

Parting Shot

By Richard Wright



High Above LA

“**T**he style of this house is modern,” says architect Austin Kelly, who with his partner, Monika Hafelfinger created the architectural firm XTEN in Los Angeles nine years ago. “It’s not modern in the way that Corbusier was modern, or even Barragan, although he is a big influence on us. We like that sense of big, open spaces, without columns and without a lot of visible structure (the partners refer to this house

as the Open House). We try to conceal most of that so it doesn’t take away from the experience of the space and its spatial connection to nature – whether that’s the views or the gardens.”

Those views are spectacular, for the house rests on a steep hillside overlooking downtown LA and Sunset Boulevard; retaining walls allow the house to be placed within the landscape, and provide the owners with

two levels of garden terraces.

Take a look at the exterior and think of a straight line – bent. The cleanli-

ABOVE: The black granite chimney structure holds four fireplaces and rises through two stories.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The view from the first floor with glass doors opened and a warming fire blazing away.



ness of that façade is protected by ample use of glass. Forty-four sliding glass panels, each 7-by-10 feet, allow the front and rear sections of the house to slide open, bringing the outside in and vice versa. When open, those panels are hidden in walls and closets, presenting an unobstructed view of the outdoors.

“(Here), nature meets contemporary urban living,” says Kelly. “It’s a large house, with 5,000 sq. ft. of interior space and about 10,000 sq. ft. of terraces.”

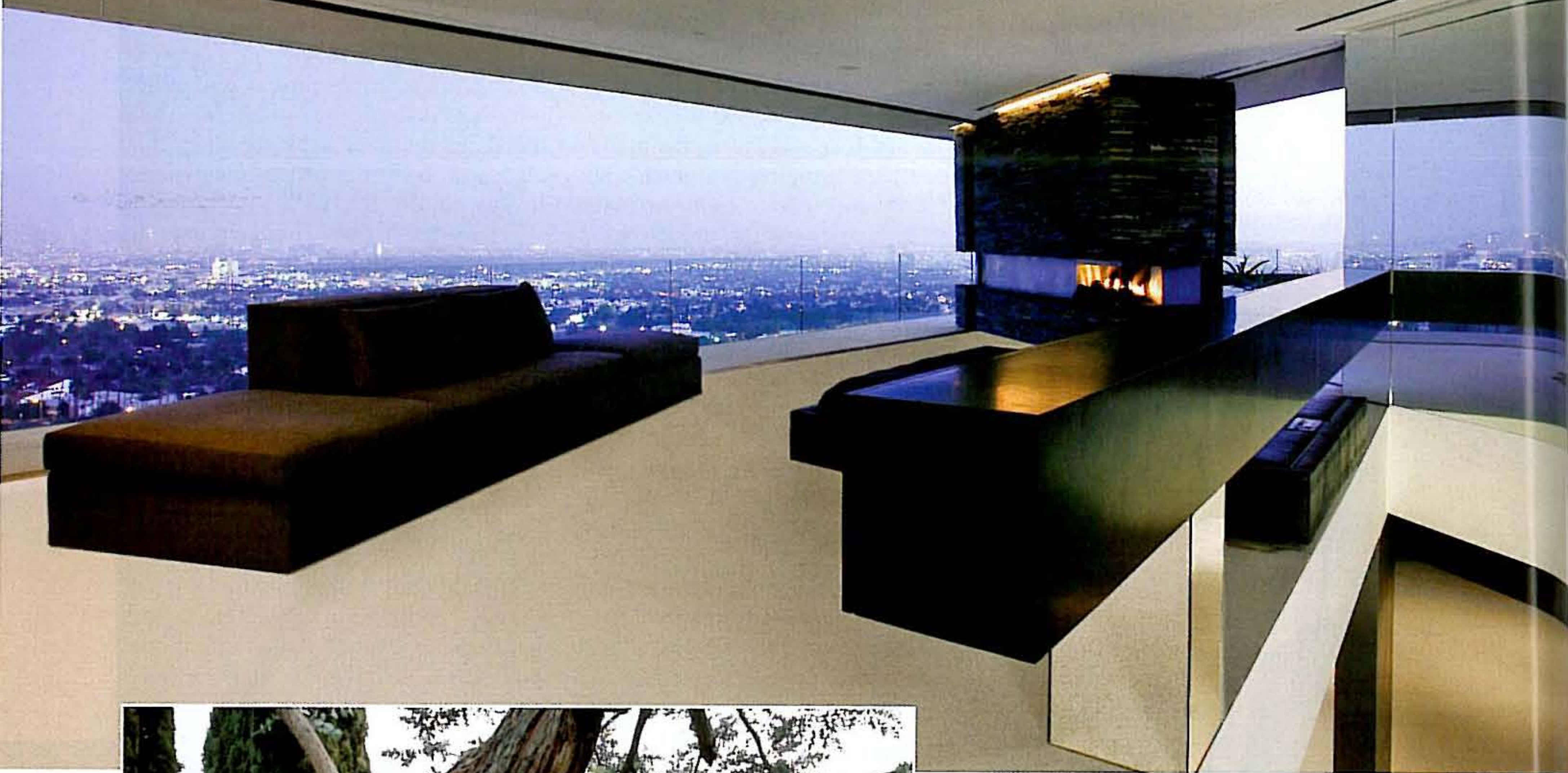
A pillar of black point granite towers through two floors; it holds four fireplaces, two on each level – one inside and one out. “There are two sheets of architectural drawings just about the fireplace,” says Kelly. “It is very complex. Not only is there a steel structure in that granite rectangle, but

all of the roof drainage and a tremendous amount of electrical and other building systems are in there. Then there are the four separate flues that all had to have the proper clearances. It was quite a trick.”

The ground floor fireplace uses an Isokern system. The two on the top floor are from Lennox Hearth Products. Glass panels butt up to the granite, forming a tight seal separating the outdoors from the interior.

“Those glass doors are our only James Bond-like feature,” says Kelly. “We had a company that does big hotels around the world come out from Phoenix; they were able to rig it so you can hit a switch and all the doors will slide open automatically. We had to work with commercial installers because residential guys don’t know how to do this type of work.”





ABOVE: View from the top floor.



LEFT: The texture and design of a wooden table and bench contrasts sharply with the rigid lines of the house and a chandelier hanging from the tree.

BELOW: View from the covered outdoor area with daybeds for reading, conversation or just plain sleeping.



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