

Stanley Saitowitz collaborates
with interior designer Michael Booth
in Northern California's wine country

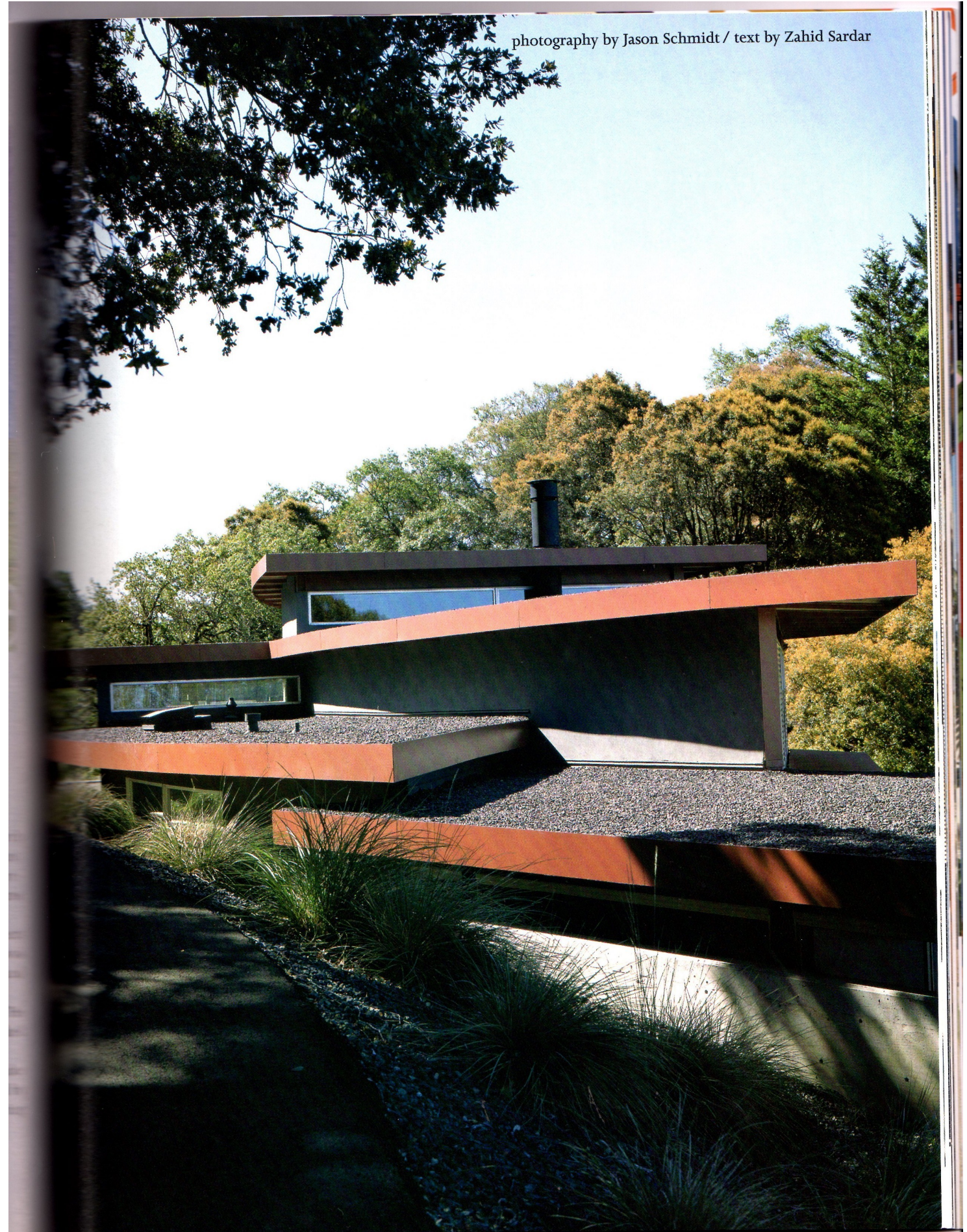
WALKING UP A GRAVEL PATH ON HIS SONOMA SPREAD, ninety minutes north of San Francisco, real estate mogul and art collector Byron Meyer spots a paw print. "Wolf," he notes with satisfaction, as if to say that during the decade it has taken to realize a country retreat on his hilly, three-hundred-sixty-acre property, he has become acquainted with the land and its creatures.

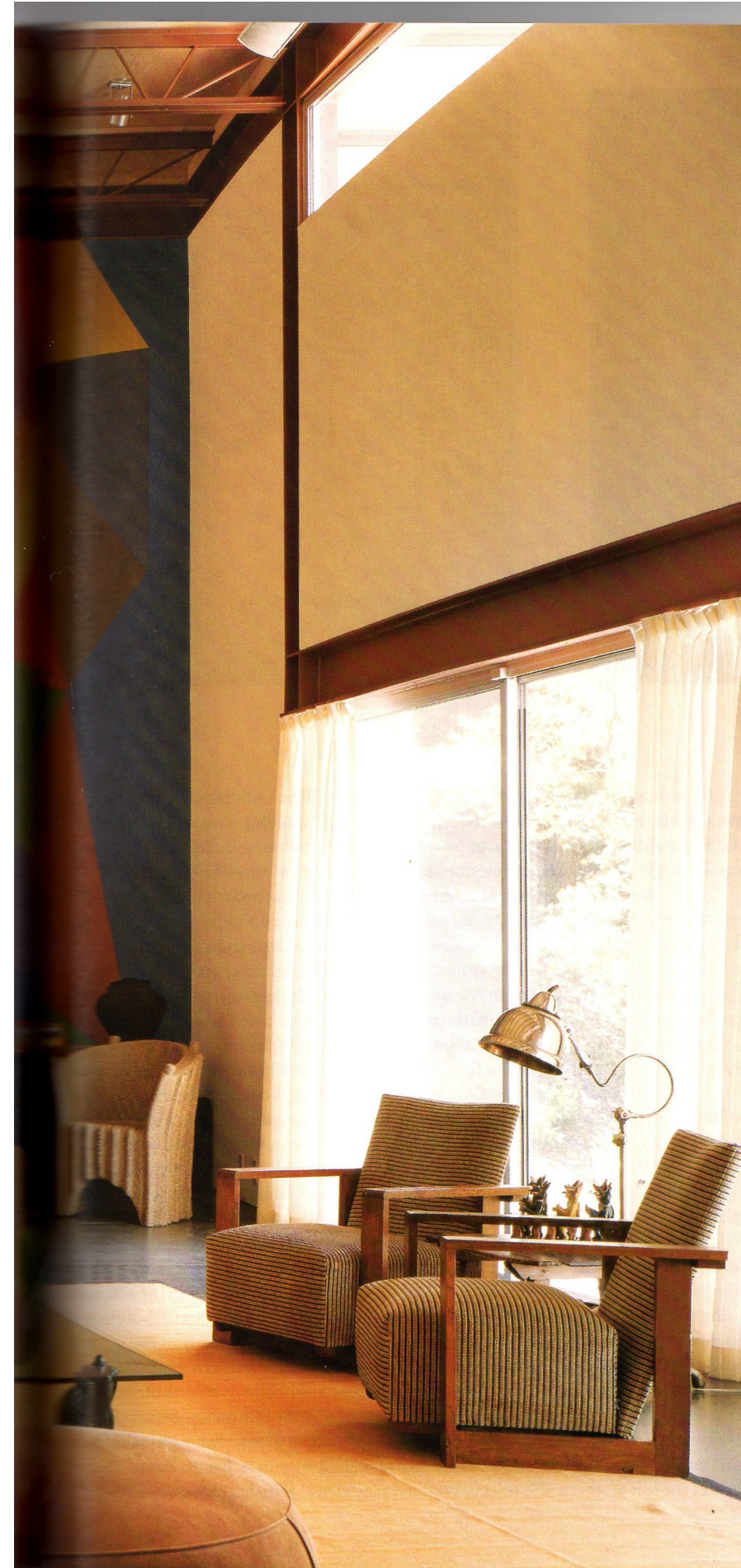
Designed by Stanley Saitowitz, principal of the San Francisco firm Natoma Architects and professor of architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, the house was conceived as a complex of separate structures; it became loosely interconnected and smaller as it evolved, but it never lost its loftlike essence.

"Byron has a sophisticated aesthetic, and lofts appeal to him," says Saitowitz. "He knew that buildings in the country have a barnlike tradition, which is why he likes open rooms, corrugated aluminum siding and simple materials."

The house they completed two years ago is not exactly a simple barn. The slender bar of concrete, the low-maintenance galvanized sheathing and the glass outlines of the reddish-brown steel framing result in a house that looks more like a bullet train from past woods of oak, pine and madrone.

Stanley Saitowitz and Michael Booth devised a loftlike residence in Sonoma for client Byron Meyer that is as connected to the countryside as it is to Meyer's impressive collection of furniture, art and artifacts. **above:** A covered footbridge links the main living area to the master suite. **opposite:** Roof becomes landscape as "the house twists and cascades to align itself with the terrain," says Saitowitz.





left: A perforated metal staircase descends from the mezzanine to the living room, which is dominated by a Sol Le Witt mural. The kilim area rug was custom made and sits on poured concrete floors, while a pair of Gordon Russell armchairs and an end table by Jeff Jamieson help define the sitting area. **above:** The kitchen remains open, yet it is detached from the living room. Booth opted for antique factory lights and aluminum barstools.



"It's a seam that connects the site," says Saitowitz. "The building is a kind of repair operation to unite a hill, a valley and a promontory." The 5,800-square-foot structure, based on a twelve-foot grid, is composed of three south-facing buildings. The central double-height structure is cut into the hill and connected to single-story wings.

The master suite, across the ravine to the west, can be approached from the living area by a covered footbridge. On the east side, at the edge of the promontory, a guest wing is connected to the center by a screened breezeway that runs parallel to a lap pool. Paths and terraces connect all the spaces more informally, knitting house and landscape together. Garden designer Roger Warner has placed wild, deer-resistant grasses, boulders and ancient olive trees around the pool to stretch the illusion of virgin terrain.

The main building contains a carport, a vestibule and split-level living and dining rooms divided by a double-sided fireplace. A kitchen and a library—pocketed into the hillside—flank the living spaces. Concrete floors inside and out link the dining areas to the breezeway (like an old-fashioned screened porch), providing a practical, protected extension for outdoor dining. Beyond it are two guest rooms, baths and lockers. A spiral staircase to a mezzanine landing leads to the bridge and Meyer's bedroom and bath. The south retaining wall has small clerestory openings to let in light, but large plate-glass sliding doors in the north wall open completely to terraces and the view.

Out back, the main structure curves, and its overhangs transform Saitowitz's street bar house from a Case Study look-alike to a series of languorous Japanese pavilions. "This is a rural loft," Saitowitz insists. "It implies a modest way of living in the country."

But this isn't a packing-crate kind of modesty. Even if you look past Meyer's collection of art photography and antique artifacts gathered in Asia and Africa, you can't ignore sophisticated details everywhere: a Sol Le Witt mural in the living room; a gourmet kitchen equipped with ovens and stoves for large parties; baths with custom stainless steel sinks as beautifully crafted as fine jewelry. "In terms of intimacy, bathrooms are always more intricate and sensual. That's why we fetishize them," Saitowitz admits.

The interior design by Michael Booth of Babey Moulton Jue & Booth further elevates the loft aesthetic. He selected refined plaster wall finishes and custom carpets,



and designed knotty pine furniture inspired by the work of sculptor Donald Judd to suit the space. Meyer, a former San Francisco Museum of Modern Art trustee and a current board member of the San Francisco Ballet, was able to persuade Judd's authorized fabricator, Jeff Jamieson, to help with the furniture. Other pieces are midcentury classics re-issued by Knoll or vintage pieces found in London.

"We softened the interior to make it comfortable," says Booth. His well-planned seating arrangements are conducive to parties or intimate conversations, and table lamps counter harsh downlighting.

Throughout the space, practicality was paramount. "It's not Byron's primary residence, and he didn't want a staff up here," says the interior designer. Hence Booth chose Rogers & Goffigon linens that could handle winter mud or summer dust, and he referenced natural colors for the fabrics and paint. For the steel, he went with shades of madrone instead of fire-engine red.

Practical concerns might also have limited a display of art. "It would be hard to rescue important pieces in case of fire," says Booth. "It takes fire trucks at least twenty minutes to get here."

But few collectors can abstain entirely. The black-and-white photographs by Ed Ruscha and the Sol Le Witt mural are shown partly because they are reproducible. Scattered about are furniture classics by Hans Wegner and Andrée Putman, paintings by Roy DeForest and Richard Prince, and prints by photographer Nan Goldin. The custom knotty pine furniture matches the horizontal scale of the house, but in Meyer's bedroom, Booth placed a Frank Lloyd Wright desk as homage to the master architect. A Gerrit Rietveld chair from the Victoria and Albert Museum was reproduced for use outdoors.

And that is where Meyer often finds himself sitting, admiring a view of hills and vineyards. He likes to say that he is really partly a farmer, perhaps because his own vineyards supply BV, the Napa winery. But the truth may be that at heart this urban developer ultimately remains a boy from Stockton, California.

"I've understood what I need by developing many houses," Meyer says. "But this is the house I've always wanted." +

opposite left: In an intimate library off the double-height living room is Meyer's collection of Sunset Strip photographs by Ed Ruscha. **opposite right:** The covered footbridge contains a copper chair, a chair/table and a daybed—all by Donald Judd. "This space continues 'through' the master bedroom, becoming a path up the hill," notes Saitowitz. **above left:** Photographs by Mike Kelly hang above a seagrass headboard and a drafting lamp from Robert Altman in the master bedroom. The chair is by Mario Botto. **above:** In the master bath, steel beams and views of the hillside add a sense of openness, while the color scheme and dark floors keep it warm.

following pages: The corrugated-aluminum siding and concrete terraces are softened by the house's form, which unfolds through the site. The pool is situated at the edge of a ravine.

