

HOME



FANCIFUL GEOMETRY

A pared-down Modernist residence echoes the classic simplicity of Case Study houses

BY MICHAEL WEBB | PHOTOGRAPHED BY TIM STREET-PORTER

The house that Zoltan E. Pali designed for Sean and Hsiu-Yen Brosmith is tailored both to the needs of their young family and the spectacular site overlooking the San Fernando Valley. It's also a Modernist classic that recalls the simplicity and clarity of the Case Study houses, which created a new blueprint for indoor-outdoor living in the postwar decades.

Sliding glass doors, shaded by an overhanging roof, open the 5,100-square-foot house to the pool. A luminous terrazzo-floored concourse divides the open-plan living, dining and kitchen areas from the master suite, children's bedrooms and a guest room, which are separated by intimate courtyards. Add a two-tone Bel Air convertible and it's 1955 all over again.

Both architect and client have links to that era. Sean Brosmith grew up in New York, where his father designed houses inspired by work he had done in Sarasota, Fla., as an associate of Paul Rudolph, one of the giants of midcentury Modernism. Pali worked for Jerry Lomax, who was project



Above: Concrete pavers lead to the understated front door and center concourse of the Brosmith house. The wing at left contains the living areas, while the bedrooms are to the right. Both wings are clad with teak plywood, which provides a warm framework for the glass used at both ends of the house. Top left: Teakwood shelters the north-facing window of the master bedroom. Architect Zoltan E. Pali, at left.

This page: Light from a clerestory spills onto the terrazzo floor that runs the length of the house. Pocket doors close off the bedrooms from the concourse. Opposite, top: The dining area opens to a courtyard between the master bedroom and the children's rooms. The kitchen is separated from the dining area by a low CaesarStone wall with a wooden ledge for serving.



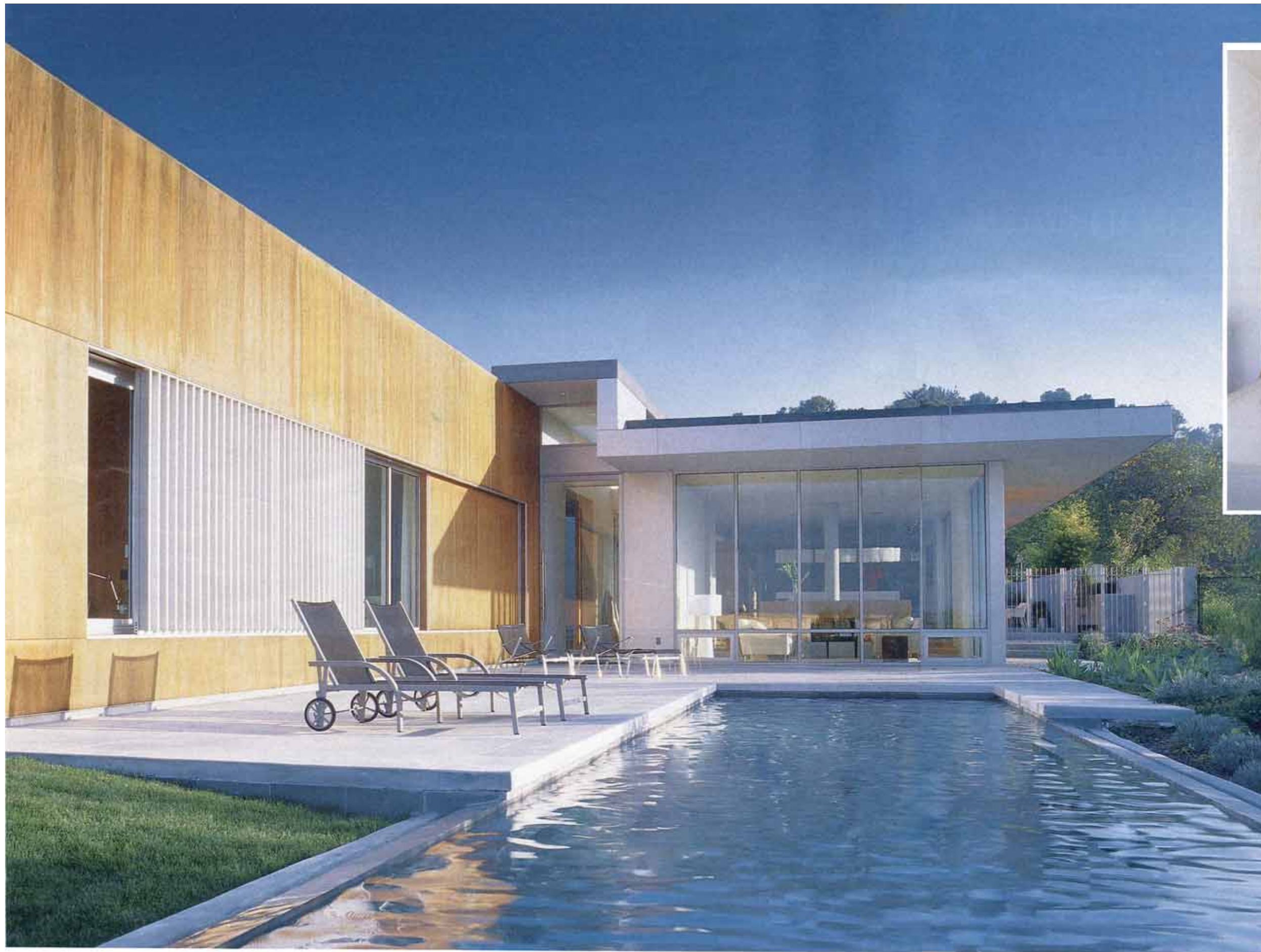
architect on several of Craig Ellwood's iconic houses. The buildings he's done as design principal of his firm, SPFA, have the clean lines and pared-down elegance that have characterized the best of Southern California residential design since Richard Neutra arrived from Vienna 80 years ago. "I don't come into the office on Monday morning and feel I have to invent new tricks," says Pali, and this house shows how much can be done with four plain boxes.

The couple decided to commission something spacious and airy after the unhappy experience of living in a house that was all stairs and cramped rooms. "Knowing what didn't work focused our thinking," says Sean.

"We found a site with a tear-down and a great view. Zoltan was smitten and we quickly closed escrow." Pali had designed a studio for Sean Brosmith and a house in Bel-Air for his partner Scott Oshry (their company, Zorbit Resources, specializes in designing packaging and premium items for beauty companies), so he was the logical choice.

In contrast to the cool, all-white Oshry house, the Brosmiths insisted on a warmer feel. Sean had fond memories of wood-sided houses in Westchester County, and Hsin-Yen feared that the polished concrete floors Pali prefers would appear too institutional. They opted instead for terrazzo in the concourse and bathrooms, and wide boards





Clockwise from above: The pool deck is reached by a door at the end of the concourse. Sliding aluminum shutters shield the master bedroom from the afternoon glare. In the living room, the free-standing fireplace is wrapped in quarter-sawn oak. The room steps up to reflect the change in grade. Windows in the master bathroom open to catch the breeze.

of white American oak with carpet or cork insets in the other rooms. Parklex, a building panel of resin-impregnated wood fiber, was their first choice for cladding, but they couldn't find a color or finish they liked. Instead, they got a good deal on teak plywood (used in boat-building) with matching grain from a single lot. "It needs to be oiled every year, but I like the way it will mature over time," Pali says.

The master suite forms the house's "prow," facing north to the mountains on the far side of the Valley. A television cabinet is set into one of the tall panes of glass that frame the view, while the teak-clad walls on either side end in a splayed frame. "The side walls had been thickened to incorporate sliding aluminum louvers, and rather than extrude that bulky section, I tapered it to a narrow edge," Pali explains.

Sean added his own touches by designing the walnut dining table, desk unit and master bed. Cabinetry of quarter-sawn European oak complements the floor boards, and a linear glass chandelier from Artemide lights the dining area. Hsu-Yen has come a long way from the Mediterranean-style house her father built in Palo Alto, but Sean feels as though he's never left the spaces he grew up with. Their young daughters, Elin and Pia, have yet to express an opinion, but seem content to run in and out all day long.

Michael Webb last wrote for the magazine about an artist's studio in the Hollywood Hills.