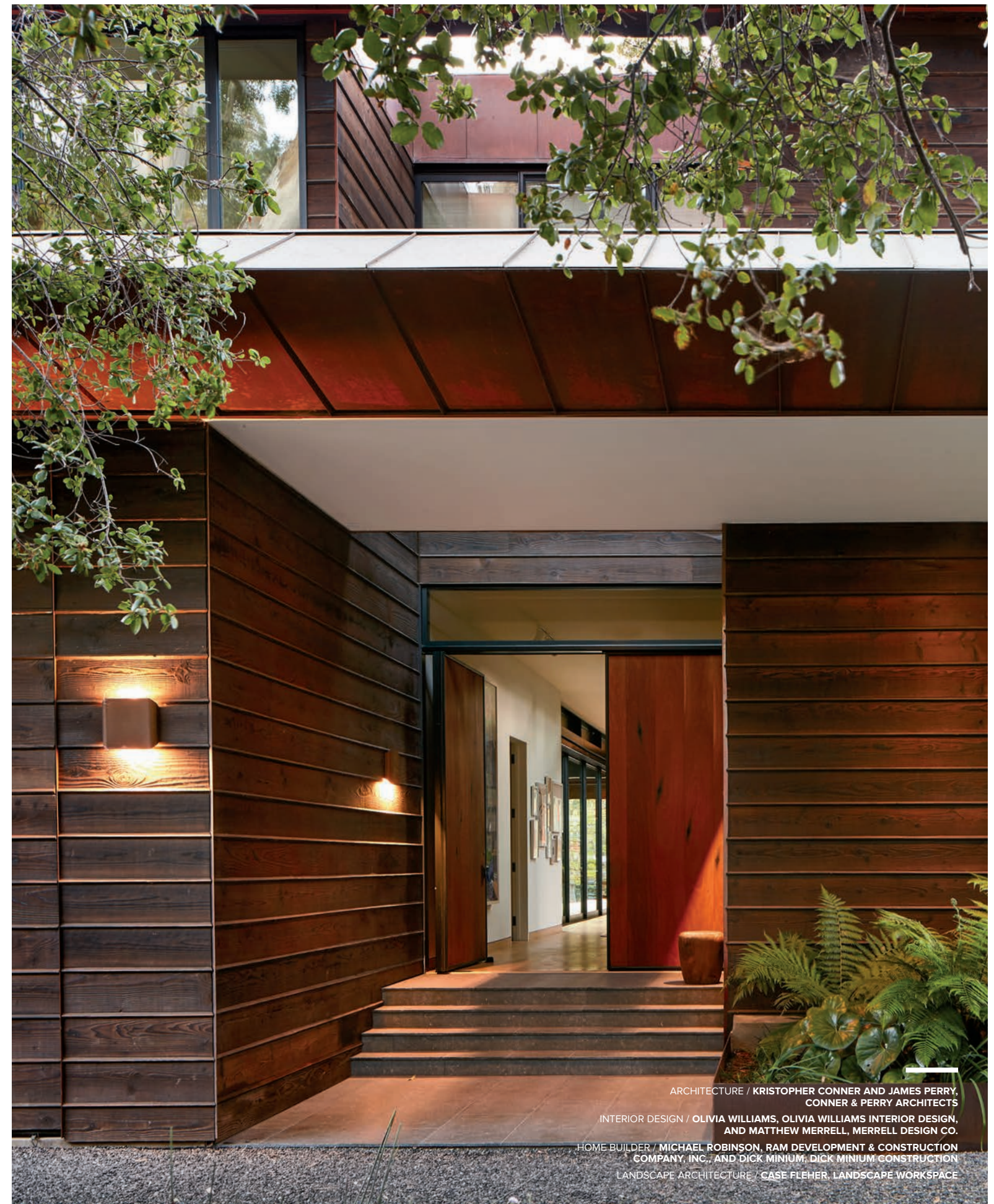


INTO *the* WOODS

CRAFTING A ONE-OF-A-KIND FAMILY HOME
IN SANTA MONICA, TWO ARCHITECTS CARRY
ON THE LEGACY OF THEIR LATE MENTOR.

WRITTEN BY KAMALA NAIR / PHOTOGRAPHY BY TREVOR TONDRO



ARCHITECTURE / KRISTOPHER CONNER AND JAMES PERRY,
CONNER & PERRY ARCHITECTS

INTERIOR DESIGN / OLIVIA WILLIAMS, OLIVIA WILLIAMS INTERIOR DESIGN,
AND MATTHEW MERRELL, MERRELL DESIGN CO.

HOME BUILDER / MICHAEL ROBINSON, RAM DEVELOPMENT & CONSTRUCTION
COMPANY, INC., AND DICK MINIUM, DICK MINIUM CONSTRUCTION

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / CASE FLEHER, LANDSCAPE WORKSPACE

Architects Kristopher Conner and James Perry continued the work of their late colleague Duncan Nicholson on a home in Rustic Canyon. Designers Olivia Williams and Matthew Merrell devised a stylish spot for lounging in the great room, appointing the living area with a custom sofa in a Sahco fabric, a pair of vintage armchairs from Adesso, a Philip and Kelvin LaVerne coffee table and a rug from ABC Carpet & Home in New York. Above the fireplace is a Charlie White photograph.

It should come as no surprise that native Angelenos Jamie Price and Bradford Schlei should build a bright, airy contemporary dwelling in the wooded Santa Monica enclave of Rustic Canyon. Jamie's nearby childhood home was designed by the legendary architect Ray Kappe (Bradford lived in a residence by another titan of L.A. architecture, Paul R. Williams), and she grew up playing at the neighborhood park. "I always felt like the area had a bit of magic to it with the overgrown trees and streams," she says.

In creating a home for themselves, the couple wanted to capture the feeling of light and space and of living among the trees. "This property brought all of that together," Jamie says. They turned to architect Duncan Nicholson of Nicholson Architects. Tragically, Nicholson, a protégé of the great John Lautner, fell terminally ill toward the end of the schematic design process. Before his death, he passed the torch to his associates, Kristopher Conner and James Perry. "A lot of the design essence was there," notes Perry. Conner adds, "The spatial layout of the house and aesthetic was generally established, but we figured out the nuts and bolts and did some redesigning."

The lush setting—during the early 20th century, the site had served as a U.S. Forest Service test station for eucalyptus trees—inspired the home's indoor-outdoor concept. "The climate in the canyon is specific," explains Perry, and allowed for the house to flow around the landscape, yielding outdoor rooms, the organizing principle of the architectural program. "Anywhere you are in the house, you can see into the landscape," says Conner. Landscape designer Case Fleher also capitalized on the venerable trees for his design. "We kept some but severely manicured them to make space in the front," he says. Whatever trees they had to cut down were harvested and used for everything from the front door to a fireplace mantel to a series of turned outdoor stools. "We shipped them off to be milled into blocks of wood," says Michael Robinson, who, along with Dick Minium, served as the general contractors.



A slab of Calacatta Gold marble tops the kitchen island's base, which is wrapped in the same weathered brass by Mark Ogburn Enterprises as the hood. The structure allows for a set of Ochre counter chairs on one side and for bookshelves on another. The Wolf and Sub-Zero appliances are from Ferguson; the faucet is Waterworks.

Not only did the architects literally incorporate the site's trees in their design, but they also took inspiration from them for the home's other components. "As the building progresses upward," Conner explains, "it transitions from more rusticated, earthen materials such as concrete, weathered steel and stone, to lighter materials like charred wood, glass, plaster and copper."

The effect is nearly allegorical. "The rusticated materials of the base relate to the land and root the building to the earth," notes Conner. "The expanses of wood siding and glass relate to the tone and massing of the tree's trunk, springing up from the base. And the plaster and copper elements of the dramatic eaves and the skylights and openings throughout the house relate to the tree canopy." The interior materials, a mix of limestone, French oak flooring, weathered brass, and blackened steel among them, harmonize with those found outside.

As the architectural bones of their new home came together, the couple brought in Olivia Williams and Matthew Merrell to tackle the interior design. "They have a colorful art collection, and personalities, so we needed the house to represent that aspect of who they are," Merrell says, alluding to works by Adolph Gottlieb, Charlie White, Alexander Calder and others that grace the residence. The designers also wanted to make sure the abode had a classic California feel. Notes Jamie, "Growing up here in the '80s was magical and that vibe and aesthetic influenced my design taste, so you get a sense of that in the house."

A top priority for the designers was selecting a palette to complement the home's blackened wood exterior. An enormous pink Venini chandelier, which they hung above the dining room table, set the tone for the rest of the color scheme. "We chose the Corbusier palette," says Williams, referring to a collection of shades the architect created. "They give complexity and depth that is not achieved in conventional paints. The paint color changes throughout the day in different light. It all works harmoniously and quite naturally. It's special to the house and the clients."

That singularity infuses every aspect of the home, both inside and out. "There's a common misconception that Lautner was striving for some consistent style, but it was the opposite of that," says Conner. "His biggest goal was striving for each project to be unique. That's what Duncan always talked about, trying to do something original. That's how we paid tribute to both him and Lautner." ■

The bronze handrail on the main stair is supported by the glass guard so it visually “floats” above the blackened steel railing by Potter Mallis. Rode Bros. supplied the solid French oak planks for the floors and the treads. The windows, in a dark bronze finish, are from Monumental Windows and Doors.



A vintage Murano chandelier serves as the visual anchor for the great room. Brass elements such as the dining area's Mastercraft table base and the framework of the chandelier connect to the materials palette found elsewhere in the space. The custom dining chairs wear a Chase Erwin linen.

Opposite: Rift oak veneer paneling houses a hidden built-in bar and TV niche as well as storage, bookshelves and a fireplace. The custom tile surround is by Lubna Chowdhary; the mantel by EBK Woodworking is of eucalyptus from trees felled on the property. Lighting around the B&B Italia bed includes a Murano chandelier and Gentner sconce.

Below: In a corner of the master bedroom, the designers composed a striking moment furnished with a Gio Ponti vanity from the Royal Continental Hotel in Naples, a Paavo Tynell table lamp and a vintage Mario Bellini chair. The draperies are in a gauzy C&C Milano linen from Thomas Lavin.





Charred wood by Montana Timber Products dresses the home's façade. The pool, designed by the architects and executed by Intex Design and Construction, features Massangis limestone coping and steps, by Diona Marble, and a Heath Ceramics tile border. Landscape designer Case Fleher conceived the lush plantings that echo the vibe of the canyon.

“THE RUSTICATED MATERIALS OF THE HOME’S BASE RELATE TO THE LAND AND ROOT THE BUILDING TO THE EARTH.”

—KRISTOPHER CONNER