

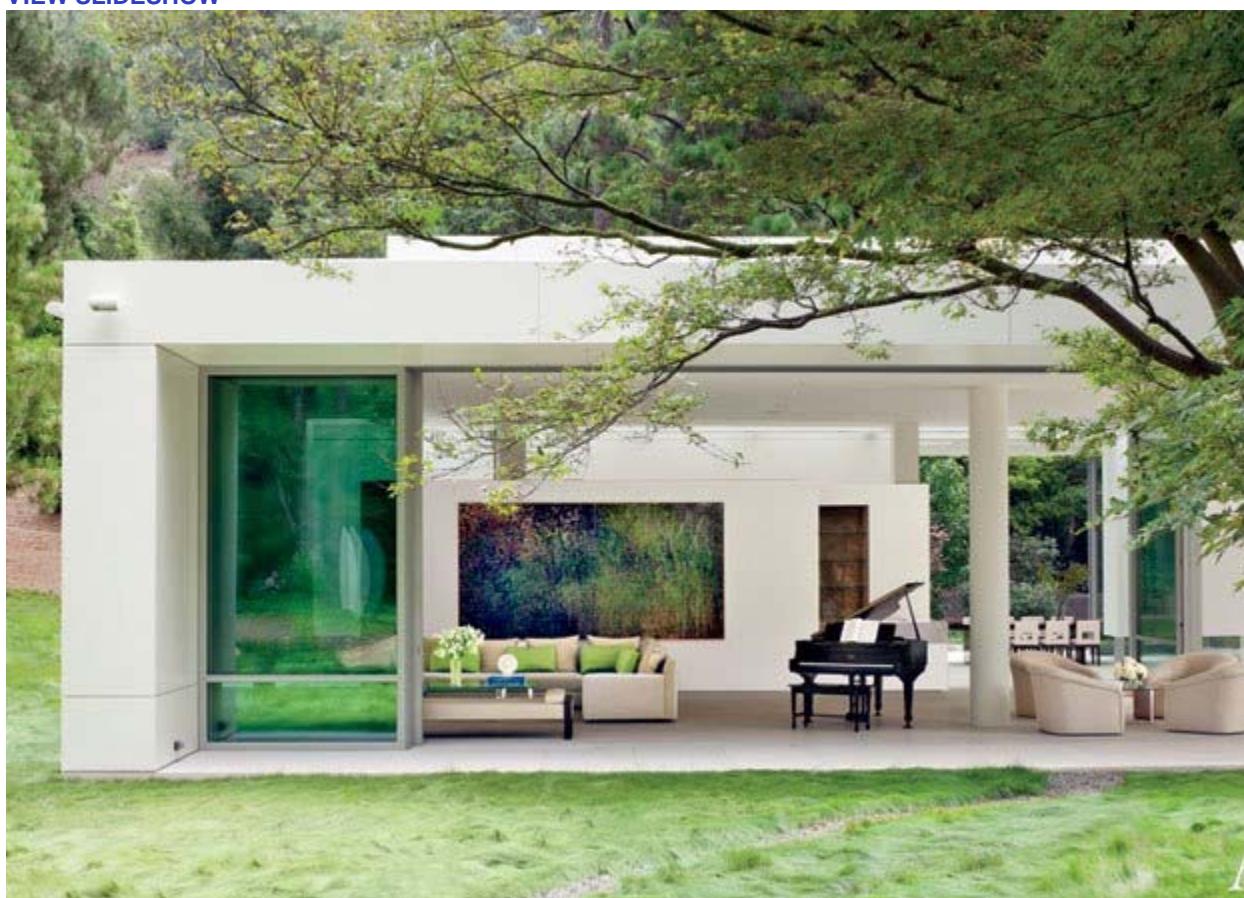
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

A CONTEMPORARY LOS ANGELES VILLA BY MICHAEL LEHRER

The architect crafts a singular home of glass and steel artfully in tune with its Arcadian surroundings

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Architects have their own language. They speak about space in terms that may seem arcane or even cabalistic to nonpractitioners, delineating elusive concepts such as scale, proportion, and balance with words like *datum* and *enframement*. Walls are not merely walls, they are *membranes* or *skins*. Sliding doors are *permeable boundaries*. And in the case of a striking modern house that architect Michael B. Lehrer designed in a West Los Angeles enclave, floors become an opportunity for a meditation on “flatness,” as he puts it, and mirrors are a means of

“dematerializing what is solid and what is space.” ©2012 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
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Lehrer’s fluency in the lingua franca of the architecture academy, however, does not obscure the pragmatic goals of his endeavor. Spatial rigor is important because it translates into palpable human experience. That sense of deep order makes the joy more profound. It’s not about theory,” he insists.

In one regard, this epic project, 13 years in the making, is quite straightforward. Lehrer’s clients—he’s a retired businessman and a sculptor obsessed with the sensuality of stone, she’s a former landscape designer and avid gardener—wanted a light-filled dwelling that would feel as though it were part of the setting, a sheltered piece of land replete with old-growth trees. The couple had been living in a 1950s tract house on the property since 1976; they’d undertaken two renovations over roughly two decades before they discovered Lehrer’s work during a fortuitous local architecture tour in 1999. The pair liked what they saw, and in short order they contacted him about the possibility of expanding their dining room. That request led to talk of building a larger kitchen, and from there the commission snowballed into what Lehrer characterizes as a “13-year conversation,” the last five years of which were spent in construction following the demolition of the original house.

“I love the Getty and the procession of space after space there. The whole place just speaks to me,” says the wife, referring to Richard Meier’s modernist citadel of culture in nearby Brentwood. “Michael is a magician with that kind of pure architecture, particularly in his ability to bring nature in.”

Lehrer took the idea of indoor/outdoor living so essential to the L.A. lifestyle and interpreted it in a three-story, 13,000-square-foot structure whose massive sliding and pivoting glass walls, doors, and windows convert indoor spaces into true open-air pavilions. The living room is perhaps the truest expression of the architect’s approach. Six movable glass wall panels, stretching 42 feet, can be ganged in one stack, effectively making the room a part of the adjacent garden terrace. A ground plane of Alhambra limestone runs between indoors and out, its threshold nearly invisible. The clients’ decision to frame the house entirely in steel made these features possible and also allowed Lehrer to float a number of stationary interior walls above bands of glass that extend 30 inches up from the floor.

The purposely restrained, almost minimalist furnishings scheme by JoAnne Brosnahan of Unique Custom Interiors acknowledges the primacy of the landscape in the hierarchy. “The clients like things that are soothing and comfortable, but they didn’t want a million pillows and accessories,” she says. “They’d rather have fewer, substantial pieces that accent the architecture and enhance the experience of living in nature.”

Pick up a copy of AD's July issue, on newsstands now, to see more photos and to read the complete story. In the meantime, click here to see a sneak peek at the slide show of this light-filled Los Angeles villa.

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