

SAN DIEGO

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## straight talk.

WRITTEN BY LEILANI MARIE LABONG | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILLY DORAN

A SIMPLE GARDEN, A PLAIN WHITE STUCCO WALL, A WOODEN DOOR. At first glance, the house at the end of a quiet cul de sac in La Jolla doesn't command much attention; its street view presents a kind of architectural poker face. And while architect Tony Crisafi hails this subtlety as one of the home's most distinguishing features ("The owners are from Mexico City and prefer the anonymity that comes with living 'behind the garden wall,'" he explains), he also revels in the way the design unveils every inch of itself, one surprise at a time. "It's not like a bottle of cheap Champagne that fizzes out as soon as you pop it open," muses Crisafi.

Pivoting open the tzalam wood entry door—a gorgeous custom-designed sculpture in its own right, featuring a lattice of hand-carved inlaid squares—doesn't reveal a traditional foyer, but rather a courtyard accentuated by a reflecting pool. This serene space, enclosed on two sides by glass and topped with a ceiling of sky, is the architecture's first indoor-outdoor gesture. Throughout the sprawling footprint, disappearing walls—of both the glass and pocket-door variety—aren't simply generous portals through which Southern California's warm sunlight and fresh ocean air infuse the home. They're also the apertures that capture views of the pool, garden, distant beach or even other rooms in the house, well-appointed with the homeowners' vast collection of modern art.

<b>ARCHITECTURE</b>	Tony Crisafi, AIA, Island Architects				
<b>INTERIOR DESIGN</b>	Gina Diez Barroso, Diarq Diseño y Arquitectura				
<b>HOME BUILDER</b>	Dan Arenas, Mitchell D. Burton Construction, Inc.				
<b>BEDROOMS</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>BATHROOMS</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>15,000</b>



**ANIMAL KINGDOM**

The living room's location at the back of the house puts it front row center for pool and ocean views. With neutral upholstery on the generous Bolier & Company sofas and a zebra-hide print on the chrome Kravet chairs, this room feels like an après-safari retreat.



**FIREWATER**

When lit at night, the massive gold travertine slab that acts as a backdrop for the entry fountain provides the water with a fiery reflection. The open-air courtyard hints at what's to come, from the home's indoor-outdoor mission to an actual sneak peek inside via glass walls and doors.

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Crisafi incorporated "shifting planes" into the design that provide thrilling elements of surprise—just when the edge of the home is in sight, there's another level below with more to offer. "In this way, the home unfolds like a good story," he says. While the living room, for instance, extends its footprint to include an outdoor reflecting pool on the rear terrace, a few steps toward the edge discloses another chapter, another surprise, another tier: a swimming pool. On yet another tier below that lies a garden. And underneath the massive, all-concrete



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podium deck that holds it all, an additional unforeseen wonder reveals itself: a cavernous nine-car garage, with nary a supporting vertical post or I-beam in sight. “The entire house sits on it. It spans from front to back,” explains builder Dan Arenas. “It was easily one of my greatest challenges.”

Working with Diarq Diseño y Arquitectura owner Gina Diez Barroso, lead designer Hilda Espino worked her own surprises into the mix. Rather than countering the boxy, minimalist architecture with, say, overtly curvaceous furniture and lots of soft textures, Espino embraced the right angles and sleek surfaces. Linear layouts appear in the living room, where the furniture is centered for coziness rather than banished to the outskirts, and in the dining room, where a generous custom square table can host dinner for a dozen.

#### SQUARE DANCE

Looming above the parchment-topped dining table is a masterpiece rendered in white onyx: a light fixture that’s rectilinear in shape and texture, much like the architecture of the house. Both pieces are custom. The brick red leather chairs are from Antonello Italia; the carpet underneath is from Aja Rugs.



#### PICTURE IN PICTURE

Given the home’s boxy shapes, many of the pass-throughs inadvertently frame picture-perfect design vignettes that include the homeowners’ collection of modern art by Mexican artists. This particular view of the family room is seen from the glass entry doors.



**BLACK TIE AFFAIR**

An L-shaped sofa by Italian Homes and classic Barcelona chairs anchor the family room. The stools and end table are from Hold It Contemporary Home; the Natuzzi coffee table was found at Designet in Mexico City. Snaidero cabinetry and hardware elevate the kitchen's contemporary aesthetic.

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Black leather seating in the family room is decidedly modern, and an abstract painting in primary colors by Loli, a popular, mono-monikered Mexican artist, heightens the vibe, as do the stainless-steel appliances and barstools in the adjacent kitchen. Yet, somehow, in the presence of all these contemporary attributes, warmth prevails.

"The family room is large in scale, but cozy," says Espino. "It's open to the pool terrace and the kitchen, which helps a lot," because, after all, nothing enlivens a space more than a flurry of activity. The wood-and-leather custom drop ceiling, also designed to echo the home's orthogonal expression, creates even more intimacy.



**TOUCH THERAPY**

The gray color palette in the master suite is enlivened by a variety of materials (custom wood dresser and lacquer platform bed, leather chaise by Zuo, and silky quilted bedding and Mongolian lambskin pillows from West Elm) and the surrounding outdoor environment, framed by large pocket-door openings.



**WINDING ROAD**

The helical staircase is virtually the only piece of architecture in the house that curves. The glass railings seem to aid the hefty sculpture in its effortless spiral, which spans all three floors. The tall glass enclosure looks onto a planted bamboo screen, connecting outdoor and indoor environments.

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At the center of it all stands one significant sculptural piece that Espino and Crisafi describe, respectively, as “the heart of the home” and “the binding of the book”: an elegant staircase that seems to float between all three floors. At once understated and grand, it’s the only geometry in the house that swerves. When placed in the context of architecture that exhibits all the trademarks of cool minimalism, it’s the biggest surprise of all. **L**