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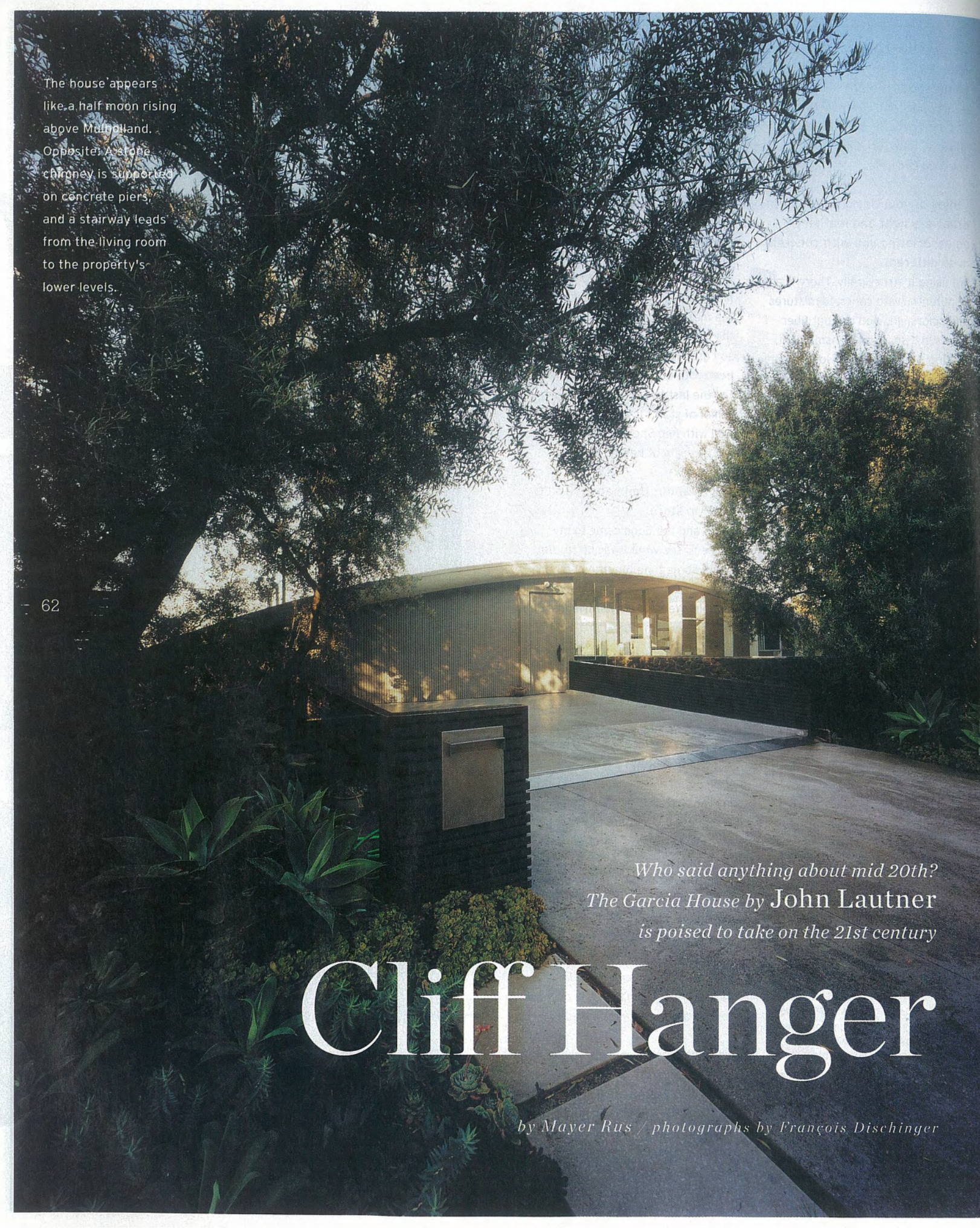
TITANS OF DESIGN
Frank Gehry, John Lautner,
Philippe Starck, J Mays

Santa Barbara Ranch, Sunday Lunch

by Amanda Chantal Bacon



Los Angeles Times Magazine



The house appears like a half moon rising above Mulholland. Opposite: A stone chimney is supported on concrete piers, and a stairway leads from the living room to the property's lower levels.

Who said anything about mid 20th? The Garcia House by John Lautner *is poised to take on the 21st century*

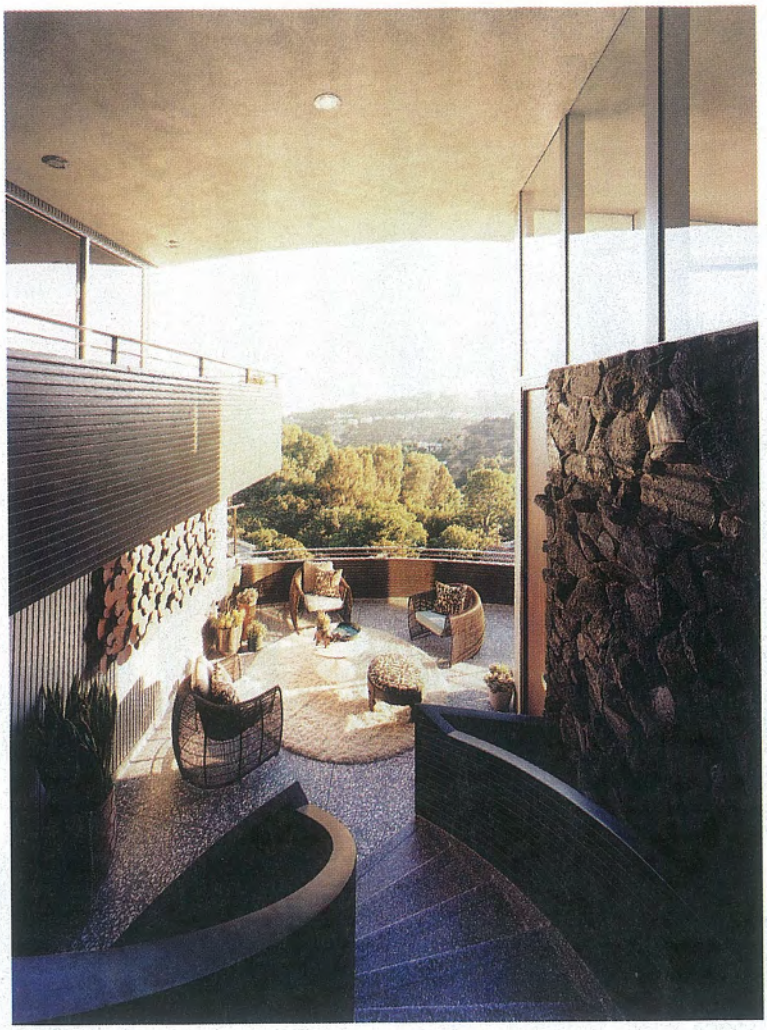
Cliff Hanger

by Mayer Rus / photographs by François Dischinger





A terrazzo staircase curves down from street level to an alfresco landing that separates the two wings of the house. Opposite, right: The terrazzo floor moves into the house to foster the indoor-outdoor connection.





Like so many of L.A.' s great midcentury modern dwellings, John Lautner's 1962 Garcia House had fallen on hard times by the close of the last millennium. Lautner, who died in 1994, was, of course, one of the geniuses of California modernism. In landmark projects such as the Chemosphere and Elrod houses, he established a highly personal architectural language that connected human beings to buildings and buildings to nature.

At the Garcia House, seen here for the first time, the sculptural brio of Lautner's vision survived, but the building's support systems were badly compromised by rust, dry rot and water damage. To compound its woes, the house had undergone a series of insensitive renovations that militated against Lautner's vision of muscular forms and flowing, transparent spaces.

Happily, the Garcia House found what every wayward structure would dream of—sympathetic suitors who could look past its surface deformities and see spectacular promise beneath. The saviors were Bill Damaschke, an executive at DreamWorks, and his partner, John McIlwee, an entertainment business manager.

The couple enlisted the services of Marmol Radziner, a firm that had forged its reputation as the premier restorer of classic midcentury houses. "Our goal was never to do a slavish restoration but to create something that maintained the spirit of Lautner's work and also made sense for the 21st century," Ron Radziner explains. "We wanted to make the house livable for the next hundred years, so it would be much more difficult for people to make a case that it should be torn down."

Marmol Radziner's expertise as a design/build firm was ideally suited to tackle the trickier aspects of the renovation, such as the glass door that leads to an exterior staircase along one side of the eye-shape structure. Lautner's original design had not fully resolved the problem of setting a door within the complex geometries, but Marmol Radziner managed to craft the perfect piece in the firm's own glass-and-metal workshop. Another issue was the entry sequence. In Lautner's original design, the entry progression off Mulholland Drive led down an essentially open staircase that divided the structure (one half devoted to public entertaining and dining, the other dedicated to more intimate bedroom areas). Over the years, a desire for privacy and security had led previous owners to enclose the central stair with solid walls, thus blocking any transparency through the house to views of the canyon beyond. Marmol Radziner developed a system of glass walls and semi-opaque boundaries that returned the central void to its intended status as an outdoor space.

"For the interior, we didn't think it appropriate to do anything supercontemporary, but we also didn't want a caricature of midcentury modern," says McIlwee. A reference from a friend led the owners to New York decorator Darren Brown. "I wanted to give this house the feeling of a masculine bachelor pad with a 1970s vibe," Brown says. "At our first meeting, I gave them a look book that included photographs of Halston and Bianca Jagger leaving Studio 54."

Brown pulled together furnishings that range widely in period and provenance but nonetheless resonate with a masculine attitude. The eclectic mix includes Charles Hollis Jones' mammoth Lucite coffee table and four-poster bed, a Warren Platner dining table, python pillows and a custom Edward Fields carpet.

"With modern architecture, there's potential for it to feel cold, but this house is incredibly warm and cozy," Damaschke says. "I don't feel like I have to tiptoe around my own home."



Living and dining spaces are united under the dramatic sweep of the arched roof. Strategically placed colored glass panels break up the rhythm of massive window walls.



Marmol Radziner fabricated a canted sliding door that opens off the living room. Opposite: The master bedroom has a custom Lucite bed by Charles Hollis Jones and a carpet of radiating curves by Edward Fields.

