

This property's long, narrow lot ends at the beach in Malibu, so the designers chose a sand-colored limestone for the patio floor pavers, which continue into the living room.

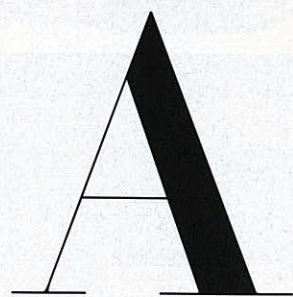
An overhaul by Safdie Rabines Architects takes a narrow beachfront lot and turns it into a livable work of art.

# SEA WORTHY

BY VANESSA KOGEVINAS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY UNDINE PRÖHL



The figured Australian walnut paneling that extends across the ceiling features concealed lighting that illuminates a custom coffee table made of the same wood. BELOW: The outdoor furniture from Summit and Janus et Cie echoes the materials found throughout the house.



Although Malibu is known for its beautiful beaches, epic surfing and stunning coastal mansions, few outsiders realize that it's also a quiet beach village where resi-

dents can walk to their favorite restaurants and markets. This little-known fact—and, of course, the unmatched ocean views—is what drew a Los Angeles family to a cave-like house on a beachfront lot in Malibu. With vacation homes in Palm Springs and Montana, the family of five wanted a convenient getaway close to home. The house would need a major gut-and-remodel, but the owners had enough real estate experience to know that they had just purchased a gem.

One of the first friends the new owners invited over was renowned architect and urban planner Moshe Safdie, who immediately noted that the orientation of the existing house would have to be shifted: The old layout positioned the entrance at the side of the house, which meant

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visitors had to move through several rooms before catching their first glimpse of the ocean. The owners collaborated with Safdie on some rough, preliminary sketches, which were then handed over to Safdie's daughter, Taal, a San Diego architect who founded Safdie Rabines Architects with her husband, Ricardo Rabines. Together, the team set off on what would become a four-year renovation that, in the end, retained only two of the house's original walls.

“The lot is only 33 feet wide by about 300 feet long, and the neighbors are right up

against you,” says Taal of the project's greatest challenge. “We needed to create privacy without making the house feel like a fortress. Equally important was finding a way to take advantage of the long lot in order to capitalize on both the ocean and mountain views at either ends of the property.”

The master suite is perfectly situated at the house's highest point, where the couple who live there can take in the views of the Pacific from their bedroom or their cantilevered deck.

Safdie Rabines' site plan masterfully met those objectives. Upon entering the front gate, which is next to the guest house, visitors walk along a fence of horizontal slatting, across a bridge and past a series of outdoor spaces to the main house's glass front door. The walk-







way feels like a tunnel leading toward the beach, which can be seen through a three-story glass atrium, with an inset front door that draws the eye straight out to the ocean views. "Because it's such a long site, we felt that the architecture should emphasize and embrace that," says Taal. "Plus, it was difficult to get sun and light into the center of the residence, so we came up with the idea of an atrium wall."

"With its vaulted roofline, the house has a feeling of complete openness and of constant connection to the ocean, as if you were on a ship," says one of the owners. The captain's helm is the mezzanine office, which hovers under the curved roof at the highest point of the atrium, commanding views of the ocean, the garden and the Santa Monica Mountains. To shelter and soften the glass atrium, which contains staircases

ABOVE: The house's combination of various natural materials, including limestone, figured Australian walnut and teak, work together to make the modern architecture feel rustic and beachy.

and elevated walkways but is essentially one open space, the architects lined the inside of the curved glass with an "indoor trellis" of horizontal teak slats. "The warm-toned trellis also serves to give the enormous atrium a more human scale," says Taal. The trellis creates a play of shadows throughout the day and a kaleidoscopic series of reflections off the darkened glass at night. More shadows are created by sunlight filtering through a screen of bamboo, which conceals the property line while allowing more natural light to dapple into the space.

To optimize the views, the oceanfront elevation is one large room with a living area and slightly raised dining and kitchen areas. All three have unobstructed views of the beach, and lead out to a deck with a pool. To blur the line between the indoors and outdoors, the architects used the



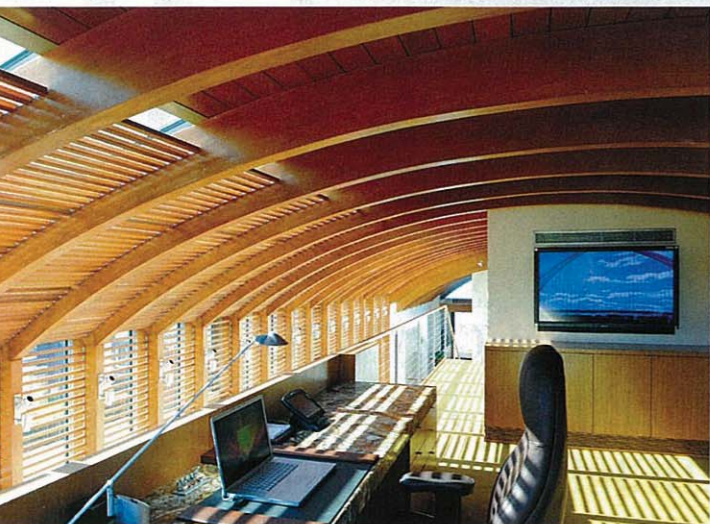
The kitchen and a formal dining area (below) are raised one step above the living room. Accents of blue—on the kitchen countertops, dining chairs and a painting in the dining area by Ed Ruscha titled *Final Triumph Final Picnic*—reflect the house's water views.



**"WE CHOSE A BEAUTIFUL GRANITE CALLED 'BLUE JEANS,' WHICH RECALLS THE COLOR OF THE OCEAN AND ACCENTUATES THE WALNUT."**



RIGHT: The view from the master bedroom is the best in the house. The curved Douglas fir ceiling with teak-veneered Glulam beams makes it feel like a ship. BELOW: The office is tucked away at the top of the atrium wall, where it could be a captain's command station.



same limestone for the whole ground floor and patio and then repeated the material throughout the first floor—for the bathroom flooring, the fireplace surround and as chiseled blocks for walls that extend from the interiors to the exterior. Upstairs, the master suite has the best vantage point, thanks to an entire wall of glass, which is interrupted only by a pair of teak columns and one horizontal beam.

On the garden side of the ground floor, a family room opens up to a terrace living area. “We integrated the indoor and outdoor spaces as a series of rooms,” says landscape designer Andrew Spurlock of San Diego-based Spurlock Poirier Landscape Architects. Sandwiched between the outdoor living area and a circle of chairs surrounding a stone firepit, an open-air dining area is tucked under a stand of olive trees. The guesthouse, which contains a garage, a spa, a gym and guest quarters, stands like a matched bookend at the opposite side of the garden.

To create an overall cohesiveness, the architects used very few materials—predominantly glass, steel, teak, walnut and limestone—throughout the project. “But we used each material to clearly differentiate certain spaces,” says Taal. “For example, to visually separate the living area from the raised kitchen and dining area, we extended the figured Australian walnut we used for the wall up and across



The atrium runs along the east side of the house so that light reaches deep into the interior spaces of this narrow building. For privacy and shade, the architects added an “indoor trellis” made of horizontal teak slats. Outside the window, bamboo adds more privacy.





The front door is located at the end of a wooden walkway that runs alongside a series of outdoor rooms, including the seating area just outside the family room. Along the way, steps lead down to a dining area shaded by olive trees and a seating area around a firepit.

**“IT WAS DIFFICULT TO GET SUN AND LIGHT INTO THE CENTER OF THE RESIDENCE, SO WE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF AN ATRIUM WALL.”**



the ceiling.” Interior designer Christopher O’Connor, also from San Diego, created a coffee table of the same wood. “It was important not to mask the strong architecture with furniture that drew too much attention to itself,” says O’Connor. “The color palette inside and out was chosen to reflect the colors of the surrounding nature and landscape.”

In the dining area, a similar wrapped-ceiling design was employed, with a custom oval dining table echoing a walnut ceiling panel of the same shape. An oblong chandelier furthers the theme and speaks to the team’s collective creativity. “The stainless steel chandelier was etched with a ribbed texture, which contractors Rick Holz and Larry Dubey came up with,” says Taal. “They thought it would tie in with other striped elements, such as the teak screen in the garden and etchings in some of the glass in the bathrooms. That’s the kind of teamwork and attention to detail that defined this project.”

ABOVE LEFT: The building at the front of the property contains a guest suite, a spa, a gym and the garage. ABOVE RIGHT: The walkway crosses over a lily pond, and passes a series of garden rooms created by Spurlock Poirier Landscape Architects.

The house’s clean lines are accentuated by the lack of clutter. Built-in cabinetry in the dining area and master bathroom is topped with semiprecious “tiger’s eye” and “blue wild” agate in order to offer storage while complementing the contemporary architecture. The same is true of the kitchen, where O’Connor deftly hid all appliances and necessary kitchen accessories inside Australian walnut cabinets. “For the countertops, we chose a beautiful granite called ‘Blue Jeans,’ which recalls the color of the ocean and accentuates the walnut,” says O’Connor.

The owners are passionate collectors of contemporary art, and they purchased many minimalist pieces for this house. “I wanted to be in a contemporary home where I could see the ocean on one end and the mountains on the other,” says the owner. “And this house in particular really moves from being a residence to a piece of art. More than any piece within it, the house itself is the artwork. And that was the goal.” ■



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