the windows, including the stained glass, plus an occasional light fitting, and they managed to keep the kitchen sink. Just about everything else had gone in the 80s or had been trashed. Having stripped the house back to the bones and updated all the services, Marmol Radziner began reinterpreting the many bespoke elements of the house, from the walnut cabinet work and kitchen to the fitted L-shaped sofa in the living room.

“When it came to the master bedroom, we really did reconfigure the space a bit, as there hadn’t been a master suite and we needed to make it work for Bill and John,” says Ron. “But the process was very subtle and not done in a way that would outwardly change the feeling of the house at all.”

Having bought the house in 2002, the restoration was completed in 2005 when Bill and John asked interior designer Darren Brown to work on the home’s loose furnishings. Darren blended an eclectic mix of retro and contemporary pieces for a glamorous, updated Studio 54-inspired look. Best piece goes to a lucite coffee table by Charles Hollis Jones, who also designed the four poster in the master bedroom.

“The house doesn’t look good with a lot of clutter,” says Darren. “And Bill and John didn’t want a cold house either. It has a certain warmth to it, and then there’s the whole indoor/outdoor thing going on with the terrace.”

Now the entire team has reassembled to build a pool alongside the house, inspired by Lautner’s original, but unbuilt, design. For Bill and John, they are also taking time to enjoy the house the Garcias gave up, using the terrace all year round, savouring the views of the city. “We sit out there, have a glass of wine and talk,” says John, “and the next thing you know it’s two hours later.”



SPEED READ The owners of this iconic 60s house, designed by US modernist architect John Lautner, wanted to make it liveable by 21st-century standards while doing so in a way that felt natural to the structure’s character. • They chose Los-Angeles-based architects Marmol Radziner and New York interior designer Darren Brown to realise their brief. • The result sees a subtle structural restoration teamed with an eclectic mix of retro and contemporary furnishings that suit the look and feel of the house.

The home’s space was slightly reconfigured to accommodate a main bedroom suite, which features a bed frame by Charles Hollis Jones. A 70s Venini lamp rests atop a bedside table from Gala Home Furnishings in San Diego. A 50s Italian Aldo Tura coffee table features in the foreground. The cabinetry is by Marmol Radziner, artwork is by Iona Rozeal Brown.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT One end of the master bedroom, with a 70s sofa that was bought at auction and an artwork by Gregory Crewdson. In another corner rests a 60s armchair by Jean Guillon. Carpet is a custom design by Edward Fields. In the main bathroom, the cabinetry designed by Marmol Radziner and bath are encased in honey onyx. The chair is by Eero Aarnio.