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MALIBU REVIVAL

WITH AN ASSIST FROM INTERIOR DESIGNER WALDO FERNANDEZ
AND ARCHITECT MICHAEL KOVAC, BUSINESS DYNAMO JAMIE MCCOURT
BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO A CLASSIC JOHN LAUTNER BEACH GETAWAY

TEXT BY MAYER RUS PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER DAVIES PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSIDI





Designer Waldo Fernandez and architect Michael Kovac collaborated on the renovation of Jamie McCourt's 1980 John Lautner beach house in Malibu, California. The living room is outfitted with Charlotte Perriand cocktail tables, Oscar Niemeyer ottomans, and a matching vintage Jean Royère sofa and club chair; the pair of sculptures at left is by Isa Genzken. The grounds were revamped by Diamond Landscaping. For details see Sources.



The curved guardrail and floors on the upper level are of Douglas fir.

Right: The swooping roofs are capped with copper. Vintage outdoor seating and tables by Walter Lamb are arrayed on the teak deck.

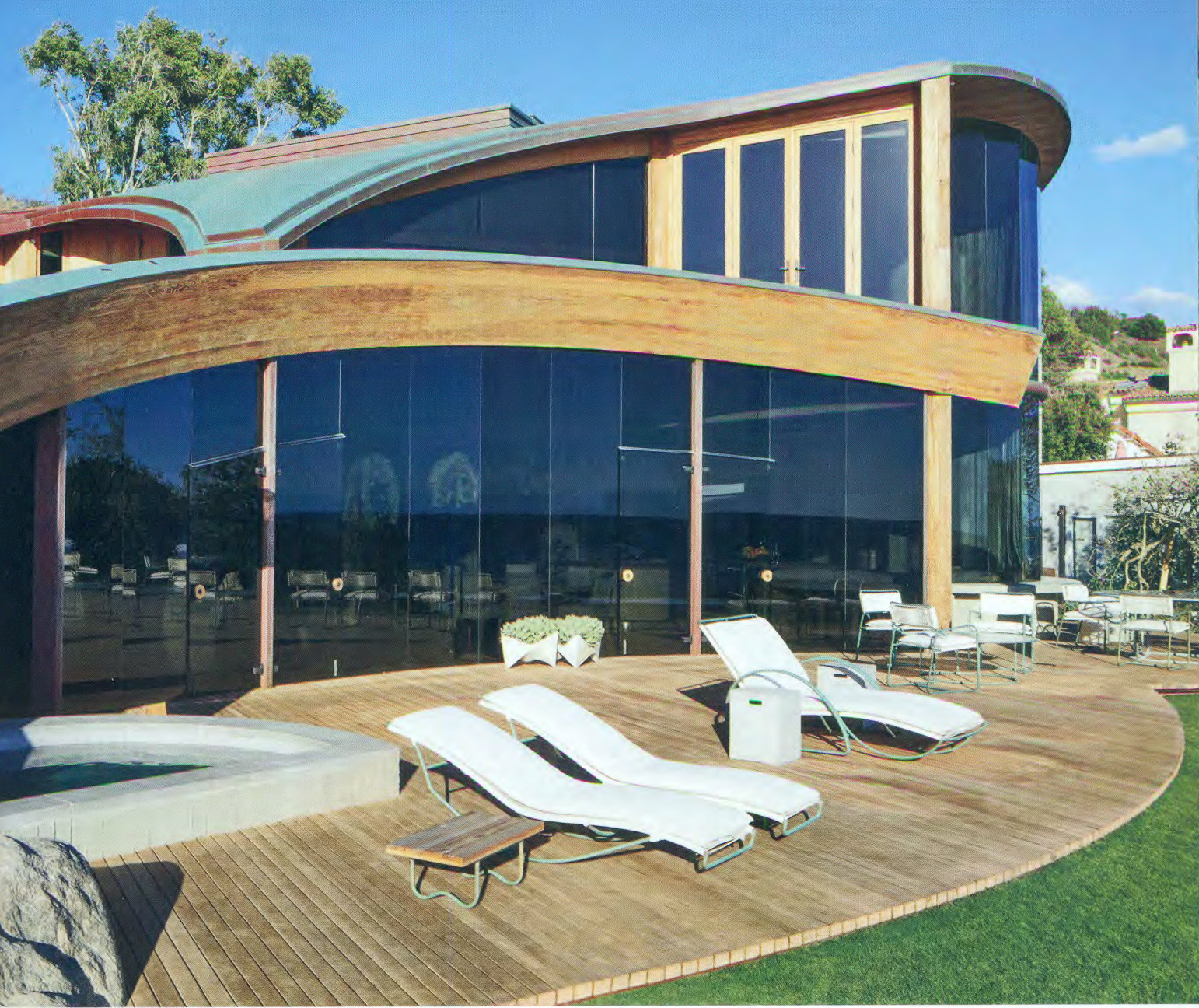


Anyone who has ever delighted in a love affair with their home can appreciate the impulse to break into swooning rhapsodies that might otherwise seem hyperbolic or saccharine. Chalk it up to the power of place. So when Jamie McCourt, former CEO and co-owner of the Los Angeles Dodgers, describes her dazzling John Lautner beach house in Malibu as “a living organism” and “one of my closest friends,” she can hardly be faulted. After all, most disciples of great design would give their eyeteeth to have such a friend.

“This house breathes with me,” muses the high-octane entrepreneur, whose career has encompassed real-estate development,

investing in tech start-ups, and tending the Napa Valley vineyard she purchased in 2013. “The trees, the boulders, the water—they keep me grounded,” she continues. “You look out at the ocean and hear the waves, and you understand your own insignificance in a bigger world.”

McCourt bought the cedar-clad, copper-roofed residence on tony Carbon Beach in 2006 from Courteney Cox and David Arquette. Built in 1980, the nearly 7,000-square-foot structure bears all the hallmarks of Lautner’s most acclaimed projects: striking spatial adagios, avant-garde engineering, sculptural applications of wood and concrete, and a kind of organic spirit that feels at once primitive and futuristic. “The minute I walked in, it felt right,” McCourt recalls.

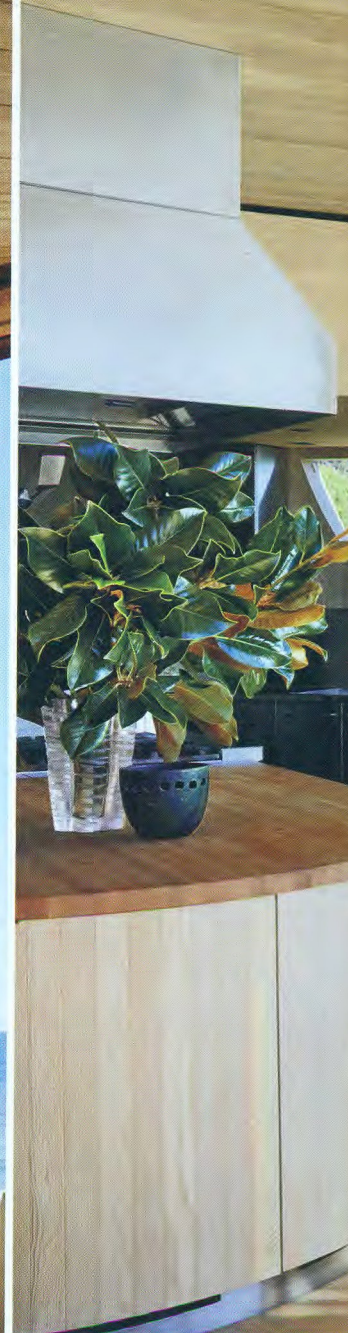


Before embarking on a renovation, though, she lived in the house for five years, acquainting herself with its many moods and nuances. “The real catalyst for redoing the home was Jamie’s desire to have a 25-meter indoor pool,” explains architect Michael Kovac of Los Angeles-based Kovac Design Studio, the firm entrusted with the commission. “She is a passionate swimmer, and the original pool was really more of a beautiful water feature than a place to do laps.”

To carve out sufficient space for the amenity, Kovac and McCourt decided to remove an awkward two-story bedroom addition that had been built at the front of the house sometime in the ’90s. The new concrete pool is sympathetic to the original architecture, to the point of being largely indistinguishable—its

vaulted timber ceiling mirrors that of the adjacent living room, and the panel of glass that separates the two spaces echoes the curtain-wall details of the dwelling’s oceanside façade.

“Our guiding principle wasn’t, ‘What would Lautner have done?’ It was, ‘What would Lautner do if he were designing the house today?’” McCourt says. That concept was put to the test in the next phase of the makeover, when she called on interior designer Waldo Fernandez, a friend and previous collaborator, to join what she says was a “mission to make the house perfect.” In practical terms that meant preserving the pillars of Lautner’s vision—the muscular concrete stairwells and fireplaces; the lyrical, swooping fir ceilings; the mammoth boulders—while replacing every inch of timeworn metal and glass, installing



Left: In the dining area, a Frederik Molenschot chandelier hangs above an oak dining table and custom-made chairs covered in a de Le Cuona fabric; the light sculpture in the foreground is by Robert Irwin.

Above: A new stainless-steel island and butcher-block countertops blend with the kitchen's original concrete counter, Yosemite-slate floor, and fireplace/grill; the curtain panel is of a Cowtan & Tout fabric, the clocks are by George Nelson, the sink fittings are by Kallista, and the barstools are vintage Pierre Jeanneret.



brand-new electrical, mechanical, and plumbing systems, and manipulating the floor plans to provide for updated conveniences such as a large chef's kitchen, a cozy media room, and an expanded master suite.

"A house like this is very specific, so you need to be careful with the moves you make," Fernandez observes. "We love the complex geometries and the scale of Lautner's rooms, but it takes a bit of imagination to find pieces that suit all of those curves and angles."

Despite the parade of pedigreed furnishings and accessories by the likes of Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret, Oscar Niemeyer, Maria Pergay, Wharton Esherick, and Jean Prouvé, Fernandez's tightly edited ensembles essentially defer to the bravura architecture. On the other hand, McCourt's art collection—which combines canonical works by Cy Twombly,

Milton Avery, Betty Woodman, and Francis Picabia with signature contemporary pieces by Rashid Johnson, Jules de Balincourt, Doug Aitken, Subodh Gupta, and others—lends the surroundings a breath of fresh air and just the right kind of kick in the pants.

"I love to grow things," McCourt says, casting her net wide enough to include her four adult sons, her precious wine grapes, the art she collects, the fledgling businesses she funds, and her butterfly-dappled garden of fruit trees, herbs, and dahlias. Asked the inevitable question of what she thinks Lautner would make of her emendations to the property, McCourt remains sanguine. "I feel like I know him at this point, and I think he'd be proud," she says. In the end, she and her designers have paid the architect the ultimate compliment: celebrating his daring point of view by safeguarding one of his creations for decades to come. □



On the second level, the master suite terrace overlooks a green roof; the custom-made teak table and chairs are by Alwy Visschedyk for Summit, and the cushions are of a Holly Hunt fabric.

Top right: The new lap pool echoes John Lautner's forms and materials. A large window at the far end lets in ocean breezes.

Bottom right: A Jules de Balincourt painting and a vintage Serge Mouille double sconce surmount a banquette dressed in a Holly Hunt suede in the master suite sitting room. The cashmere carpet is by Mansour Modern, and the bookcase is by Waldo's Designs.



In the master bedroom, Jean Royère-style poufs clad in a de Le Cuona linen are grouped on a cashmere carpet by Mansour Modern; the coverlet is made of a Lee Jofa linen, the walnut cabinet conceals a pop-up television, and the concrete fireplace is original to the house.



