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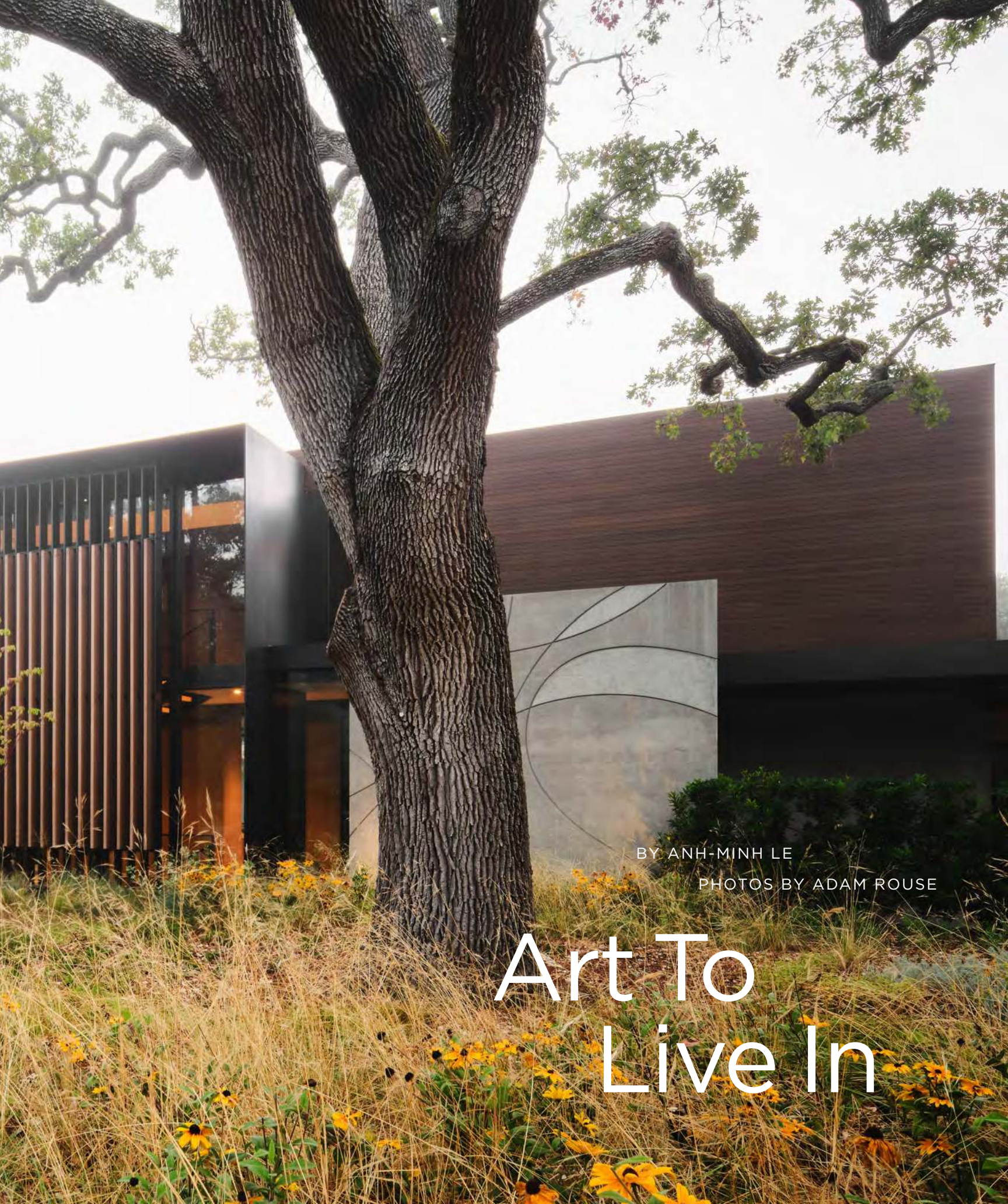


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In Silicon Valley
a sculptural home
by Aidlin Darling
Design elevates a
suburban lot.



BY ANH-MINH LE

PHOTOS BY ADAM ROUSE

Art To Live In



The nearly one-acre property in Atherton was a canvas on which Aidlin Darling Design and Surfacedesign, Inc., layered forms, textures and colors for an ever-evolving composition.

The starting point, says architect and studio cofounder Joshua Aidlin, involved “an abandoned, simple, single-story bungalow,” where he camped out to better understand the site, in particular the way the light and wind change throughout the day.

Landscape architect Roderick Wyllie, a founding partner of Surfacedesign, recalls the premises as “wild and overgrown,” but whose virtues included a handful of mature oak trees — living, organic sculptures, with gnarled branches very likely shaped over more than a century.

Left: The 6,150-square-foot house consists of rectangular volumes, with concrete walls, wood-clad enclosures and deep metal frames; the same materials appear inside.

Opposite: The concrete underfoot unifies the living room and adjacent courtyard, as well as the pool that is a few steps up from the latter.





Foregrounding those trees, he and Aidlin, along with project architect Laing Chung, closely collaborated with interior designer Susan Collins of Studio Collins Weir and MatPel Builders to conjure a new three-story home for a couple and their three young sons. “We were looking for a contemporary aesthetic, but also a warm practicality that would work for our family,” says the husband. Among the priorities were a large open living area and a strong connection to the outdoors. “Across architecture and design,” he continues, “it really came together as both a work of art and a comfortable living space.”

According to Aidlin, “as an architect, if you’re really listening to both the client’s values and the site’s potential, there can become this remarkable, effortless and timeless constellation of the two.” Given the flat lot, he says, the client “tossed us a beautiful challenge: How can you sculpt the architecture to give it vertical drama?” The answer was to “manipulate the existing ground plane by carving down into the earth, and then floating



Above: Studio Collins Weir designed the table and built-in banquette in the dining area, which is nestled between the living room, kitchen and staircase.

Opposite: According to the client, the two-story living room “works really well whether it’s just our family hanging out or we’re entertaining our friends.”





elements of the house above, creating a sculptural effect where these rectilinear volumes get pulled apart beyond the face of the building.”

Meanwhile, Surfacedesign incorporated native and low-water plantings and embraced the client’s openness to color. Hence, a meadow includes flowers in white (*Achillea millefolium*, *Agastache*, *Salvia Snow Hill*) and yellow (*Romneya coulteri*, *Rudbeckia hirta*, *Santolina chamaecyparissus*). Variations in grading differentiate the outdoor spaces; for example, a few steps separate the courtyard and pool deck. The client’s desire to encourage play was also fulfilled: Surfacedesign introduced 6-foot-tall boulders on which the kids practice climbing and Aidlin Darling proposed the 32-foot

The kitchen — designed to frame views of the gardens — combines white oak floors and cabinets with stone counters and precast concrete. Pato Sledge bar stools by Fredericia, procured at Garde are curved counterparts for globular island pendants by Lambert and Fils.

In the primary bedroom, a seating area and a window seat float above the gardens; a glass bridge adjoins the space to a bathroom and closet.







steel ring sculpture that can function as a balance beam.

The project's iterative and synergistic design process led to boundary-blurring concepts such as a fern garden and a koi pond that run inside and out. A glass bridge over the latter links the media and living rooms. Wood, steel and concrete contribute to a consistent material palette, further enhancing the indoor-outdoor relationship. Case in point: The living room's concrete floor extends to the adjacent courtyard, with a 19-foot-wide glass door between the two venues.

Concrete plays a key role elsewhere as well. Take the exterior access to the lowest level of the house: Inspired by the home's overlapping rectangular

Right: In a Jack-and-Jill kids' bathroom, the clerestory window achieves privacy while permitting glimpses of the oak trees.

Opposite: "We pierced the ceiling to allow the oaks to also come into the primary bathroom," says architect Joshua Aidlin. "It's almost as if you're floating in a tree house."





masses, Surfacedesign conceived the concrete step elements. “We wanted that access to be sculptural and interesting in its own right,” Wyllie says. Indeed, Aidlin describes it as “one of the most stunning landscape stairs I’ve ever seen and experienced.” And with a cascading water feature along one side, Chung adds that “not only is it a visual thing, it’s an auditory sensory thing” that invites rest and respite.

British Columbia-based fabricator Spearhead was enlisted for not only the residence’s steel armatures, but also the concrete bas relief walls on the front façade. “We literally sculpted lines and areas that change the texture and depth,” Aidlin says of the design, which entailed sandblasting the concrete. Spearhead created the tiled



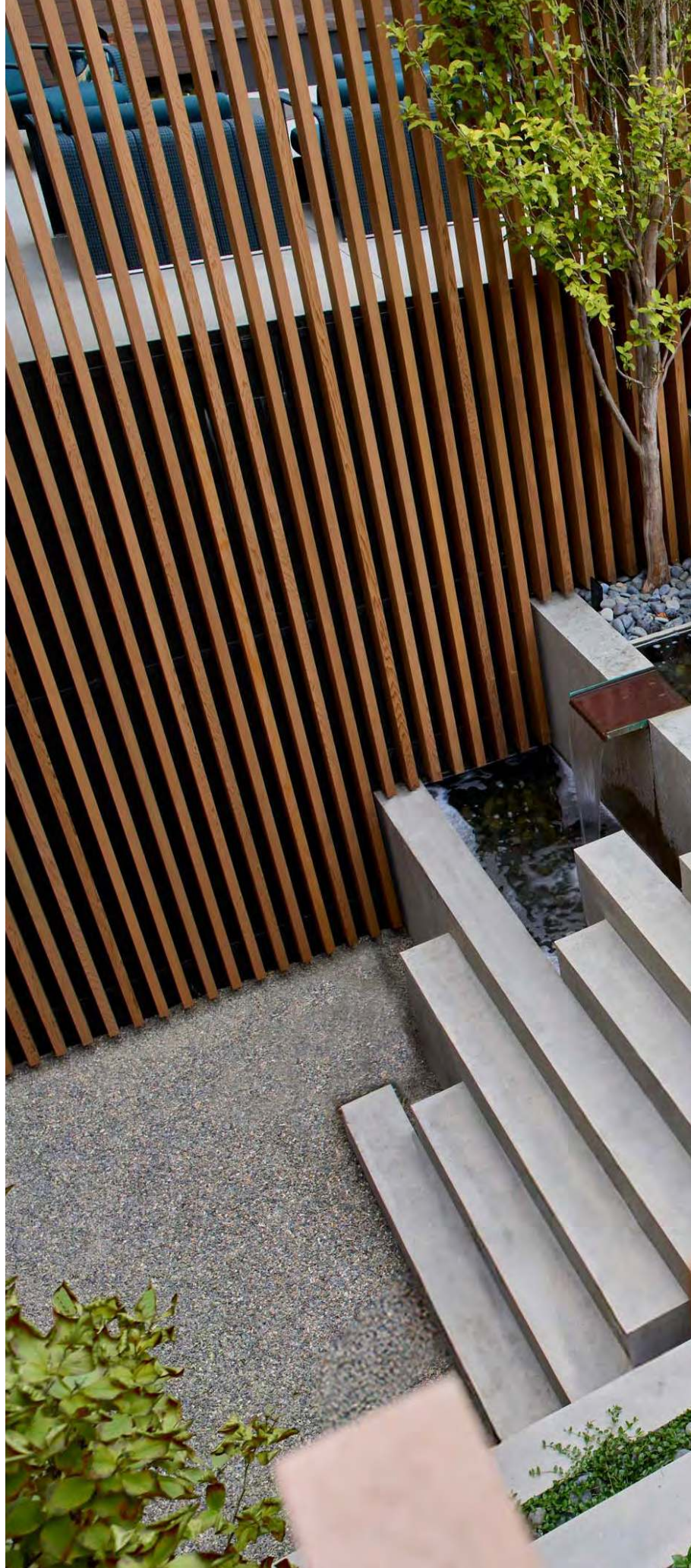
Right: A window seat is positioned above the koi pond that runs through the courtyard and living room; a nearby glass bridge, which offers another vantage point of swimming koi, connects the living and media rooms.

Opposite: In addition to selecting melon sword, bog lily, water hawthorn and white lotus for the koi pond, Surfacedesign implemented the cedar bench with a shou sugi ban treatment.

formwork and then shipped the pieces to the site, where Solid Concrete assembled and poured them in place. “We love working with craftspeople,” the architect notes, citing Stewart Painting, who stained the cedar siding and handled the painted surfaces, as another firm vital to the project’s success. So, too, was Stuermer Studios, which was brought on for the custom resin stairs that impart a soft glow.

Whether standing in front of the house or looking out from within it, as sunlight filters through the trees, the shifting shadows mesmerize. “It’s like this movie that is constantly morphing and changing throughout the day,” Aidlin observes. “It’s so incredibly rich with visual phenomenon, which is all based on nature.” 🌿

Surfacedesign devised the sculptural concrete steps with a cascading water feature on one side and plantings and river rocks on the other; the stairs lead from the lowest level of the complex three-story house up to the pool.







A photograph of a landscape sculpture. A large, dark, curved steel beam, described as a wide-flange beam, is the central element. It curves from the upper left towards the lower right. The sculpture is set in a garden with various plants. To the left of the beam, there are clumps of tall, thin grasses. To the right, there are dense green shrubs and a small tree with bright green leaves in the foreground. The lighting is bright, creating strong shadows and highlights on the plants and the beam. In the upper right corner, there is a block of text in an italicized serif font.

At the front of the property, Aidlin Darling conceived a circular sculpture comprising a steel wide-flange beam; Surfacedesign surrounded the oak tree with plantings such as Festuca californica, Muhlenbergia rigens, Nassella pulchra, Narcissus Minnow and Crocus flavus.