

INSPIRATIONAL HOMES IN STUNNING LOCATIONS

GREAT ESCAPES

JUDITH MILLER WITH PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON UPTON





LEFT With only an ancient horse trail and an obscure hiking path meandering past, it is easy to forget that Los Angeles is less than an hour away. At the house-warming party, guests were asked to throw wild-flower seeds, so the house is now surrounded by sage, mustard, clover, popples, lupins, yuccas, cornflowers and nasturtiums.

RIGHT Space is not a problem in southern California, so the single-storey scheme was an affordable luxury. Four distinct modules, each a separate structure, nestle beneath the huge, barn-like steel roof. The building materials are functional, with construction-grade wood and structural steel used throughout, and often left exposed, as are the electricity conduits. Specially designed clamp-on lighting and polished concrete complete the residence's industrial feel.

Peering out from beneath its sheltering roof, this plastic, concrete and steel residence near Los Angeles is protected from the threat of wild fires.

FIREPROOF BY DESIGN

The house in Topanga Canyon, north of Los Angeles, was planned with escape of a very practical nature in mind. With summer temperatures frequently exceeding 43 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit), the area is regularly at the mercy of wild fires. This fact has driven the aesthetics of the design from the very beginning. The 4000-square-metre (43,000-square-foot) Palladian-style airport hangar barn of a house,





The house is divided into four zones - the kitchen/living room, the living room area, the children's rooms and the bedroom suite - all connected by cross-aisle hallways and converging beneath an atrium lit by an overhead skylight. This area, seen left and below, is used as a formal dining room. The left side living room features a six-meter (twenty-foot) span of fully retractable glass sliding doors which open up the whole room to the landscape and the street beyond. But whenever you are in the house, the outside world is only a step away. Double doors from the central atrium entrance of the open hall straight out into the open, to sitting area (right) shaded from the sun by the overhang of the roof.

HOUSES ARE BUILT TO LIVE IN AND NOT TO LOOK ON; THEREFORE LET USE BE PREFERRED BEFORE UNIFORMITY, EXCEPT WHERE BOTH MAY BE HAD

designed by architect Brian Murphy is coated with plastic siding that will char in a fire, but not burn. In addition, the eaves are equipped with sprinklers which, if required, can create a fire-retardant curtain of water. Eventually, the house's block-wall plinth will be flooded, making the house appear to be floating in a lake. This will help cool the interior, but will also reflect light into the rooms deep inside and, most importantly, will serve, if required, as a back-up reservoir for the water-sprinkler system.

Constructed from utilitarian materials - concrete, wood, aluminum, steel and plastic - the house, with its novel series of four zones beneath a huge steel roof, is a temple to modernity - the perfect synthesis of beauty with practicality.

