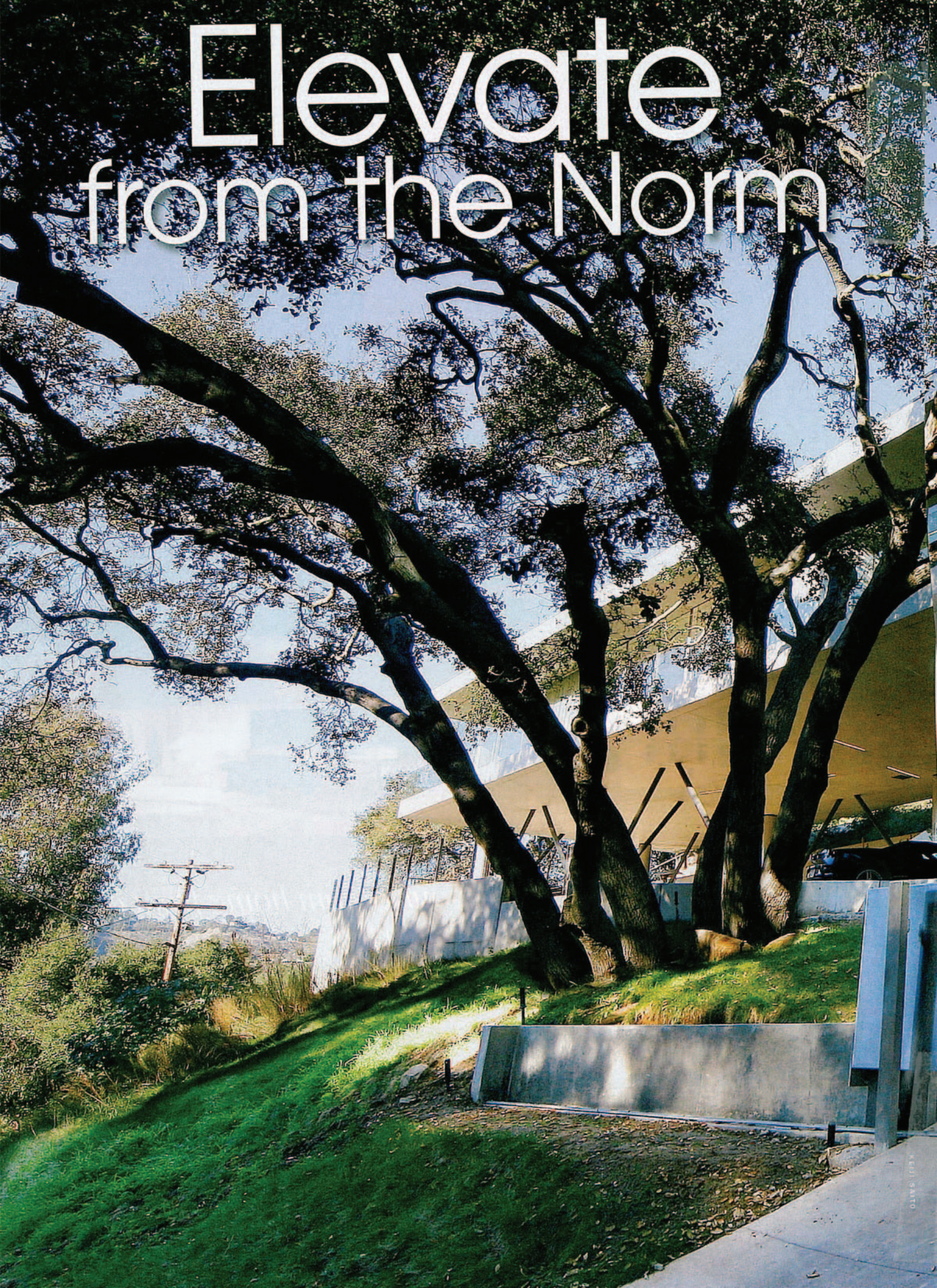


# Elevate from the Norm







New heights for  
an architect in Beverly Hills.

BY JOANNE FURIO





**W**HEN HE IS NOT PLAYING POLO on his farm outside Buenos Aires, flying abroad twice a month to oversee projects or returning to his home in Aachen, Germany, Gerhard Heusch can be found in Los Angeles, where his architectural practice is based. The German-born architect's work has taken him to Japan, Polynesia, France and Portugal, though of late his projects have been on continents closer to home. He has recently completed an estate for a film director in Los Angeles, and a winery in Patagonia, Argentina, where he is slated to build three houses nearby. Currently, he is designing a boutique for a five-star hotel in Buenos Aires.

Given the global scope of his work, it is not surprising that when Heusch set out to build his own home, he

chose the International Style, and, in particular, a sun-worshipping Southern California version popularized by Richard Neutra.

"It's very much in the tradition of midcentury contemporary houses," says the architect of the glass-and-stucco home he built atop one wooded acre in Beverly Hills. "Neutra opened up houses and brought the outside inside. If you live in this climate, you can do that. I think that concept is very much expressed in my house."

Indeed, the home has many of the hallmarks of the Neutra style. Flat-roofed and mostly rectangular, with a smoothly troweled stucco exterior, the home boasts extensive glass walls in both front and back. The design creates shaded overhangs above, decks below and a glorious transparency that



*Previous pages: The approach to the house that architect and polo player Gerhard Heusch built for himself in Beverly Hills, which is elevated several feet and seems at home among the trees. Left and above: The architect used materials consistent with the modern vernacular—stucco, wood and glass—for the entrance. Top: The open-plan living area, with a Bulthaup kitchen.*





Heusch designed the glass-and-steel dining table to anchor the room and chose artwork such as an equestrian piece by Seock Son (left).

reveals the bright outdoors. "Wherever you are in the house, you have a view of either the back or the front, which is an extended view," he says. "Every room in the house, even the walk-in closet, is full of natural light. There is no space where you need to turn on a light."

Yet there is one major distinction that keeps this from being a Neutra-esque homage. The entire 3,200-square-foot house is elevated between 11 and 16 feet. Raising the house to treetop level provided some design benefits, such as privacy, views and a carport, but the architect's primary consideration was to preserve the pristine land, which had never been built on.

A traditional home would have flattened much of the rugged hillside, required a retaining wall in back, and eliminated many of the majestic oaks that frame the house. "I wanted to keep the site as natural as possible," Heusch explains. "This way, I didn't have to import or export any soil."

Elevating the home also created a challenge: how to connect all the inner workings of the house to the ground. Heusch solved that potential problem by having the roof drains, electricity and plumbing funneled through

the 10 steel columns that support the house.

If a home's entrance sets the tone for what is to come, this one embodies the architect's best intentions. Here, the views begin, instead of end, at the front door, which opens to reveal, through a glass wall, a large oak. "You feel very much as if you are in a tree house," Heusch says. Adding to that feeling is a 115-foot front terrace that runs the entire width of the home, offering panoramas of the wooded canyons below.

In addition to providing views, a key aspect of the design involved easy access to the outdoors. Though likewise elevated, the rear of the home is steps away from terra firma, via the master bath. A Brazilian walnut deck leads to a bridge, followed by a set of stairs to the lap pool below. Respecting the steep terrain, Heusch designed a raised lap pool supported by a trio of columns. The Italian glass tiles that cover the interior surface of the pool create a shimmering effect in the otherwise naturalistic setting.

Inside, the interiors are breathtakingly sleek. Heusch limited his materials to a relative few, though they are of the highest caliber. Even the palette is restrained, limited to soft





*Above: The master bedroom has unencumbered views and Mark Levinson's Red Rose theater system. Below: Heusch designed the bed.*

neutrals accented by red and orange. "Like the architecture, I wanted the interiors also to be very simple and minimalist and very open and full of light," the architect explains.

One of the challenges of living with so much glass is balancing the desire for transparency with the need for

privacy. A clever response to that modernist conundrum is illustrated in the master bedroom suite, where even a soak allows for tranquil views of the outdoors. Because the home is elevated, some privacy is automatically achieved. Additional seclusion is made possible through the use of

sand-colored drapes of Belgian linen throughout the house (including in the master bath) which the architect commissioned for the home.

A pair of sandblasted sliding glass doors can also separate the bedroom from the bath area—"otherwise you have a view through the open bathroom onto the hillside and all the oak trees," Heusch says. "So the spaces flow into each other just like in the common rooms and give more light and views and spaciousness."

Again like a midcentury home, the common rooms are open to one another. The architect's choice of high-end and custom materials also raises the luxury quotient a few notches. The custom cabinetry in the bathrooms, for example, is rosewood. In



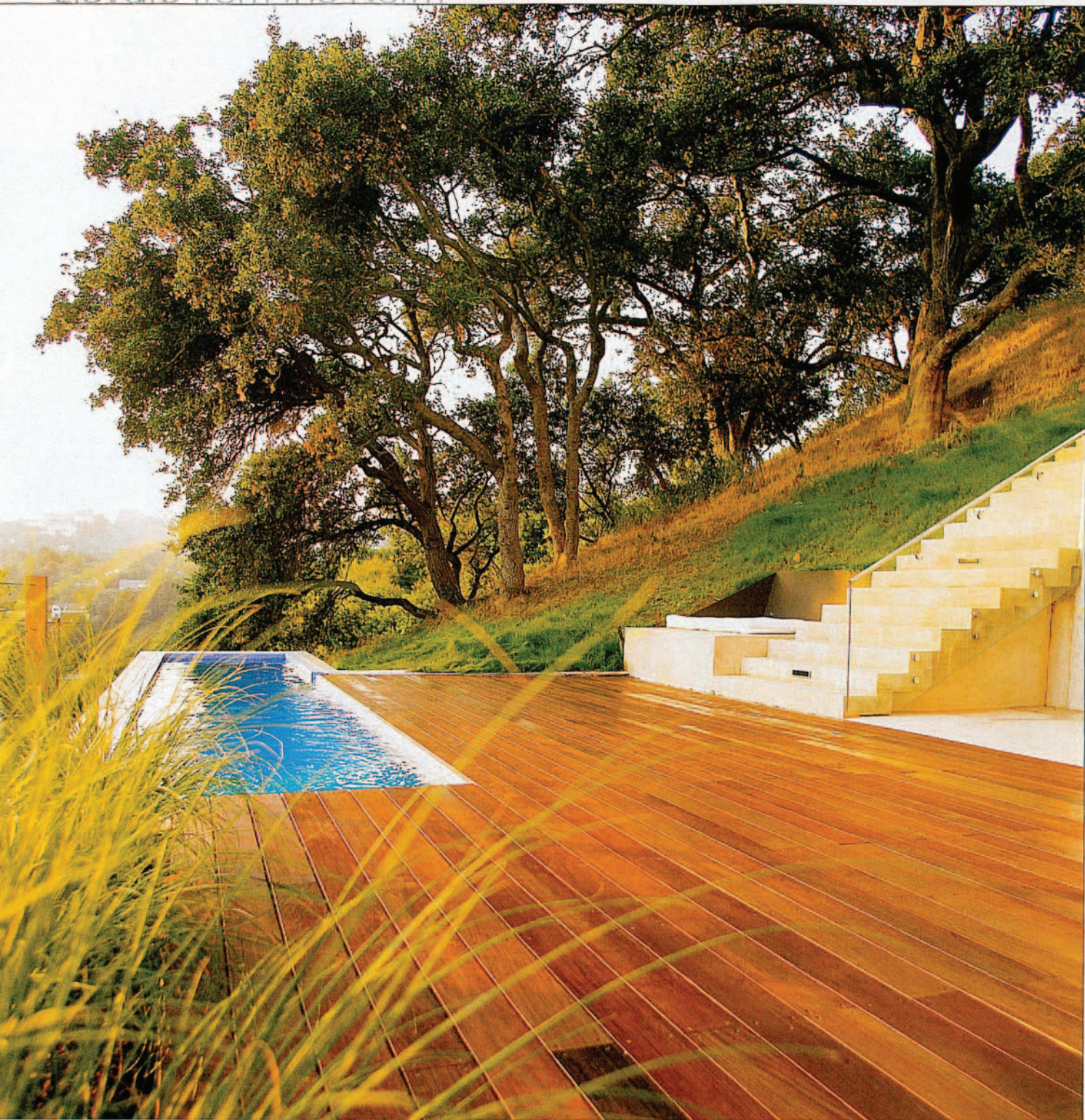
KEIJI SAITO





*Top: The master bathroom, which opens to the master bedroom via a glass pocket door, is outfitted with Boffi fixtures. Above left: An Alison Van Pelt painting hangs in the entrance hall. Above right: A swath of orange glass provides privacy and whimsy in the powder room.*





*The Brazilian wood terrace features a slender pool. The stairs lead to the upper level, which holds the house and another small terrace.*

the Bulthaup kitchen, only an island, topped with the same gray-and-white Portuguese marble used elsewhere in the house, separates cook from company. "When you cook, you can visually communicate with everybody in the dining and living areas," he says. Heusch knows this firsthand because he likes to cook, and when he does it's usually—in keeping with his global perspective—French.

Designing his own house gave the architect the chance to explore his own creative impulses, unencumbered by another's perspective. "This is the only one of my homes

I really built from scratch, so I was able to express myself freely," he says. "I could really implement the best architectural solution for that site."

When compared to his 300-year-old home in Germany and his 60-year-old stone farmhouse in Argentina, it is this home that has become a true respite for the globe-trotting bachelor. "It is so soothing to be in the space," Heusch says. "I love being inside." □

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