

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

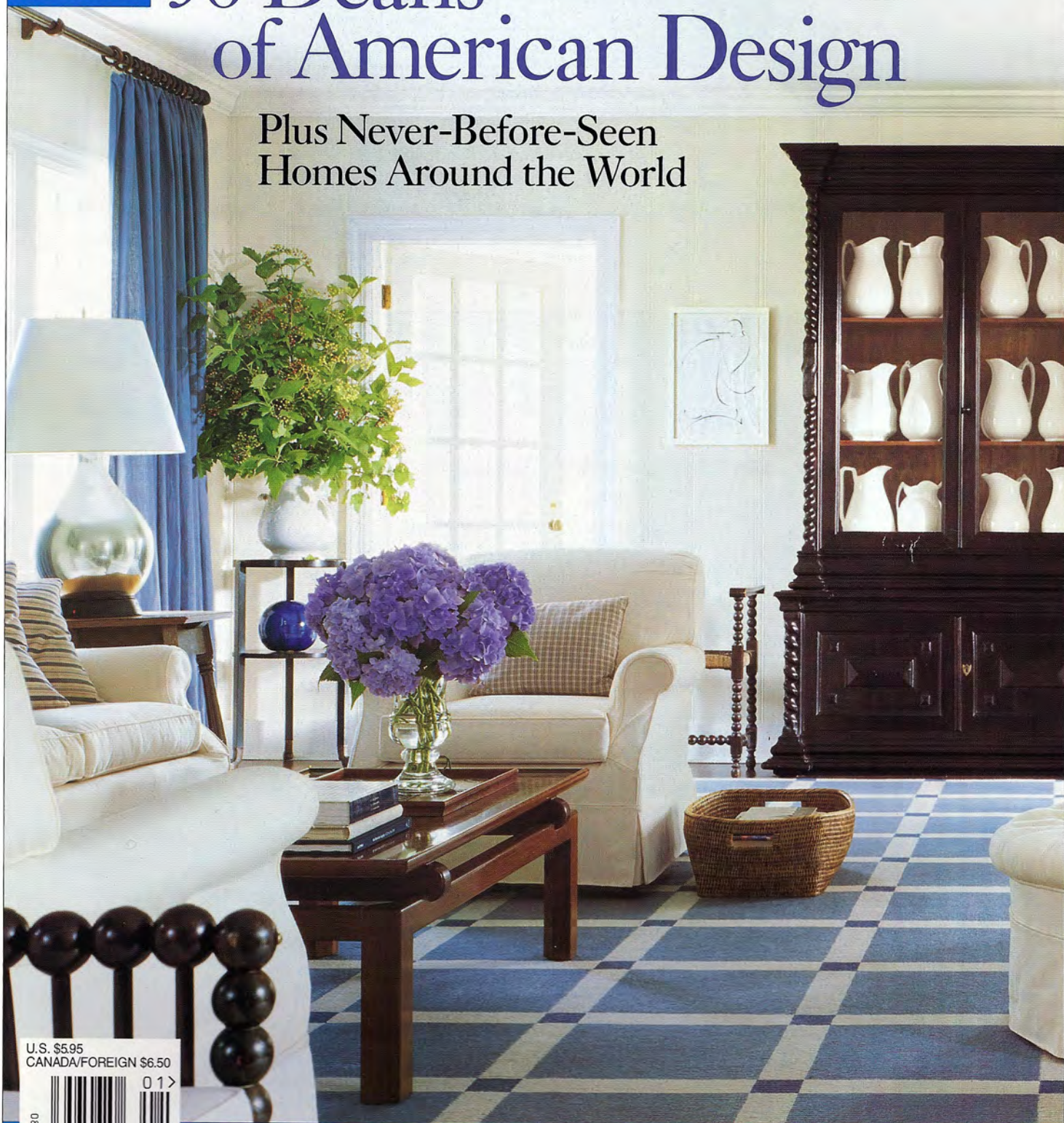
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MOTORING BY DESIGN: Daryl Hannah's Vegan Car
The Timeless Porsche 911, Renault's Design Center Outside Paris

A glass-and-stainless-steel pyramid tops the entrance hall of a Los Angeles house. Designer Charles Allem, who oversaw a team of architects, renovated the 1961 residence for Reagan Silber. They added another floor and a 32-foot-high steel retaining wall to level the once sloping site.





Charles Allem, the South African-born, New York- and Los Angeles-based designer, has a tendency to refer to his projects as movies. If this house were a movie, it would almost certainly be of the James Bond variety. The stainless-steel driveway would flatter 007's Aston Martin. The staircase shaped like a helix and crowned with a glass pyramid begs for an entrance by a Bond girl. The white-terrazzo bar next to the 80-foot lap pool is made for shaking, not stirring. And that's just the house. The sexiest feature of all is its setting—a Los Angeles hilltop with city-to-ocean views worthy of a Parahawk.

"When a broker first told me the price of the property and said I was going to have to redo it, I said, 'That's insane,'" re-

You Only Live Twice

FIT FOR 007, A 1960S HILLSIDE HOUSE IN BEL-AIR IS RECONFIGURED

Architectural, Interior and Landscape Design by Charles Allem
Text by Peter Haldeman/Photography by John Ellis



calls Reagan Silber, the Texas-born, L.A.-based private investor who acquired the place five years ago and currently lives there, as Bond might, alone. "Then I walked through the front door and looked out the window." Before there was a movie, then, there was a house. A nice enough house, a modern two-story affair built by the architect Richard Dorman in 1961. Just not a blockbuster. "Most of the house was brown wood," explains Allem, "so it tended to read a little bohemian/hippie. The terrazzo floors were there, the glass was there, the actual shape and length of the house were there. But it used to hang off a cliff."

Thus, the construction of "the Great Wall of Bel-Air," as Allem calls it, a 32-foot-high retaining wall that was backed with several hundred tons of soil to level the 45-degree slope below the house and accommodate a third (ground) floor as well as a terrace, pool, lawn and gardens.

ABOVE LEFT: Heavy stainless-steel double doors open to reveal the entrance courtyard and the front door. **LEFT:** "I call it a contemporary Italian garden," Allem says. "This was my first project where I took charge of everything—including the architectural and landscape design."

“I didn’t want the beige-and-white movie they turn out in Los Angeles one after another,” explains Charles Allem.



OPPOSITE: "We wanted to create different seating arrangements instead of dividing the living area with walls," says Allem. Chairs designed by William Haines were covered in mohair; they surround a Paul McCobb table. RIGHT: Allem conceived the dining table.

BELOW: "I love to choose a color and use different shades and textures throughout a space," says Allem, who paired a leather sofa by Paul László with 1950s chairs in the living area. An untitled 1988 photograph by Adam Fuss hangs on the dining area's green-lacquered wall. Stark carpet.



After that it was all, well, downhill. "It took us maybe 10 days to say the top floor should be for entertaining, the middle floor for bedrooms and the ground floor for lifestyle," says Silber.

With the help of Lacina Heitler Architects and Baker+Ogata Architects, Allem gutted the existing structure. He left a "clean sweep" to the decks and views on the top floor, fashioning three open seating areas off the dining area and a sleek all-stainless kitchen. He designed a luxe

master suite and two cocoonlike guest rooms on the middle floor. And on the ground floor, he gave Silber every bachelor's dream: an ultraplush media room, a study and a gym. But the house's biggest statement is the circular staircase linking the three floors. "That stair is iconic," says Allem. "It's the core of the house. We had it manufactured from one piece of stainless steel, craned in, floated inside the walls and topped with an organic 14-foot glass-and-steel pyramid."

The pyramid peeks over the stainless-steel wall that hides the house from the street. Touch a door in the wall, and it slides open to reveal a checkerboard of white terrazzo and emerald lawn flanked by beds of 'Iceberg' roses and crisp ficus hedges. The entrance to the house is a perfect glass cube, with no obstruction to the views beyond. A rich, masculine palette and luxurious textures soften the hard edges—oak floors are stained a deep espresso brown; walls are lacquered in





LEFT: Allem refers to the study as his “favorite room on earth.” The red-lacquered wall offsets Andy Warhol’s 1968 series *Flash - November 22, 1963*. Allem, with Lacina Heitler Architects and Baker+Ogata Architects, designed the spiral stair, which was hand-forged on-site.



ABOVE: A seating area off the kitchen. “I lean more toward darker hues—I find them very alluring,” says Allem (left). “I never hesitated with the chocolate color. I find it very rich and sensual. Reagan wanted something with more kick, and that was exactly why I was brought in,” he adds.

kelly green. “I didn’t want the beige-and-white movie they turn out in L.A. one after another,” comments Allem. Several decades’ worth of modern furniture (Paul László, William Haines, Christian Liaigre) help to bridge the entertainment area’s midcentury roots and its contemporary rebirth.

The stainless-steel stair spirals down to a floor of bedrooms in the same choco-

late tones as above. The master bedroom is as self-contained as a luxury hotel suite. “I wake up, have my coffee and watch the news all in my suite,” says Silber. The master and the two guest rooms open onto a smaller deck with views no less arresting than those upstairs.

On the ground floor, Allem warmed up the dark woods with carpets, lacquered walls and leather furniture in a winelike color he calls amethyst. There’s the media room, with its huge plasma screen (then again, most of the rooms in the house—there are 32—seem to have plasma screens). There’s the master-of-the-universe gym, with green suede walls and Louis Vuitton leather benches and equipment in stainless steel right down to the pulleys (“This is when I knew I had lost my mind too,” quips Silber).

There’s the study, featuring a cantilevered desk and a spiral stair of its own



leading to a mezzanine of bookshelves. (“If you can’t close a deal in there, you ain’t going to close it,” says Allem.) All of the rooms downstairs open onto the pool area—the one with the martini bar and the chef’s kitchen—which in turn spills into the lawn and gardens.

Each floor is self-sufficient. Silber can entertain anywhere in the house without having to go upstairs or down. But even James Bond might want to eventually settle down. Though his only current roommate is Cowboy, a two-year-old Labradoodle, Silber wouldn’t mind sharing the place with the right person. “With that house,” observes Allem, “they’re lining up.” □

TOP: A leather-and-wood bed, from Baker Knapp & Tubbs, centers the bedroom portion of the master suite, which includes a lounge, a dressing room and a kitchen. “I spend the first hour of the morning without leaving the suite,” says Silber. Stark carpet. **ABOVE:** The master bath.

“Los Angeles is the kind of environment where you entertain more outdoors than in, so I embraced that,” notes Allem. **RIGHT:** The pool area. “It’s the ideal house that every young person on the move dreams of having,” says the designer. Brown Jordan umbrella and chaises.



All of the rooms downstairs open onto the pool area—the one with the martini bar and the chef's kitchen—which in turn spills into the lawn and gardens.

