

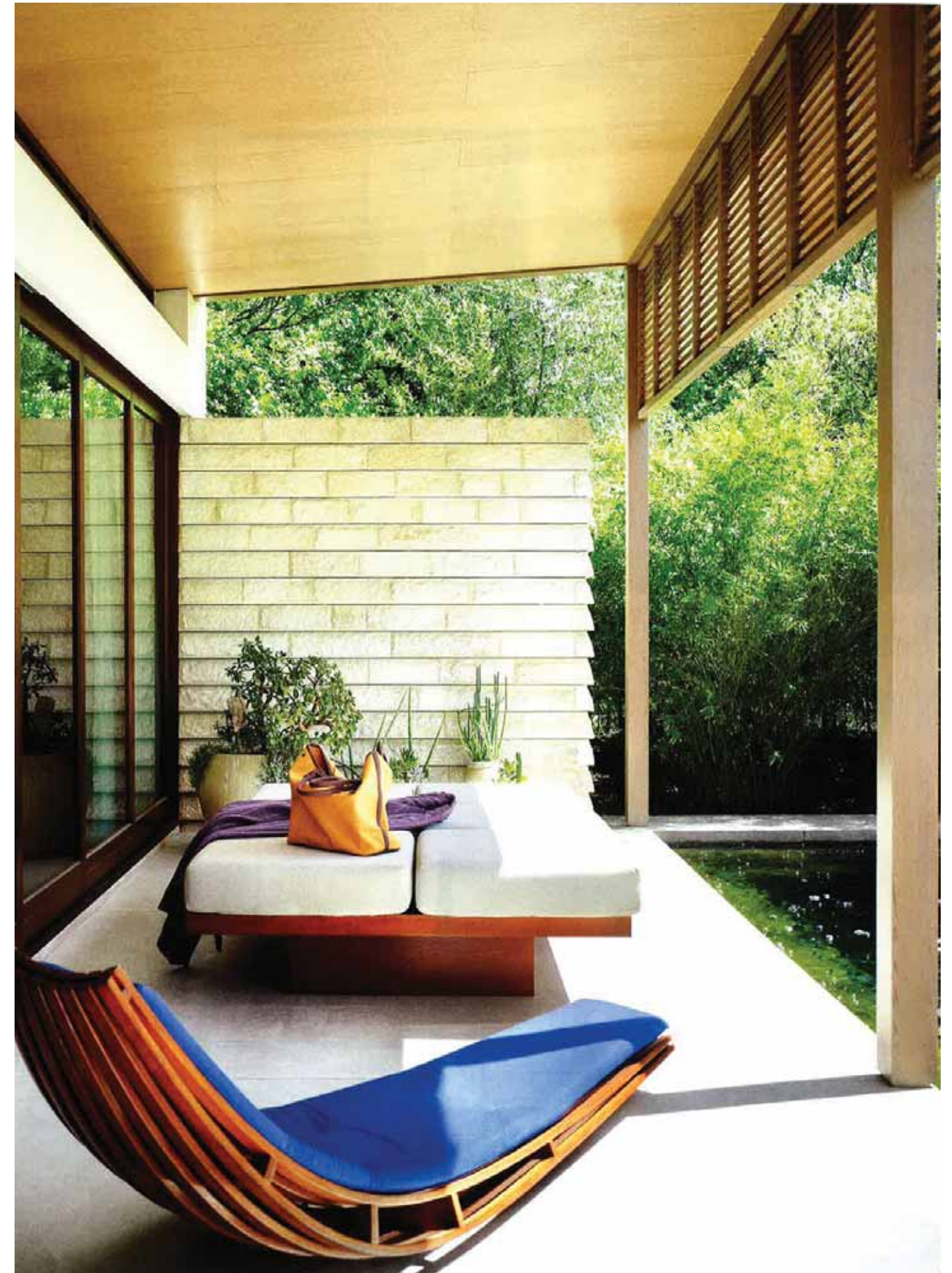
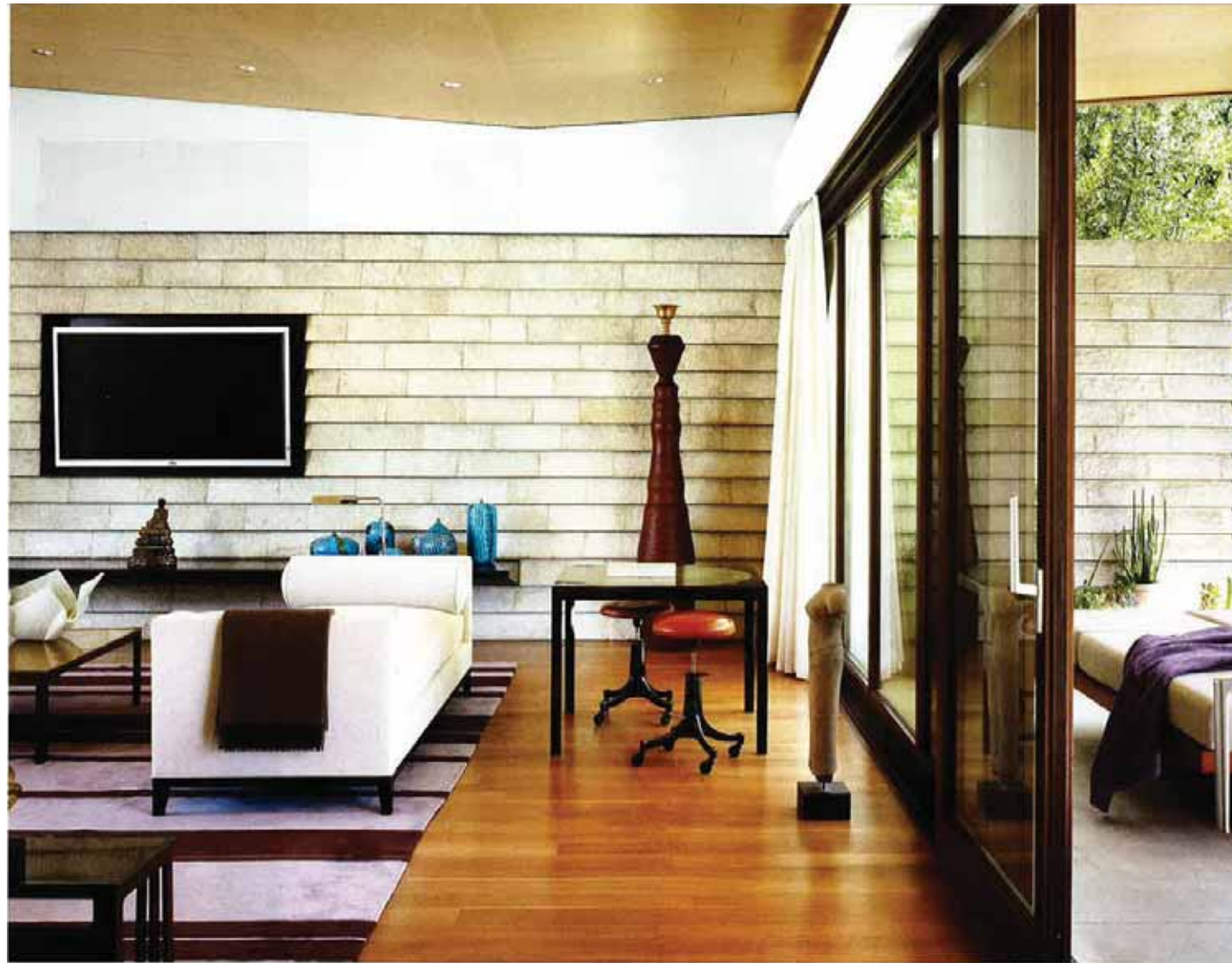


# LET THERE BE LIGHT

IT'S ALL ELEMENTAL IN A HOUSE WHERE EARTH, SKY AND WATER CAN WORK THEIR MAGIC

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY CASEY DUNN





**“THIS HOUSE IS ALL ABOUT LIGHT,”** says New York-based architect Richard Gluckman, referring to a house he designed in Austin for a former Dell executive and his wife. The 6,000-square-foot stone, stucco and glass house, inset between a koi pond in front and a 25-meter lap pool in back, is a private world where serenity reigns. Gluckman’s frequent collaborator, interior designer Nina Seirafi, joined him on the project. Her nuanced interiors make way for the subtleties that both client and architect wanted.

Because of Gluckman’s affinity for dealing with the ephemerality of light, his work is familiar to art aficionados. He designed the Georgia O’Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, the Museo Picasso in Malaga, the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh and the Whitney Museum in New York City. He has also created studios for sculptor Richard Serra, painter Chuck Close and painter and sculptor Ellsworth Kelly. In the late 1990’s Gluckman was selected to design the Austin Museum of Art. Although the project did not come to fruition, that is where the architect met his future client, who was a member of the AMOA board.

“I called Richard,” says the homeowner, “and said, ‘We aren’t going to have an art museum, but we could get a house out of this.’” That suggestion intrigued Gluckman, who doesn’t work on many residential projects. But suggestion was as far as his client went. When it came to telling the architect what he wanted in the way of a house, he didn’t mention a thing. “All my client talked about,” recalls Gluckman, “was that he wanted a house that reflected his simpler lifestyle.”

With that instruction in hand, Gluckman came back with drawings of a horizontal building,

“Our client loves water,” notes designer Nina Seirafi, “and there is water on either side of the house.” She selected a deep aubergine-striped rug for the living room with a faint pattern that mimics the movement of water in the koi pond just a few feet away. “That was a way to extend the feeling of water right into the house,” she says. Off-white cashmere-and-linen curtains frame the window wall and are a soft antidote to the hand-hewn limestone wall that extends from the inside to the outside.





Guests are greeted by the first of many Buddhas in the house, part of the homeowners' extensive collection. The foyer opens to the outside dining area and doubles as a dining room inside. The dining table is topped with bamboo, its undulating pattern suggesting the gentle shimmer of the water in the pool behind the house. A glass light wall in the foyer introduces diffuse, ambient light into the room. Leather banquette seating in the kitchen (above) dresses up casual dining.

stepped back from the street, with a hefty concrete staircase that approaches the house obliquely and establishes separation from the world outside. Gluckman's reason for the horizontal design was basic: "This is a part of the country where the sky is big," he notes. "If you establish a house that's on the plane where the sky and the earth meet, it creates a safe and secure feeling for the people who live in it."

Simplicity would carry over into the floor plan, which showed a two-story living space divided in half. Public spaces are on one side; private are on the other and upstairs. The two realms are separated by a 1,200-square-foot entry hall that would also serve as the dining room. "My client didn't want a traditional dining room," explains Gluckman. "He said he'd never use it." As decidedly modern as the house is, the entry owes much to a strategy often seen in early Texas residences. With glass at the front and the back to offer views straight through the building, the long hall is a glamorized version of a dogtrot, used as a breezeway to channel cooling winds in the summer. "I wanted the house to be open on one end and push through to the outside on the other," explains the architect.

The hallway/dining room does something else besides opening the house to the views: It serves to connect the outdoor spaces, front to back. Glass is fundamental to how the house works. "This house is very much about being part of the outdoors," says project architect Betty Rexrode. "We





Master bedroom and bath look out onto the pool and Lake Austin beyond. Light is introduced into both rooms by windows on both east and west sides, but also by the subtle use of other kinds of glass, such as the glass mosaic tiles in the bathroom that reflect light underfoot. In the bedroom, the reverse side of the glass wall behind the bed is painted a soft blue and achieves the effect of a wraparound sky to wake up to. The horizontally banded limestone wall starts in the foyer, lines the stairwell and continues into the bedroom.



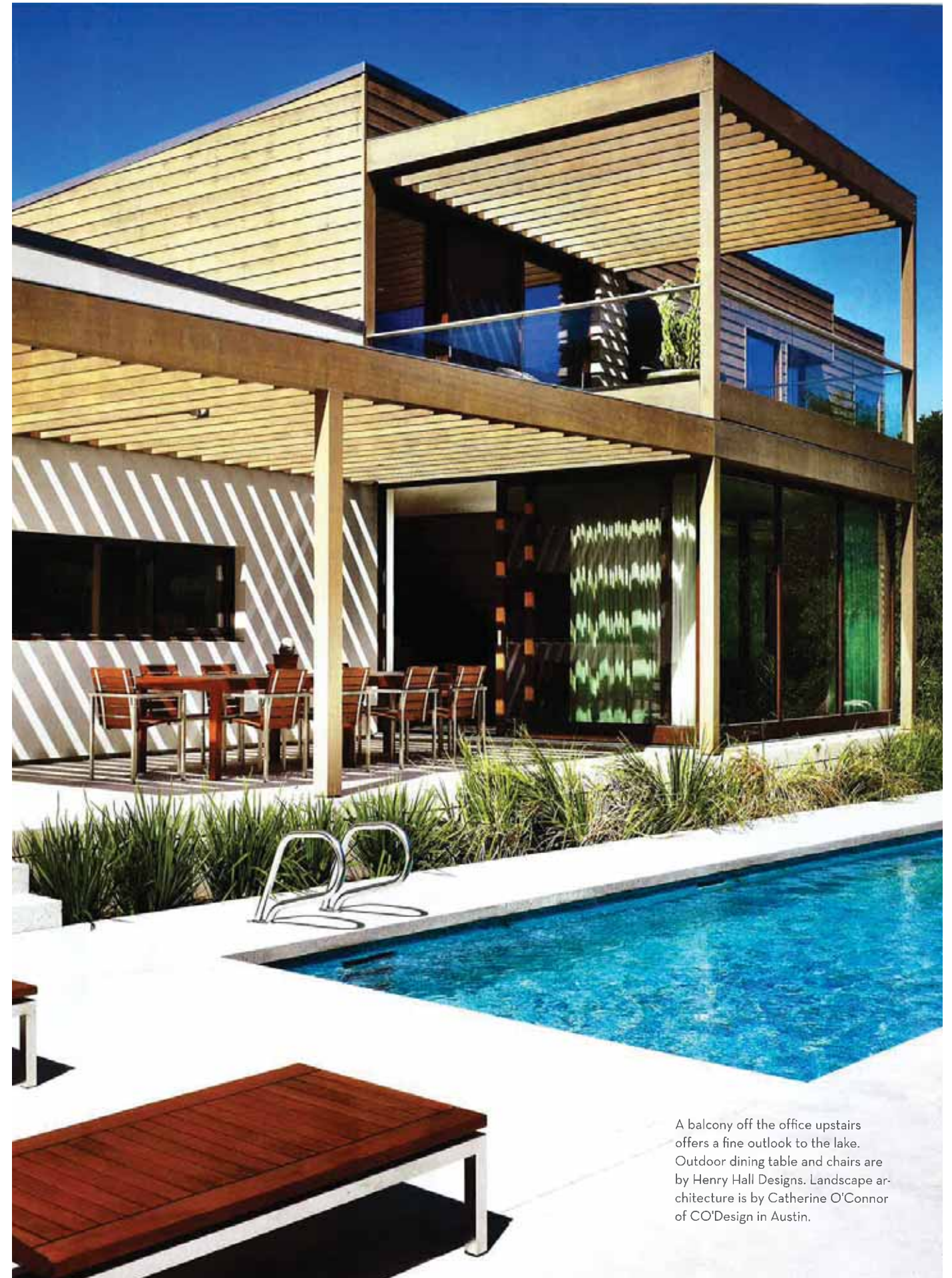




made the outdoor spaces, such as the porch with the koi pond, an extension of the living space." A wall of glass doors in the living room is the barest separation between inside and out. From the dining room, glass doors open onto an alfresco dining room that mirrors its indoor twin.

Designer Nina Seirafi developed design elements to support the feeling that house and surroundings are part of the same whole. A showstopping staircase in the entry is built from nonsense steel buffed to a gunmetal luster. Floors are rift-sawn oak finished to a light-as-air color that, with the white walls, are not unlike what you'd find in a gallery or museum. Hand-hewn limestone from a local quarry continue from exterior walls to the interior, the layered effect making a rich texture from a humble material. "We used earthy colors," says Seirafi, "that respond to the earthy textures of the landscape."

The effect is of a house that's more than a house. "When we do a building," explains Gluckman, "we let the outside flow in. It's all about the relationship of the outside to the inside." The result is that both the homeowner and his wife feel a connection to the world they live in that's unexpectedly fulfilling. "In this house," says the homeowner, "I don't feel like I need anything else." The restorative feeling was a bonus, he says. "I always feel calmer after I walk through the front door." [amh](#)



A balcony off the office upstairs offers a fine outlook to the lake. Outdoor dining table and chairs are by Henry Hall Designs. Landscape architecture is by Catherine O'Connor of CO'Design in Austin.