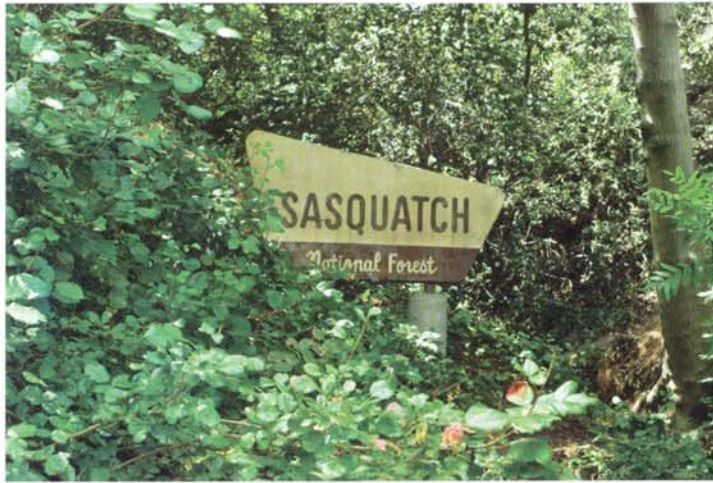


DESIGNED FOR POSTERITY

ARCHITECT JOHN BERTRAM BUILDS LASTING DREAMS

BY JAE MARGRET MICHAELS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAZY ALVAREZ





The essence of what makes a house a home can be many things, from who lives there, to how it's furnished, to what kind of art hangs on the walls.

In the ideal situation, a house is a home from the moment of its conception. Every aspect of its realization comes from a place of harmony, from the way the house integrates with the land, to the building materials that will be used, to the often-overlooked elements—like what kind of drawer pulls will be chosen for the bathroom cabinets.

Done right, the end result far exceeds the sum of its parts.

Los Angeles architect John Bertram excels at his profession because he has mastered the art of detail, merging it with his overall modernist vision to create homes that transcend the moniker of “house.”

His homes are symphonies—each element has a reason for being, works in concert with every other element and ultimately sweeps the human spirit off its feet.

“What goes into each detail—it’s one of the hallmarks of what we do,” Bertram says. “We take it very, very seriously.”

He and his firm, Bertram Architects, designed this Hollywood Hills home with the same care he devotes to each of his commissions, putting him comfortably among the top echelon of architects working in Los Angeles today.

Because of his abilities and his sterling reputation, Bertram has also been entrusted with the restoration of four Richard Neutra homes, the mid-century modernist architect whose work in the Los Angeles area has become highly sought after in recent years.

“I love modern architecture and the modern period,” he says. “The classic, high-modern architecture is something I’ll always respond to; it’s remarkable.”

A modernist himself, Bertram has a more expansive definition of his own design philosophy, though.

“I think that’s a real starting point for most of our work,” he says.

SPLENDID DETAILS This page: (Above) A whimsical “Sasquatch National Forest” sign sits in the brush of the ravine behind the house, a novel and subtle detail; (upper right) beautiful and durable Brazilian IPÉ hardwood steps lead to the front door; (lower right) expansive and airy outdoor landscape design by Bent Grass compliments Bertram’s architecture. Opposite page: The focal point of the living room is the Indiana limestone fireplace extending 12 feet along one side; the coffee table shown is a custom design by interior design team Diana Kunce and Michelle Marks.





INVITING SPACES This page: Formerly a hallway, this area has been transformed into useful and habitable space with its built-in bookshelves accompanied by a view of the outdoors. Opposite page: The dining room exudes warmth and elegance, established with walnut panels that compliment the rosewood oval dining table by Eero Saarinen and dining chairs by Pearson Lloyd Turtle; adding to the warmth is the brass Onos suspension lamp by Florian Schulz that hangs above the table.





FORM AND FUNCTION This page: Modern metal and natural wood elements form a perfect union in this kitchen. Opposite page: Rich walnut cabinetry and glossy stainless steel appliances establish a look that is both polished and inviting. This design encourages friendly banter across the cook top for anyone seated on one of the 1958 Cherner stools.

imagine the sometimes awkwardly shaped yards to match the feel of Bertram's design. "The trick was to make it feel as open as the interior space," he says.

At the time Bertram graduated from Yale in 1994, he never envisioned that he would be designing homes in Los Angeles someday. He started his architectural career in Chicago and aimed for the larger firms, but it wasn't meant to be. He found himself slog-ging it out in a "grueling internship" at a smaller residential design firm.

"It was kind of perfect for me," Bertram tells. "The people there were very immersed in details." There, the first steps on his path to today had begun.

Looking into the future, Bertram has a desire to build more substantial institutional work. "I've always wanted to do a church or a museum," he says. "Who knows if that will happen, but I would certainly love to do it."

That said, he is gratified by the direction that his career has taken to this point. "I don't think I'll ever get tired of designing houses," he says. "It's limitless." ☺

"I don't feel that I am particularly dogmatic or a doctrinaire. It's not like I have some kind of intense ideology that I kind of force the client into accepting."

In fact, he has a deep understanding of the psyche of his clients, who are oftentimes highly successful people who are used to maintaining a lot of control in their professions.

"That translates into people who pay a lot of attention to what's going on," Bertram says. "Some architects might find that frustrating because they will continue to have to respond to challenging questions, but I think that's ultimately so good. I really like that.

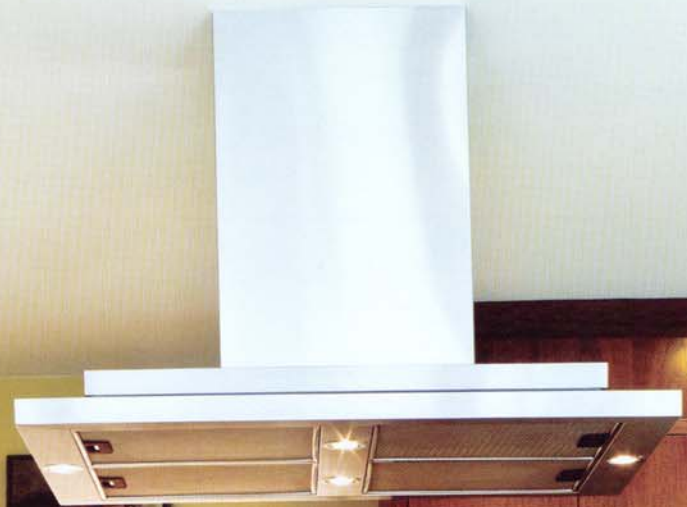
"I view it as kind of like 'a strong client is so much better than someone who doesn't have an opinion or doesn't question the process.'"

Bertram's ability to easily collaborate undoubtedly contributes to his success. For this particular house, interior designers Diana Kunce and Michelle Marks, as well as landscape architect firm Bent Grass, had glowing reports about their collaboration with Bertram.

"Michelle and I have found ourselves to be the luckiest interior designers working with John," Kunce says of Bertram. "His spaces just have this sort of inner beauty and light and integrity and grace. You just know the answer intuitively as to how to respond to it."

Equally enthusiastic was Jeff Pervorse of Bent Grass. Pervorse says that his firm begins its work pretty early in the design process so that it can integrate how people move around the yard.

With this house, Pervorse's goal was to re-







INNER BEAUTY This page: (Clockwise from top) Walnut wall panels frame the master bed by Italian designer Ceccotti Collezioni; Italian Fiorenza armchair by Franco Albini; this large 22-inch deep tub is complimented by windows on both sides that look out to the ravine behind the house. Opposite page: A gray, frosted-glass sliding panel in the master bath offers a chic layer of privacy, while windows above the full length of the bathroom sink and a skylight above let in light and create the feeling of open outdoor space.



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