

sonoma

# A WORLD APART

A SONOMA RETREAT BUILT FOR BOTH QUIET WEEKENDS AND IMPRESSIVE ENTERTAINING TAKES ADVANTAGE OF EVERY ACRE.  
BY JEAN VICTOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW MILLMAN



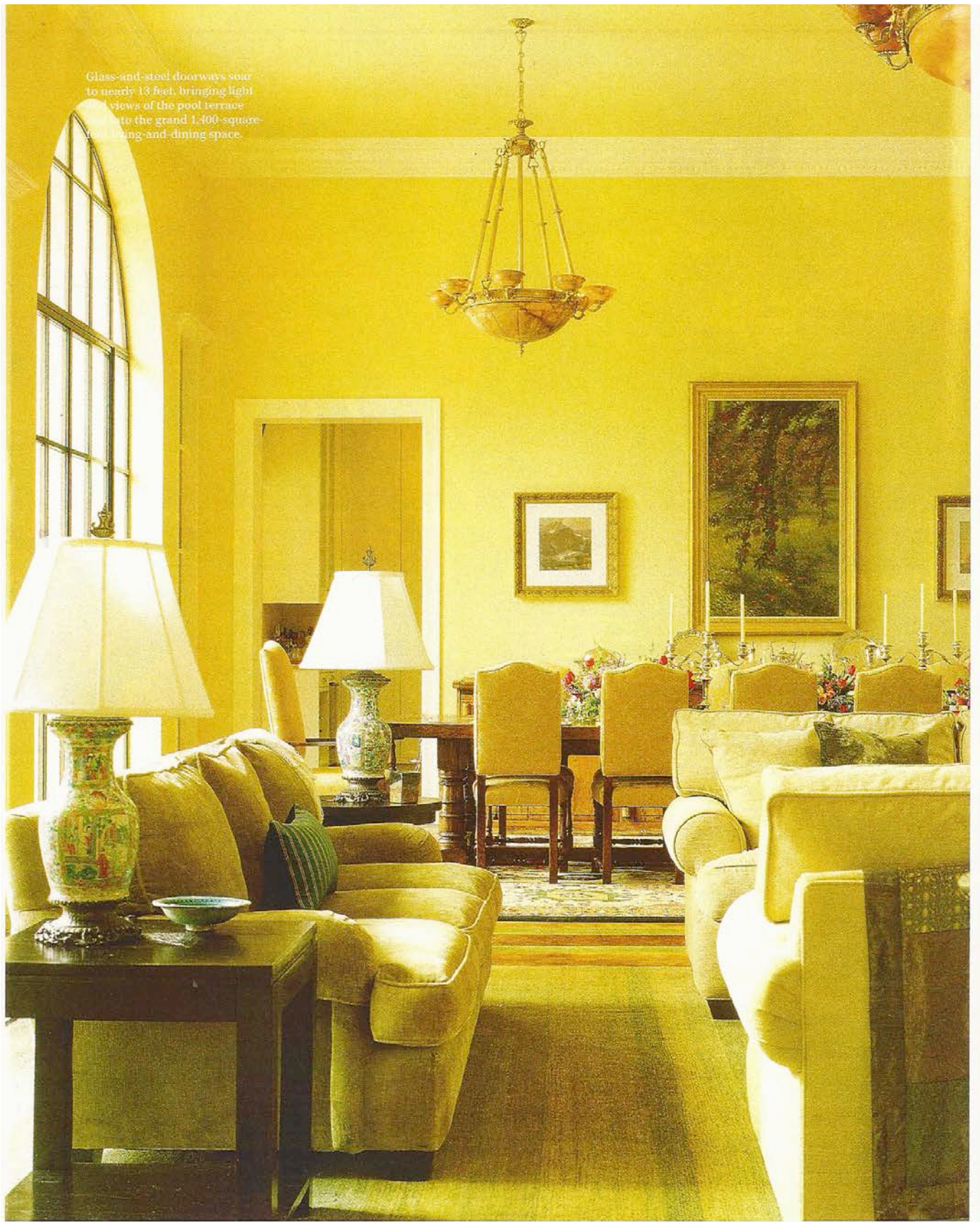


Horses graze in the pasture in front of the original barn, which was painted an iconic red to set a bucolic mood at the entrance to the 60-acre ranch.





Glass-and-steel doorways soar to nearly 13 feet, bringing light and views of the pool terrace into the grand 1,400-square-foot living-and-dining space.





**F**ew places have as many stories to tell as Rancho Mineiro, a 60-acre refuge in the Sonoma hills for a San Francisco couple and their menagerie of family, friends and animals. There's the one about the trio of 240-pound ostriches who roamed the pasture—along with peacocks, chickens and two picturesque paint horses—until the ostriches grew testy and started charging anything on two legs at highway speed. Or the aviary, home to 20 rescued parrots, including Gloria, who sings a serviceable rendition of "Fascination" on cue. Then there's the home's 15-foot-long dining table—made from reclaimed oak from a submerged pier in Belgium—which required 13 men to move it inside. Or the stone chapel at the property's edge that was constructed by a local mason named Jesus. And both guests and owners swear that the whispering voices of the ancient Miwok Indians who once inhabited the site can be heard on the wind near the creek.

Finally, there's the story of the main house itself, designed by Richard Beard of BAR Architects to reflect its eclectic inhabitants' personalities and styles. One of the owners, a former art director, grew up on a vast estancia (the original Rancho Mineiro) in southern Brazil; the other, an investment banker, on an estate in the Bay Area. "When I first met the couple, what struck me was that they had an incredible respect for the land," says Beard. "They had lived in the existing barn on the property for a number of years, and had spent many a weekend walking the site. They wanted to build a house that captured the spirit of the place without disturbing it." With the prime building location on a moderately sloping hillside, this proved to be no easy task.

Beard and project associate Lisa Victor came up with a solution for siting the building that would minimize disruption of the surrounding vegetation. The result is a 6,000-square-foot house that has a gracious facade overlooking a pool terrace, but still manages to offer an air of mystery when approached from the road, thanks to

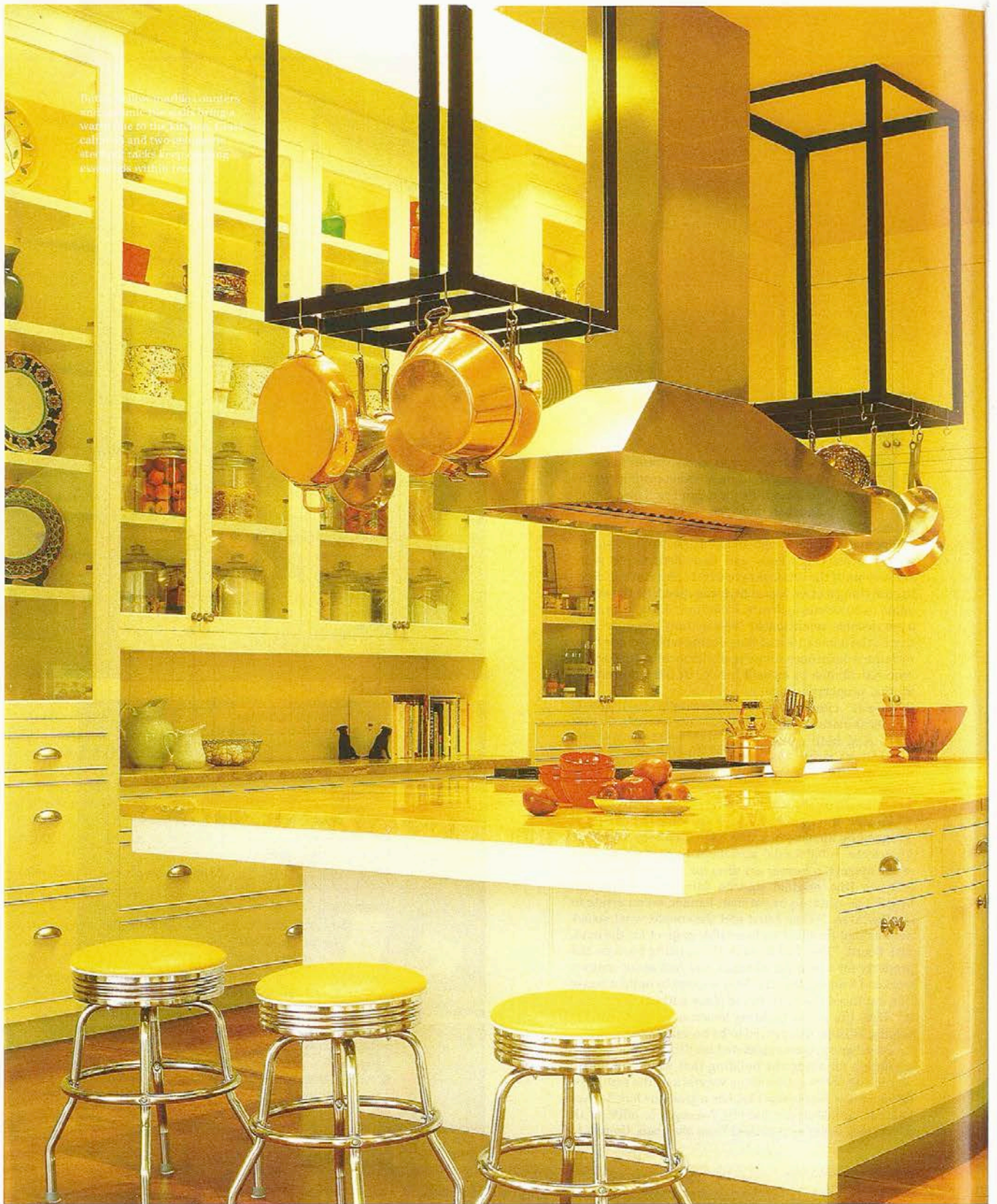
ABOVE RIGHT: Colored borders in the concrete floor divide the main room into seating and dining areas.

BELOW RIGHT: The pool view frames the East Bay's Mt. Diablo.

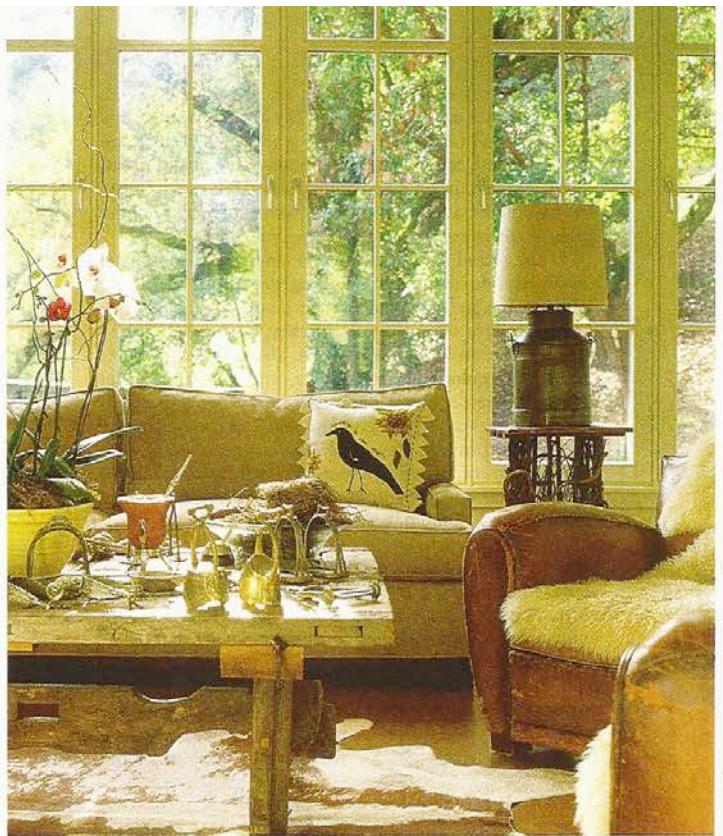
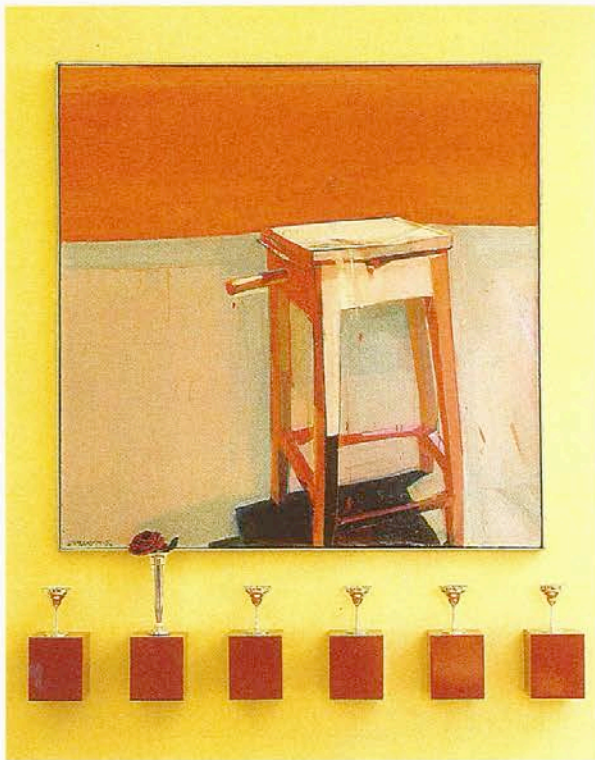




Two white marble counters  
with a built-in breakfast  
bar are in the kitchen. The  
cabinets and two sets of  
stools are made of stainless  
steel with a chrome finish.







the way the building is nestled into the hillside. "We wanted the house to reveal itself through a sequence of experiences," explains Beard.

ABOVE: Decorative red boxes play up Raimonds Staprans' *Butcher Block*. RIGHT: The owner's Brazilian roots are recalled by the heirloom silver on the mantelpiece and on the coffee table in the sitting room (above).

"When you drive up to the auto court, you basically see a wall with an opening in it that leads you to the front door—and only at that moment do you experience the scale of the house and the overpowering view down to the valley. The result is a little more intriguing, a little more interesting."

While the house was under construction, the owners traveled to Italy to hunt down the perfect shade of yellow for the plaster on the exterior. "We kept saying, 'That's the yellow. No, that's the yellow,' until finally we spotted a house high on a hill in Positano, and we knew that was the yellow," recounts the investment banker. The two climbed the hill, dislodged a couple of small pieces of crumbling plaster from the house, had the color matched at a local paint store and then, since paint is flammable and can't be taken on an airplane, coated a small board with the warm hue and carried it home to be duplicated again in the States.

In striking contrast to the bright yellow walls, the front door—an intricately carved 500-year-old remnant from a Buddhist temple—is almost black. It opens to reveal the



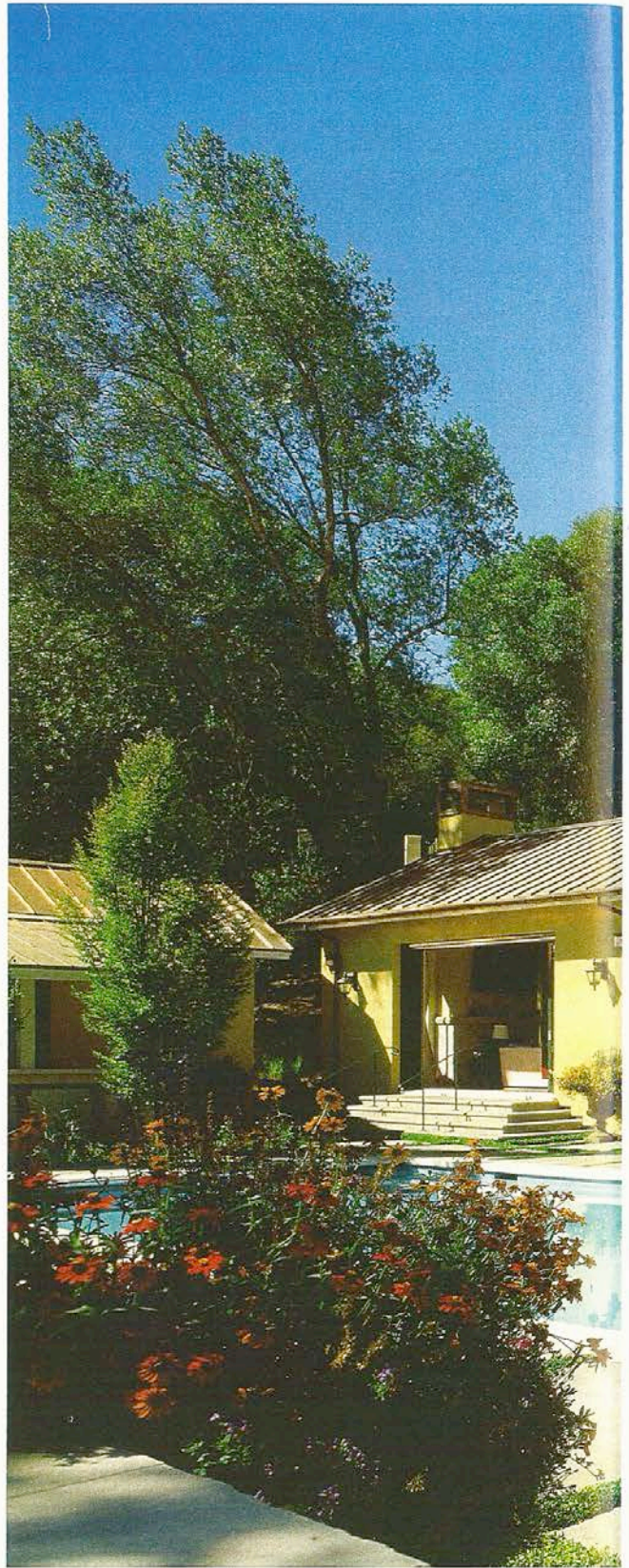
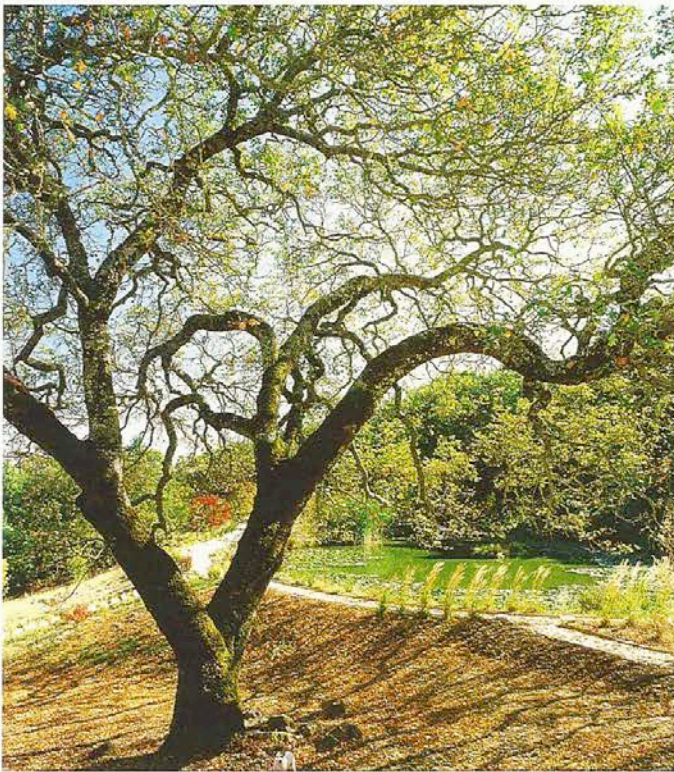


home's central design statement—a baronial 27-by-52-foot space with a 15-foot ceiling. “The owners wanted one great room, almost castle-like in scale yet still intimate and unostentatious,” says Lisa Victor. “They joked about being able to roast an elk in the fireplace. But they wanted it to be comfortable, whether the two of them were home alone or throwing a party for 200 people.”

In the grand space, warmth is conjured through the details and furnishings, including groupings of plump sofas invariably occupied by the owners’ gang of Jack Russell terriers—Tony, Vinnie, Mickey, Joey and Murphy—who are free to lounge anywhere. The concrete floor is stained the color of worn leather, and five substantial antique alabaster chandeliers—rescued from a mansion in Argentina—cast a golden glow over the room at night. A series of dramatic glass archways opens directly onto the pool terrace, bringing a sense of casual outdoor living to the space and providing stunning views across the property to Mt. Diablo in the distance.

The kitchen, which connects the main space to the sitting room, was designed to accommodate the professional needs of caterers for large parties, as well as the culinary passions of the owners. One is a serious chef who enjoys cooking for friends; the other works at the 6-by-15-foot island making jam from fruit picked in the orchard, and filling jars with honey harvested from the beehives.

RIGHT: A copper roof adds contrast to the yellow stucco inspired by the owners’ visit to Positano. BELOW: A live oak by the pond dates back to Miwok times.

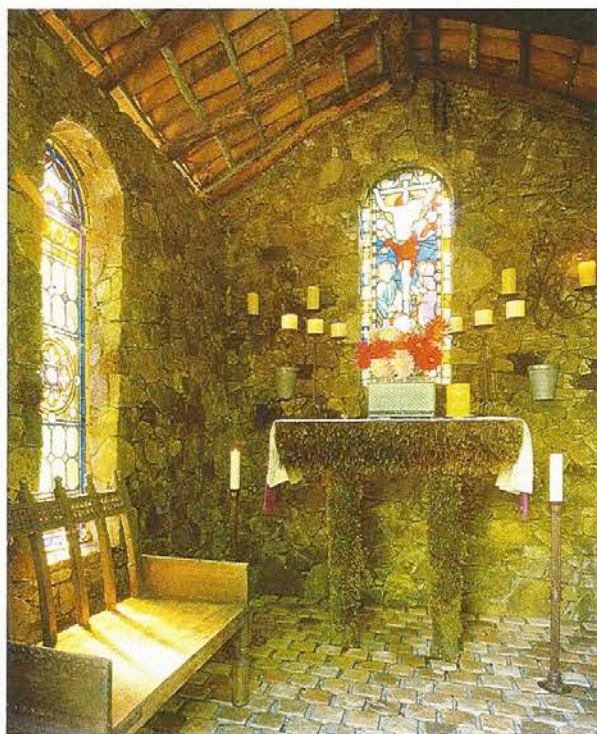
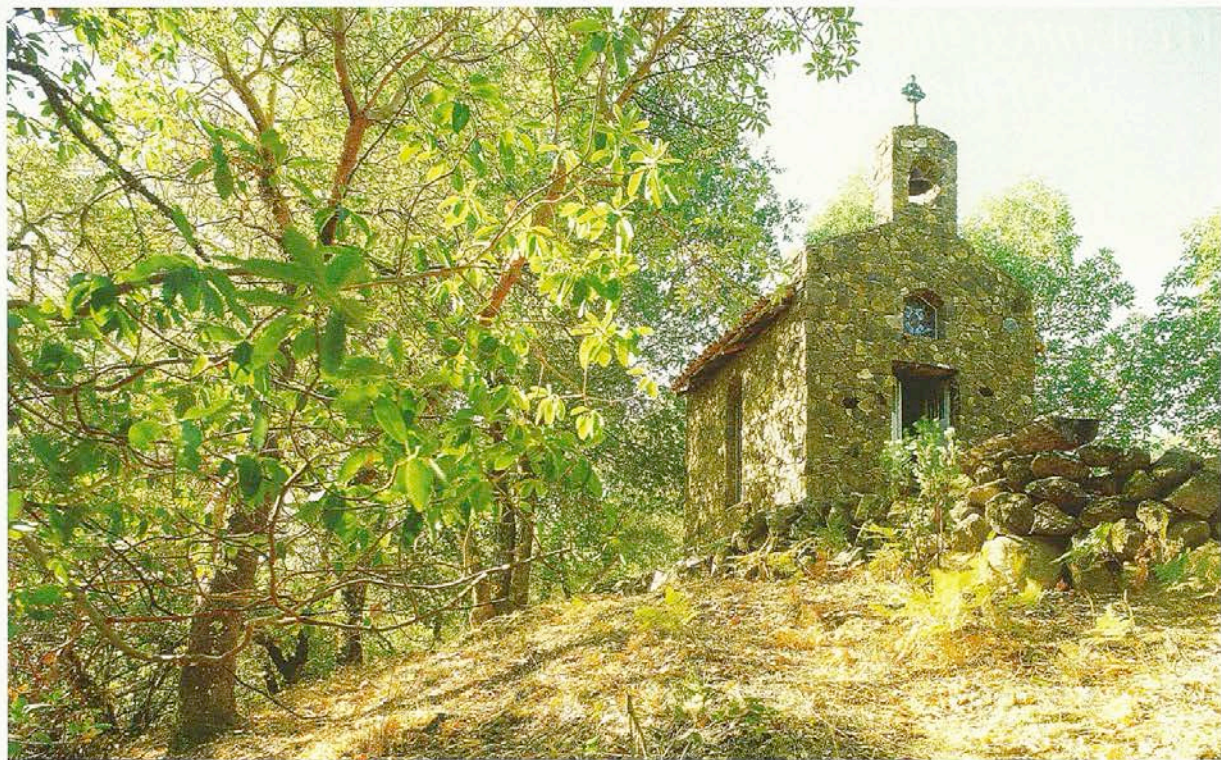




*"We wanted the house to reveal  
itself through a series of experiences."*







ABOVE: The stone chapel was inspired by a chapel on the ranch where the Brazilian owner grew up. LEFT: The altar, covered with moss, was made from a fallen oak tree.

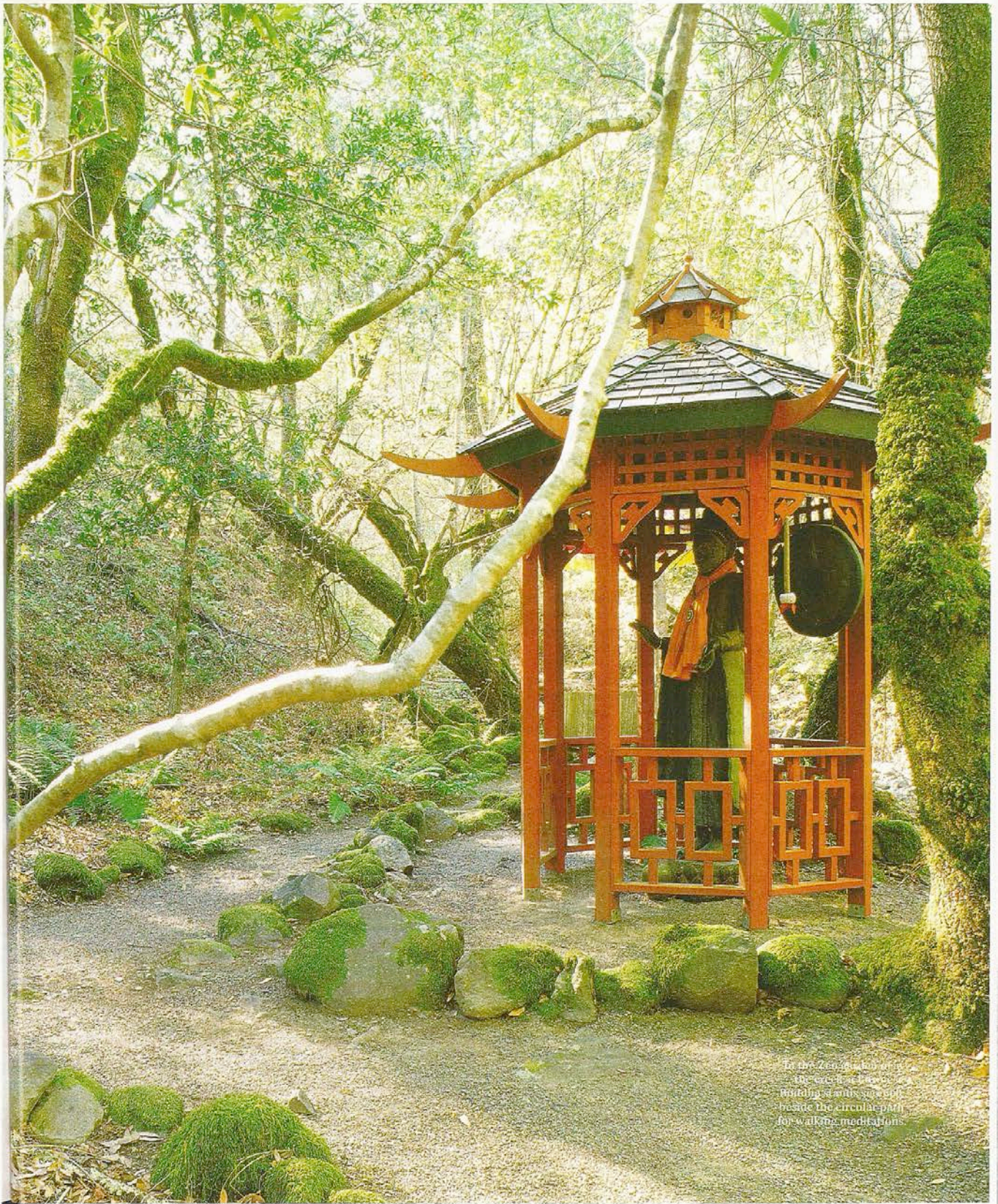
A stairway tucked in the hall off the main living room has the feel of a secret passageway—an intentional gesture meant to suggest the

more intimate scale and degree of privacy found upstairs, where the floor changes from concrete to recycled hickory and the ceilings drop to nine feet. Each of the four bedrooms is painted a different color so the frequent weekend guests can request their favorite room by hue.

The balcony off the master suite looks out to a pool edged with hornbeams. A pond framed in willows and a red barn are visible in the distance—further evidence that the owners have carried the spirit of Rancho Mineiro far beyond the main house. “The people who had the property before us lived in the barn and never really used the land,” explains the pair’s Brazilian-born half. “We’ve put in two miles of walking trails, marking the paths ourselves with stones so they look like they’ve been here for centuries.” The trails pass through the rhododendron garden, by the orchard and citrus grove and across the red bridge over the pond, which is home to koi, catfish, bluegills and bullfrogs the size of small chickens.

“You should see the legs on those frogs,” says the culinary-minded investment banker, a perfect segue into yet another story about life at Rancho Mineiro. ■





In the Zen garden of the circular path, the circular path is made for walking meditations.