

# L.A. STYLE

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# INSIDE

views, this one ranges back from the garage and carport that flank the entrance. The staircase initially reveals nothing but its hardwood treads and iridescent blue tile risers. At the first landing is a front bedroom (currently in use as an office) and the master bedroom and bathroom, which lead out onto an enclosed terrace—an open-air sitting room. Gold-veined Utah quartzite flag-paves the terrace, and is used for counters as well.

As you climb beyond the first landing, the climax of the house is revealed: a dining bay to the left, and then the living room, crowned by an 18-foot-high pitched vault of the same knotty cedar boards that canopy the staircase. Linking dining room and kitchen, to the right, is a bridge that crosses the stairwell and suggests a balcony overlooking the stepped street. The kitchen window frames an ancient sycamore; big windows to north and south flood the living room with light and open it to breezes and views of foliage.

The sinuous wall that borders the staircase on one side provides structural support for the undulating ceiling. The flow of space and shifts of scale make this upper level a delight.



Contractor Michael Koren was trained as an architect and brought a special refinement to every joint and finish. Color consultants Tina Beebe and Renzo Zecchetto chose six pale tones to warm the Sheetrock walls and plain door frames. What appears to be white turns out to be dusty rose or blue-gray, pale green or tea biscuit, colors that soften the play of sunlight and echo the plantings beyond.

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Turnbull designed the garden as a series of steps and terraces that trace a shortcut from street to bedroom. The architectural historian researched the history of the canyon, and brought in Bob

Newman of Plant Systems to help her pick aromatic herbs and flowers native to the locale. They planted acacias for privacy, eucalyptus and a sycamore for shade. Wild California roses, first chronicled by Spanish explorers, cascade like a waterfall over the terraces. The plants all have been chosen for their resistance to drought and fire, and for their subdued colors. "We didn't want a suburban garden in this wild canyon," she explains.

The clients chose to build, rather than buy an existing house, in part for the location, and also in response to designer Charles Eames's challenge. "There should be more people who give parties than go to them." It is a rare privilege to enjoy a precisely tailored house that may become, like Schindler's and Neutra's, an L.A. classic. Like the best of those, it's small and built on a tight budget. Few possess the taste, determination and funds to be a patron, but this house demonstrates the ideal is attainable. □

**Top:** The kitchen window frames an old sycamore across the street. **Below left:** Looking down on the house, which is rooted to the hillside. **Right:** Cedar boards soar above the living room and descend over the staircase.



# OUT



# UPSTAIRS

HOW DO YOU PICK AN architect who will both meet your practical needs and give you something more? A West Los Angeles couple—she is an architectural historian, he is a lawyer—improved the odds by inviting a collaboration. She knew Charles W. Moore, then a professor of architecture at UCLA; the couple had vacationed at Moore's condominium at Sea Ranch, a second-home community north of San Francisco he designed with William Turnbull and two other partners from Berkeley back in the '60s. Like an impresario seeking to reunite two star performers, she decided that Moore and Turnbull would offer complementary skills and mutual inspiration.

In fact, they had never entirely broken up, and were about to codesign a major house in the Rockies. Over the past four decades, Moore has collaborated with an ex-

They were sure their architects would share this vision. Turnbull believes that light is of "paramount importance as the revealer of space and an invitation to discovery." Moore has written (in *The Place of Houses*) that an ideal house should incorporate "the intangible rhythms, spirits and dreams of people's lives. Its site is only a tiny piece of the real world, yet this place is made to seem like an entire world."

"What are your deepest fantasies?" Moore asked his clients. And she quickly responded, "The kind of house that Dick and Nicole Diver would have built at the edge of the Mediterranean." She was recalling the hedonistic spirit of Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*, and Moore remembered its description of Nicole's garden, "bounded on one side by the house, from which it flowed and into which it ran." That image found expression on the California equivalent of a Mediterranean hillside.

The architects' first sketch showed an L-plan house that stepped up from the street along the north side of the site

by

Michael Webb

Creating a dream house on a steep site and a tight budget

photography by

Tim Street-Porter

tended family of architects, as he has moved from UC Berkeley to Yale to UCLA. He is now in Austin, living and practicing in the eighth house he has designed for himself, while remaining active in L.A. through the Moore Ruble Yudell partnership and, less frequently, the Urban Innovations Group. Turnbull has practiced independently in Berkeley since 1970, winning acclaim for diverse projects here and abroad.

Their L.A. clients wanted what they called "a tree house." She had lived in the concrete "desert camp" Rudolph Schindler designed for his family west of Hollywood in 1921; the couple had lived together in top-floor apartments in Baldwin Hills Village and a Richard Neutra complex in Westwood. He wanted "space filled with beautiful light"; she dreamed of soaring volumes. Both wanted something romantic, not hard-edged; something at once compact and airy, and at one with nature. After considering several sites, they found they could afford their first choice, a steep, secluded plot that had never been cleared of trees and grass.

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to give the principal rooms southern sun and organic links to a terraced garden. It included a deck that cut through the house halfway up the slope, and a free-form pool, both of which were later dropped as an economy. A scribbled phrase—"lots of stairs"—became the key concept.

So closely did the architects work together on the early sketches, often sharing a single pencil, that it's hard to be sure exactly who did what. The basic form of the house is quintessential Moore: Interlocking volumes flow out of a staircase that twists, narrows and swells like the stepped street of a hill village, and are wrapped in an irregular stucco envelope. It was certainly Turnbull, his colleague Heidi Richardson and project architect Robert Simpson who turned the concept into a taut, crisply detailed building, making each part of it work efficiently and infusing the whole with poetry.

While neighboring houses crowd up to the street and block each other's

# DOWN

The master bedroom and bathroom open onto an enclosed terrace halfway up the hill. Above are the living and dining areas.

