

# OF WINE AND STEEL

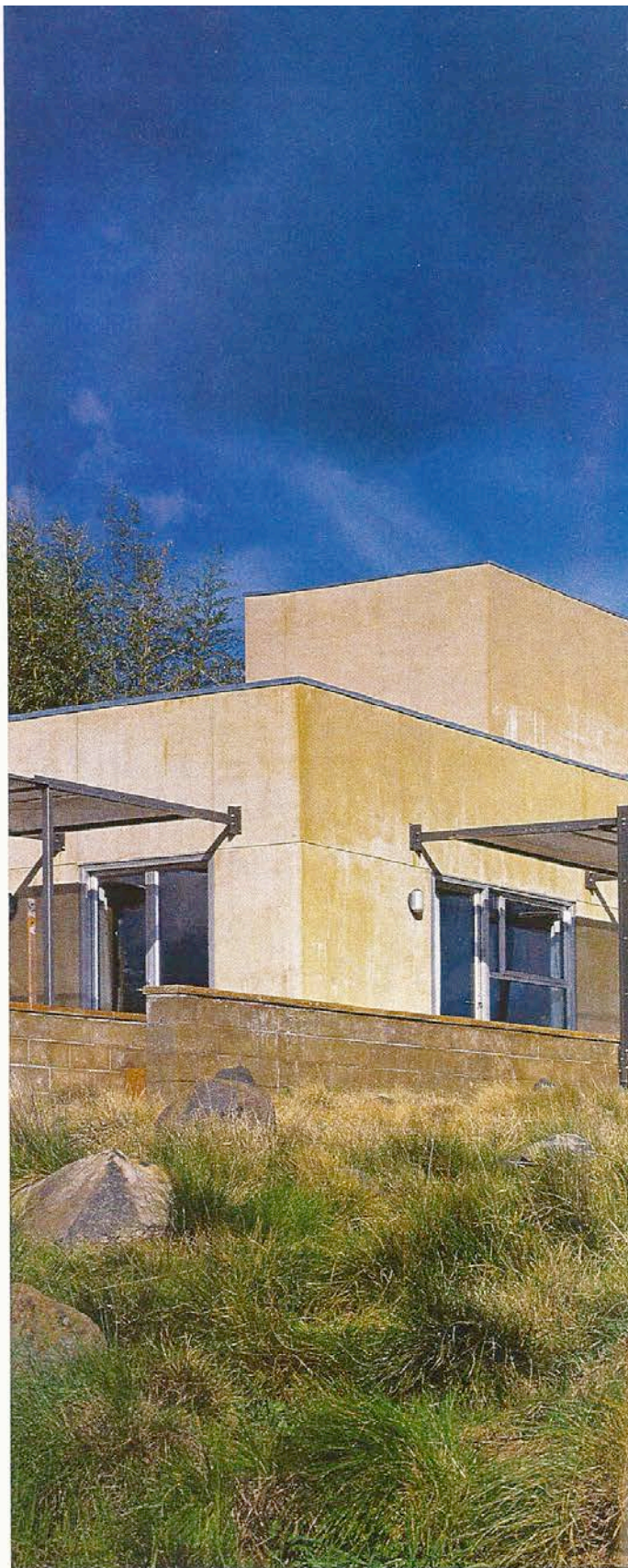
IN A HOUSE DESIGNED FOR A NAPA VALLEY WINEMAKER AND HIS FAMILY, ARCHITECT MICHAEL GUTHRIE MADE GOOD USE OF HIS PAST EXPERIENCE IN COMMERCIAL KITCHEN DESIGN AND WINE-COUNTRY VERNACULAR.

BY **JEAN VICTOR** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CESAR RUBIO**

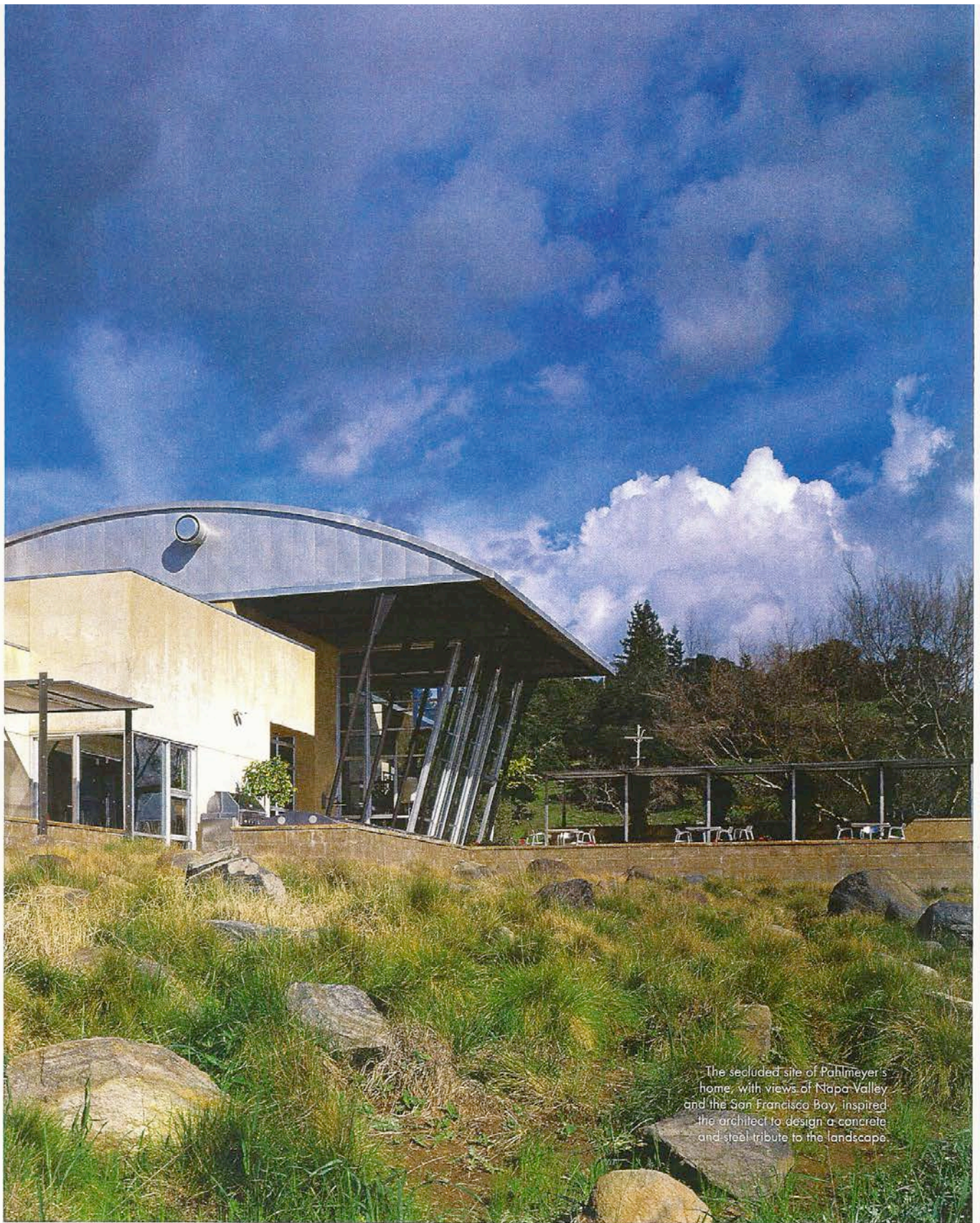
**T**iptoeing isn't Jayson Pahlmeyer's style, not when it comes to crafting his gutsy, award-winning wines or realizing his vision for a modern house built of unadorned industrial materials. "My philosophy of wine-making has to do with my philosophy of life," says Pahlmeyer. "Anything worth doing is worth doing to excess."

When the Napa Valley vintner decided to transform an existing 1950s ranch house on his 12-acre Soda Canyon property into an industrial-modern showplace for entertaining an international clientele of restaurateurs and wine collectors—as well as into living space for himself, his wife, Paige, and their young son, plus two grown children—he found a willing accomplice in San Francisco-based architect Michael Guthrie.

"Jayson wanted a statement house, a house as a work of contemporary art," says Guthrie, who is known for his modernist sensibilities in winery and restaurant design.







The secluded site of Pahlmeyer's home, with views of Napa Valley and the San Francisco Bay, inspired the architect to design a concrete and steel tribute to the landscape.

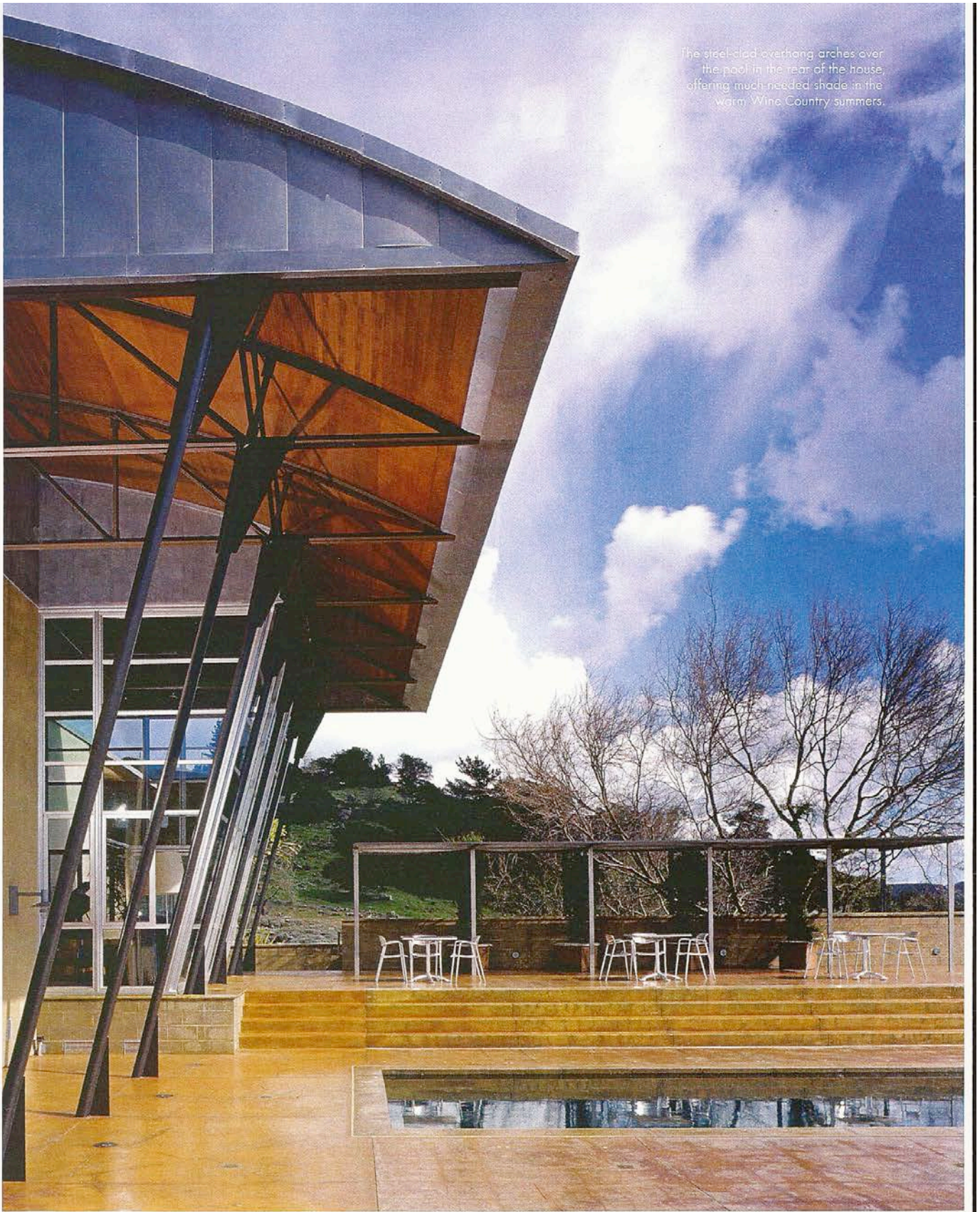


The soaring ceiling with steel trusses is reminiscent of an airplane hangar but finished in mahogany for a luxe-industrial effect. Retracting the glass "garage doors" allows the entire dining room to open onto the back patio.





The steel-clad overhang arches over the pool in the rear of the house, offering much-needed shade in the warm Wine Country summers.







The only furniture in the dining room is the table—designed by Limn owner Dan Friedlander to sit atop casters—and, surrounding it, Mario Bellini's leather Cab chairs.





The Pahlmeyers often entertain large groups for their wine business, so Guthrie designed two kitchen spaces: one “display kitchen” for Paige, a professionally trained chef, to show off her skills, and a hardworking “clean-up station” around the corner to which dishes can be whisked away.

“He was after something very different from what most people do in the Napa Valley.” Pahlmeyer approached the project much as he would if commissioning a painting from an artist. Aside from giving Guthrie a short wish list of building materials—raw steel, concrete and glass and, most specifically, a roll-up glass “firehouse” door in the main living space—he let the architect have carte blanche with the design. “Once he gave me the go-ahead, he just let me invent,” says Guthrie.

The resulting 4,500-square-foot house sits like a piece of abstract sculpture atop a grassy, volcanic rock-strewn plateau, with commanding views of the entire Napa Valley and the San Francisco Bay beyond. Approached from an entry court, the imposing plaster facade—25 feet high and 100 feet long—appears as a simple rectangle. “That’s the surprise,” says Guthrie. “You come upon this very ordered wall and think you’re going to find more of the same on the other side.”

But once you’re inside, any semblance of the predictable falls away as shifting planes of glass and steel come into view.

In the living room, a sloping glass wall soars 28 feet to meet the mahogany-clad vaulted ceiling, which is supported by lightweight steel trusses. The glass roll-up door in the dining area blurs the boundary between indoors and out—and enables the Pahlmeyers to move their rolling dining table to the pool terrace for entertaining. A concrete floor, tinted a warm ochre hue, spans the living and dining areas and stretches into the kitchen, visually tying the open rooms together.

To bring scale to this otherwise imposing space, Guthrie designed three elements he describes as “smaller than architecture but bigger than furniture”—a curving, translucent fiberglass resin-and-steel staircase separating the foyer from the dining area, a dramatic two-story fireplace of burnished plate steel in the living room and a mahogany-clad “cube” supporting the mezzanine above. “Furniture alone would never be big enough to occupy the space,” he explains.

Pahlmeyer’s preference for the ultramodern didn’t stop at the architecture. “When I hired Michael, I told him I wanted

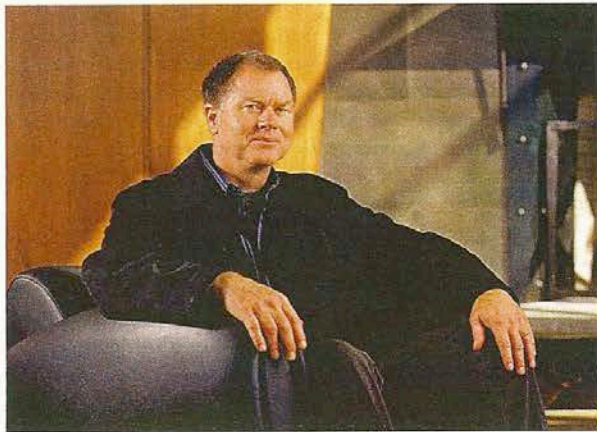


'soup to nuts,'" says the winemaker. "I wanted the architecture, the furniture, everything to go together." The extent of Guthrie's free design rein can be seen in the way he nudged his client's taste for hard-edged industrial toward what the architect calls a "softer modernism," introducing warm colors and furnishings in rich materials like wood, leather and velvet.

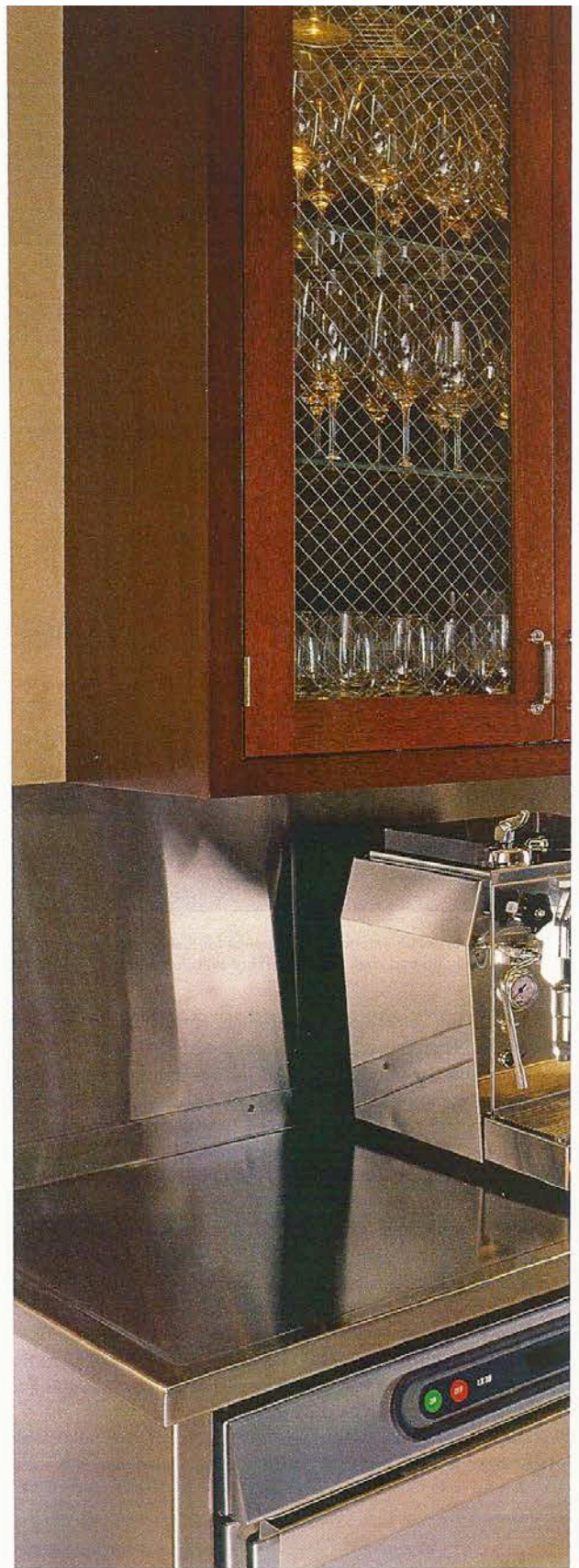
Mixed in with a well-edited selection of modern classics are pieces from Pahlmeyer's art collection, including his most recent (and decidedly most unusual) acquisition: a life-size replica of a *Tyrannosaurus rex* skull he commissioned "on impulse" after seeing the original prehistoric find in a paleontology museum in South Dakota. The piece—which brings particular delight to his dinosaur-loving four-year-old son—was just what Pahlmeyer had been searching for to occupy a prominent space in the foyer under the curving staircase.

Pahlmeyer and his wife, Paige, are also passionate antique-rug collectors, to the point of having to keep some of their favorites rolled up for lack of floor space. A rare, mid-19th century Persian Serapi graces the concrete floor in the living room. "One of the reasons I wanted the concrete was to showcase my rugs," explains Pahlmeyer. "They are works of art in their own right, and this floor is the perfect neutral backdrop for showing them, like paintings on a wall in an art gallery."

Open to the main living and dining area, the kitchen is outfitted to satisfy the needs of a four-star chef—no surprise from an architect well versed in the art of commercial kitchen design (Tra Vigne, Left Bank and Myth, to name but a few). "Winery-related gatherings are almost weekly events for Jayson and Paige," says Guthrie. "It's not unusual for them to host more than 200 guests in an evening, and I definitely kept that in mind with the kitchen." The space is laid out in two segments—a cooking and entertaining area centered around a boomerang-shaped island facing the dining room, and a prep galley around the corner, complete with high-heat commercial dishwashers for cleaning hundreds of the Riedel wineglasses Pahlmeyer favors in



Architect Michael Guthrie found not only a great client in Pahlmeyer but also a good friend—their next collaboration is the Pahlmeyer Winery.

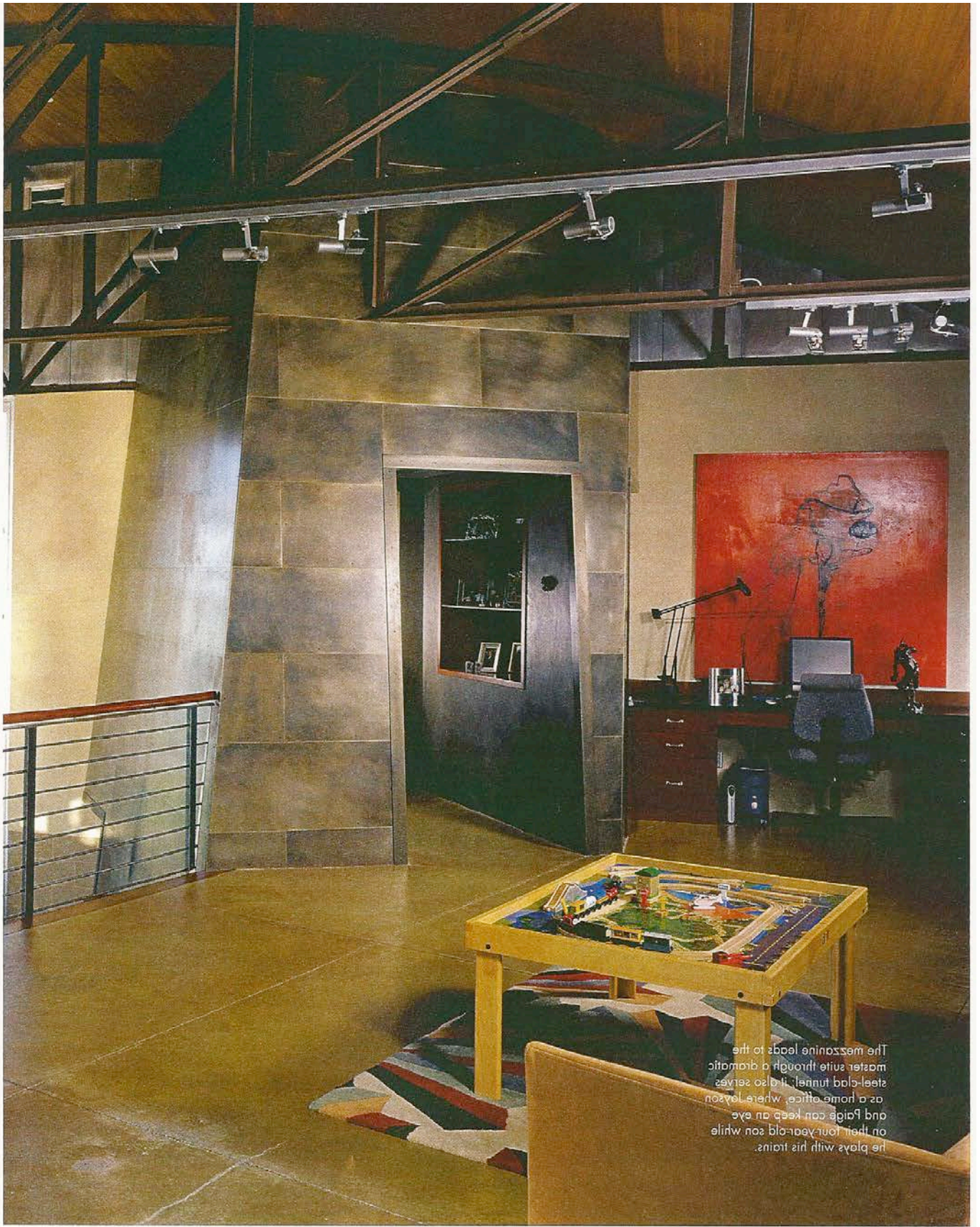






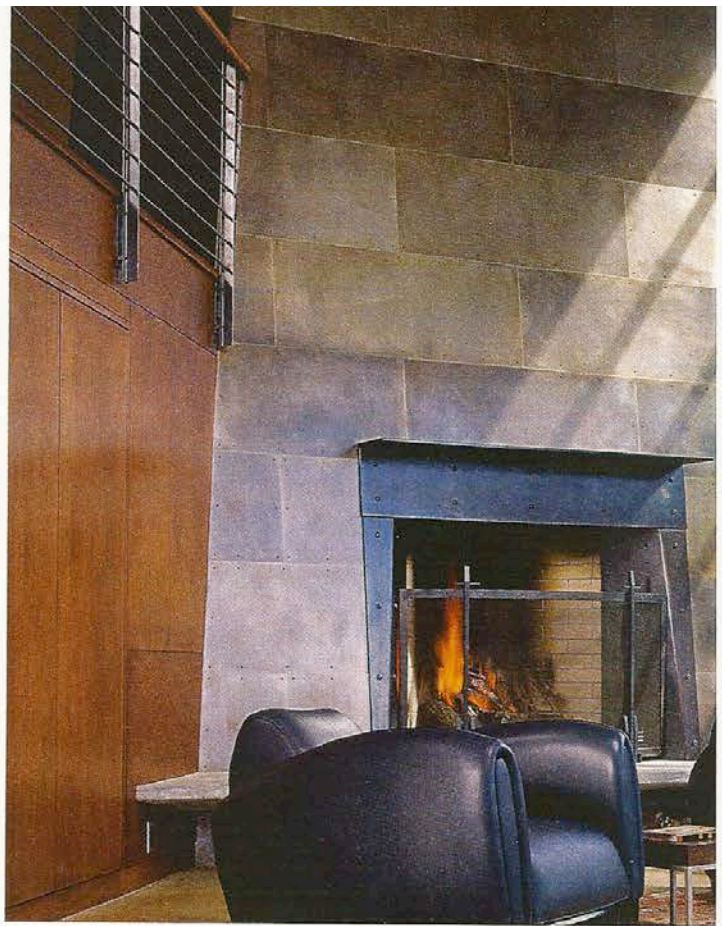
The galley clean-up kitchen, which leads to the kids' bedrooms, features a retractable industrial hose spray faucet, commercial dishwashers and storage for more than 100 wine glasses.





The mezzanine leads to the master suite through a dramatic steel-clad tunnel; it also serves as a home office, where Lawson and Paige can keep an eye on their four-year-old son while he plays with his trains.





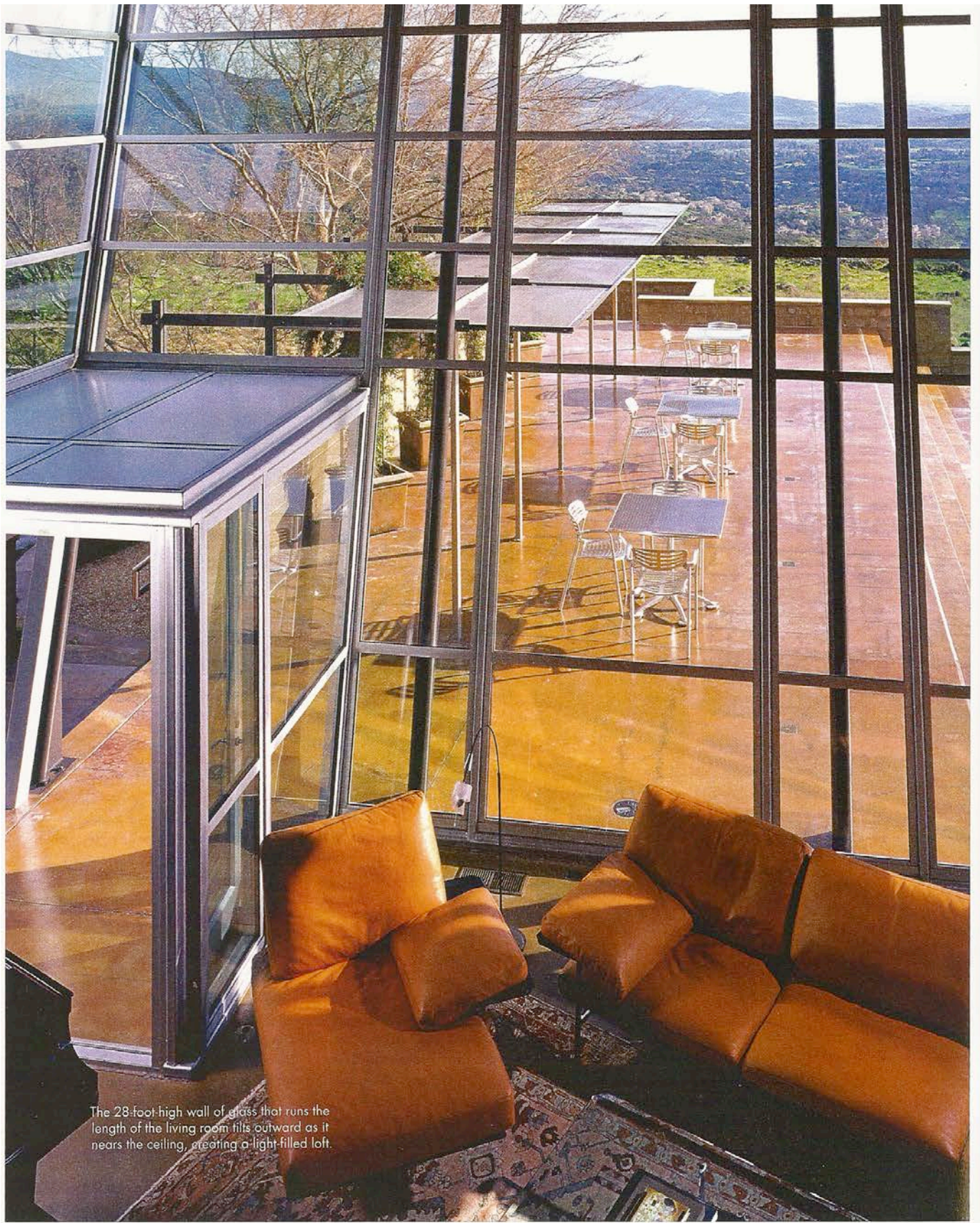
The double-height fireplace steals center stage in the living room; clad in burnished steel plates with exposed rivets, it suits the hangar-like space.

a matter of minutes. Mahogany cabinets with wire-glass doors warm up the stainless-steel surfaces.

Up the curving staircase, the mezzanine loft serves as part home office, part playroom for the Pahlmeyers' young son, as well as a passageway to the master suite—a light-filled space with an apex skylight over the bed and built-in mahogany cabinets in lieu of traditional dressers. The master bath is cast concrete, left in its most industrial shade of gray but tempered by translucent sculptured glass tiles in varying gray-green hues. Double sinks (his an elevated bronze bowl, hers integral to the concrete countertop) are a practical nod to the one-foot height difference between husband and wife. The shower is located on the other side of the sink's backsplash, offering privacy as well as a view up to the peak behind the house.

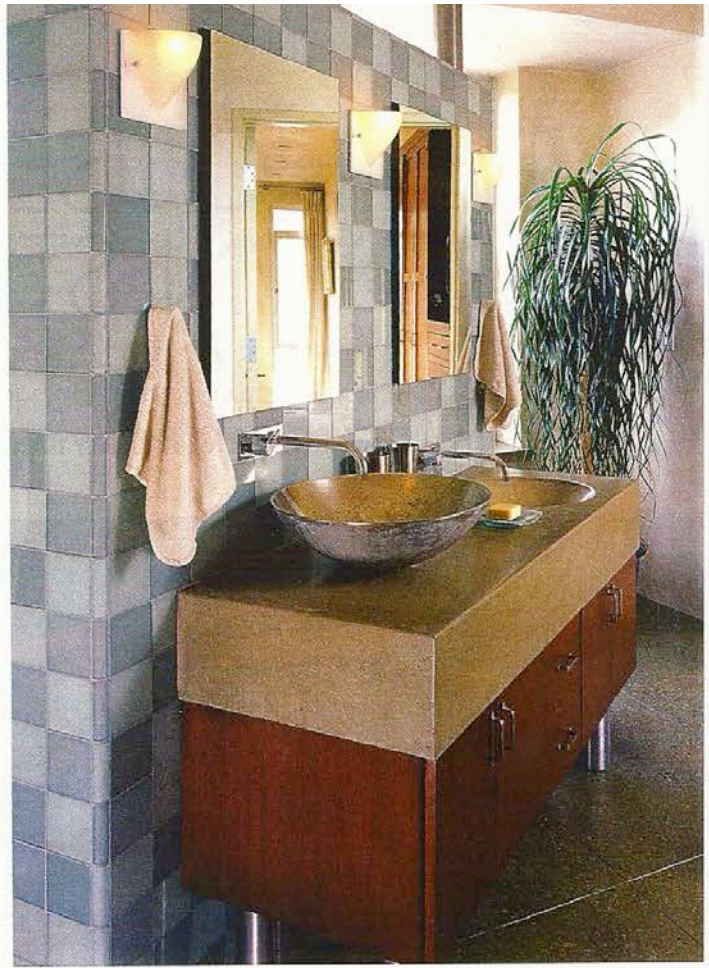
The rugged terrain around the house remains for the most part in its natural state. Areas disturbed during construction were replanted with native grasses, and volcanic rocks similar to those on the site were trucked up the hill and strategically





The 28-foot-high wall of glass that runs the length of the living room fills outward as it nears the ceiling, creating a light-filled loft.





TOP LEFT: The dual-head shower, located on the opposite side of the sink wall, offers privacy and a view of Soda Canyon. TOP RIGHT: The cast concrete-topped vanity features two sinks—one raised basin for him and a low, integrally carved basin for her. ABOVE: The master bedroom affords breathtaking vistas from both the bed and the compact balcony.

placed to match nature's random pattern. Exceptions to the natural rule are the sea of lavender plants marking the driveway, the succulent garden on the east side of the house, the kitchen garden and the small pond off the guest suite filled with Pahlmeyer's most prized koi. "I put the small koi in an Olympic-sized swimming pool on my vineyard property, where they can grow really big, and then bring the good ones here to the pond," explains Pahlmeyer.

It's on this same vineyard property, at Water's Ranch, that Pahlmeyer and Guthrie are plotting their next project, a new, 40,000-square-foot winery building for the Pahlmeyer Winery. The design, which includes wine-making, fermentation, barrel-aging and bottling facilities for the vintner's flagship Merlot and Chardonnay wines, sounds vaguely familiar: high-tech industrial with lots of steel and glass. "We're going to use zinc in a flat black finish to match the volcanic rock on the site," explains Guthrie, "and the walls will be made of inch-thick bottle-green glass." Architect and winemaker have already completed the arduous task of getting a use permit for the building—no easy feat in the growth-wary Napa Valley—and construction is set to begin in several years. □