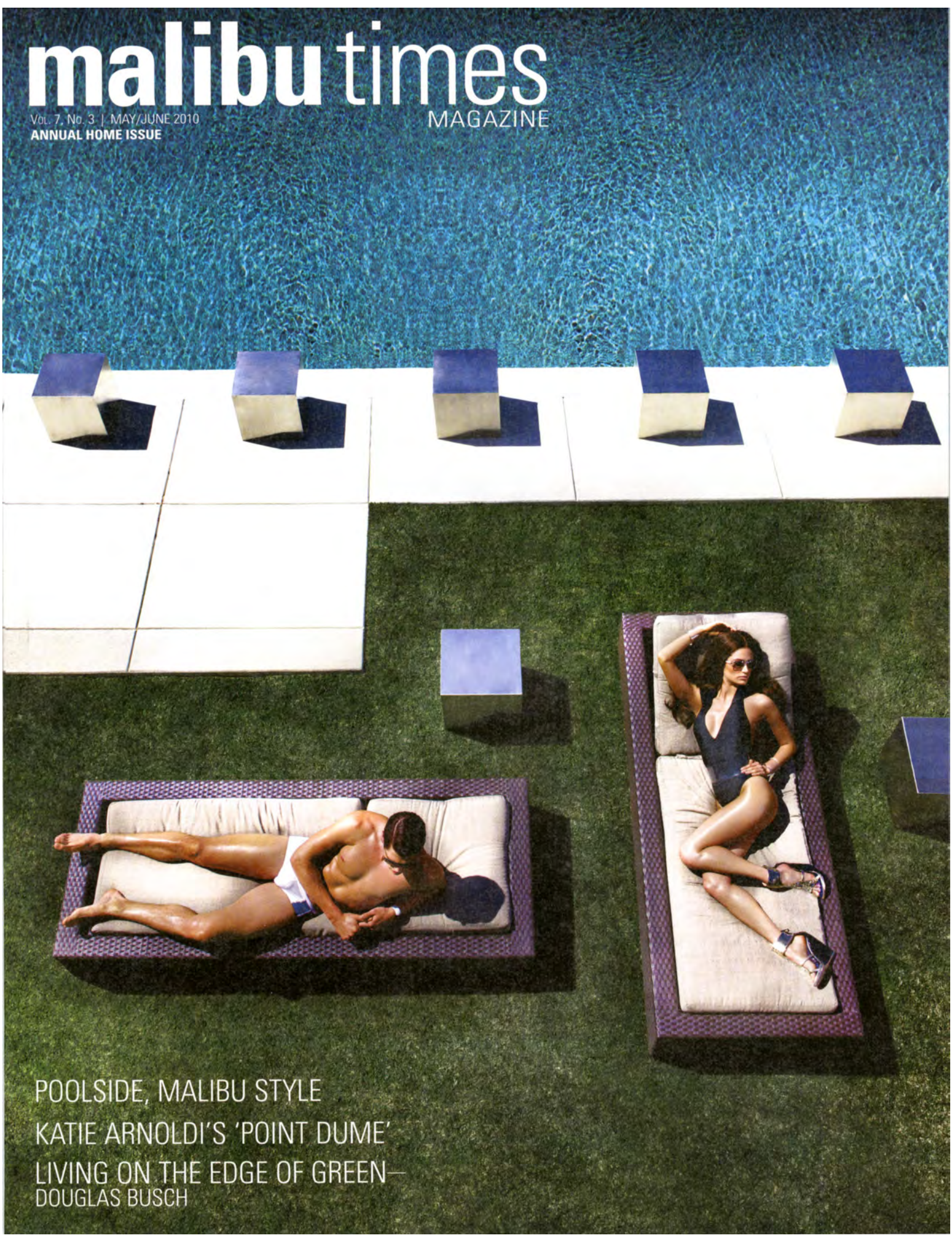
malibu times MAGAZINE

Vol. 7, No. 3 | MAY/JUNE 2010
ANNUAL HOME ISSUE

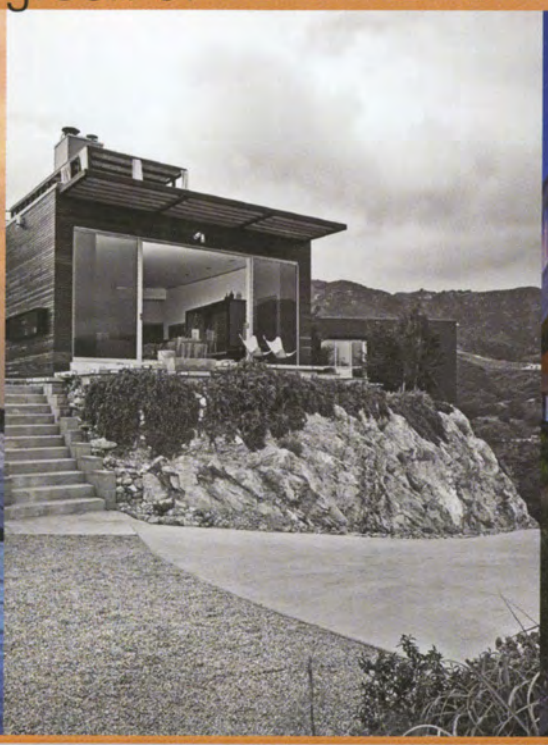


POOLSIDE, MALIBU STYLE

KATIE ARNOLDI'S 'POINT DUME'

LIVING ON THE EDGE OF GREEN—
DOUGLAS BUSCH

the simple green of busch world



Above photos by Julius Shulman and Juergen Nogai
Douglas Busch photo at left by Christopher Schmidt

By Melonie Magruder

In a day, Douglas Busch spends twenty hours thinking about how to create a sustainable future in a world where "green" to most people means recycling bottles and cans. At his sunny, wind-swept compound in Trancas Canyon, this means not just building his own home that functions off the grid, but also incorporating a multitude of simple, yet high-energy efficient design ideas. There are the south-facing solar panels hidden down a hillside and a water distillation system that renders water so pure that Busch and his wife of seventeen years, Lori, can utilize chemical-free soap that won't even lather in "normal" water. There's the underground rain-trapping system that irrigates a thousand drought-resistant plantings, and the koi and turtle rescue pond with a pebble-based, natural filtering system. Windows take advantage of sunlight during the day, and design features throughout the property are constructed entirely from recycled and/or renewable materials. There's also the one-hundred-ten-thousand-gallon salt-water swimming pool heated by solar-trapping energy grids in the driveway. But to Busch, creating a sustainable world means, "You have to educate people." It is this idea that keeps him up at night and that spurred him to envision a global green innovation center located just next door.

Photos by Julius Shulman and Juergen Nogai

"Doug is a passionate and brilliant man. He's our own kind of Malibu renaissance man."

— Barnet Bain

Photo by Christopher Schmidt

Busch, fifty-eight, looks a little like author Hunter S. Thompson, with a full head of hair, tall, bespectacled in blue-grey lenses and filled with a restless energy. Taking a tour of his office, his ideas and descriptions of his work come so fast and furious that a visitor can barely scribble them all down. "This façade of wood panels functions to cool down the stucco walls of the building," Busch said, walking around his large, airy office. Outside, the building is surrounded by flowering succulents and a pond inhabited by sunning turtles and glistening koi fish. "The slats funnel the cool air in and up along the walls. Interiors can be cooled by this new patent I'm working on—'living walls.'"

Busch was off to Malaysia the next day to develop these living walls, or "Farm-in-a-Box"—two-inch thick square panels, embedded with seeds and organic growing mix that can hang on interior walls. Strategically structured drip lines provide just enough irrigation to allow growth of herbs, lettuces or whatever you might want to pick on the way to the kitchen. "Vertical gardens are the future of farming," Busch said, puffing on one of the many cigarettes he smokes throughout his day. "You grow four times the amount of food in the same amount of space. I'm developing Farm-in-a-Box overseas, but plan to work with Volunteers of America to manufacture here. The idea is that you buy one garden panel and one is donated to a poor country. We can start feeding the planet."

Busch wasn't always so focused on greening and feeding the planet. He grew up in Illinois, son of a jeweler, and studied photography and graphic design at the University of Illinois. He worked with iconic photographer Ansel Adams (many of Busch's framed contact sheet prints hanging in his office reflect the black-and-white Adams aesthetic in nature imaging), secured a number of patents for large-format camera equipment, taught photography throughout the country and saw his work acquired for permanent collections in the Smithsonian, the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among others. Photography is a unifying theme in the family. Wife Lori used to run artist Robert Graham's studio and is an interior design consultant. Son Adam is a certified Microsoft engineer who had his first solo photography

show at age ten. Daughter Rachel runs a real estate office and is featured in plenty of Busch portraits.

About twenty years ago, Busch transitioned from the two-dimensional to three, establishing Busch Design Build, a company that specializes in consulting, designing and building homes that harmonize interiors and exteriors to create sanctuaries for the urban-bound. Environmental design emphasis was a natural outgrowth and Busch has developed a number of eco-friendly building concepts. "I sort of fell into architectural design," Busch said. "Friends came to my Culver City studio and asked me to design their homes. Well, if my name's going to be on it, I want it to be perfect." Despite his perfectionism, Busch said, "My clients all stayed my friends."

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Malibu resident and film producer Barnet Bain had Busch refurbish his Pierre Koenig-designed home a couple years ago. Busch was tasked

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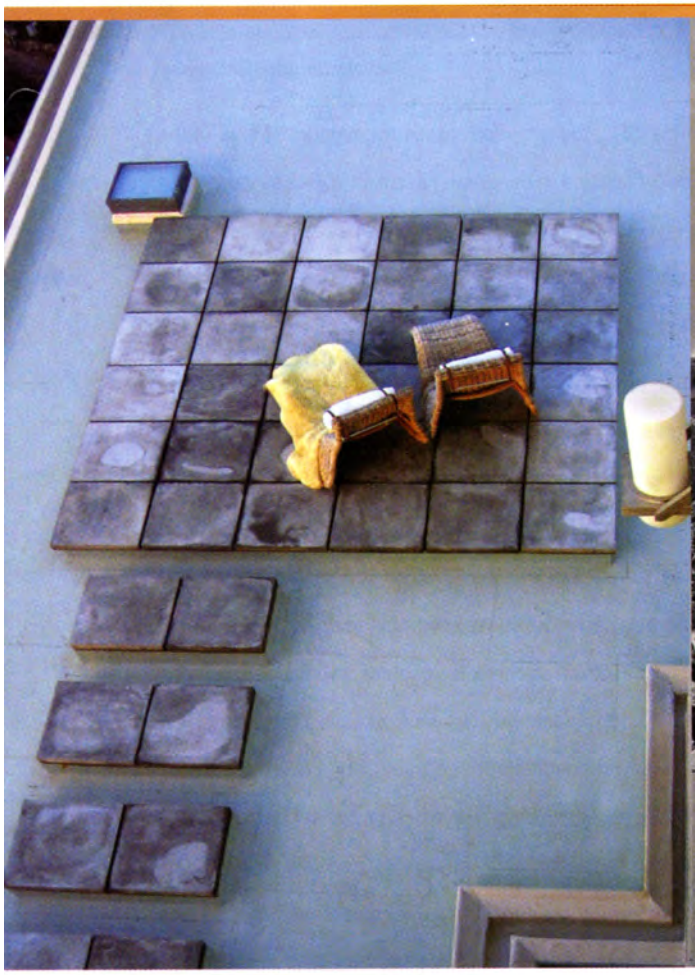

Photos by Julius Shulman and Juergen Nogai

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with updating a fifty-year-old residence, while maintaining the integrity of a local architectural treasure. "Doug is a passionate and brilliant man," Bain said of Busch's work. "He's our own kind of Malibu renaissance man."

Busch works alongside his wife in the design work their company does. It is thanks to her that the Busch home is a marvel of elegant, efficient living. The lighting design and window placement make the rooms spacious and airy, although the entire house is really not that large. Space is used efficiently, with kitchen supplies hanging within reach of cooking and prep appliances. Lori has selected natural stones and woods, harmonizing colors and recycled materials to enhance this effect. Closets and storage spaces are designed to hide within the walls, yet hold plenty.

Viewing building as "habitable sculpture," Douglas Busch is challenged by the idea of adopting design concepts that meld pleasing aesthetic with sustainable practices. Recently, he collaborated with Swedish-born sculptor Bertil Petersson (known for his large, thin metal sculptures that defy gravity) to develop ten-foot-high wind turbines. Though wind energy is a promising field, turbines present visual obstacles for even the greenest adherent. "I myself am disturbed with manmade objects in natural settings," Petersson said. "Doug worked with me to devise a turbine that was not fantastically ugly. It actually increases speed of the rotor blades and is beautiful." At his own home, Busch has embraced thermal glass chimneys to pull pond-cooled air up through floor vents, providing ambient room temperatures. He designed computerized controls that automatically raise and lower window blinds to accommodate the daily travel of the sun. The result is an environment that flows naturally, inside and out, with minimal energy demand. "I go with the KISS principal," Busch said. "Keep it Simple, Stupid."

Simple also turns out to be remarkably attractive. The roofs of his exterior buildings (the guest suites are situated separate from the main house) are planted with flowers and vegetables, providing natural—and practical—insulation. The roof of the main house features infinity ponds flowing over river rock. Such design might have required intense structural support, Busch explained, but they keep house temperatures comfortable in the summer.

Ultimately, Busch wants to incorporate all these ideas and more into his latest conceptual adventure—"EcoPark." It is a combination research lab, outdoor amphitheatre and environmental learning center that would bring everyone from beginning high school students to aerospace scientists together with one goal—teaching the world how to live, work and play without depleting the planet's resources. "I already have Rocketdyne engineers involved," Busch said excitedly. "We've designed a building that's two hundred percent LEED-Platinum (LEED-Platinum buildings are certified by the U.S. Green Building Council) and Nissan USA is working on electric-powered buses to bring people up here. It will be entirely off the grid. The grid is pointless. Did you know seventy percent of what is generated at power plants dissipates just in getting to you?"

Busch is looking to partner with a sponsor for EcoPark. It's not about personal aggrandizement or even profit ("Since when is art or ecology ever profitable," he asked rhetorically). He wants to educate teams that spread out to our urban centers, redefining civic design and tapping under-utilized natural resources. "You have to think about what we are leaving for our kids," Busch said. "Sustainability has to be integrated naturally into your life. It's pretty simple, really." >

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