

THE MANUAL OF MODERN LUXURY

# Robb Report



## THE DESIGN ISSUE

*Bespoke cars*, the rise of the Superhouse,  
Greubel Forsey's revolutionary watches  
and art you can sit on

Issue 6



PLUS — Spain's finest wine, Land Rover's latest Discovery, luxury weightlifting, yachts for millennials, cool suits for summer, dangerous philanthropy, emeralds to invest in now and Honda's nippy new jet

# RISE OF THE SUPERHOUSE



Fantasy homes don't come any more bespoke than this. But how do you set about commissioning an **'unapologetically extraordinary' living space** that makes a grand statement, embodies your dreams, hopes and aspirations and enhances your life?

Words Alex Bagner  
Photography Karen Fuchs



Arriving at Bal Harbour House, a two-storey private home set in one of Miami's most exclusive residential enclaves, you're struck immediately by its seamless connection with the natural world, the fluid interplay between indoor and outdoor spaces. Living, dining, entertaining and service areas connect directly to interior courtyards through sliding glass panels that disappear into walls. The covered deck and rooftop pool connect the eye with the bay beyond. Terraces and lush foliage optimise Miami's tropical climate and waterfront views, as you'll see from the images on these pages. From the car court with its concealed stone doors to the main entrance flanked by reflecting pools and into the house's interior, all this is achieved with a striking continuity of materials: concrete, travertine and custom-finished wood.

Walk up to the second floor and you enter a linear space, filled with natural light that pours through large skylights. All of the six bedrooms on either side of this

**Above and left**  
Bal Harbour House's outdoor spaces make full use of Miami's tropical climate, with many rooms also offering ocean views

central spine open onto landscaped terraces. The master bedroom, entered via its own private anteroom, extends the entire width of the house, with two master bathrooms, one with a spa, the other with a gym. A continuous balcony, landscaped roof deck and wood-clad Jacuzzi all offer views of the bay and nearby islands.

This is superhouse living, as envisaged by Miami-based architect Chad Oppenheim, who creates what have been described as 'unapologetically extraordinary' properties, including the LA home of *Transformers* director Michael Bay and projects for Pharrell Williams. Known for blending modernism with monumentalism and a sensitivity to the way design sits within the natural world, Oppenheim speaks of 'design solutions to enhance life'.

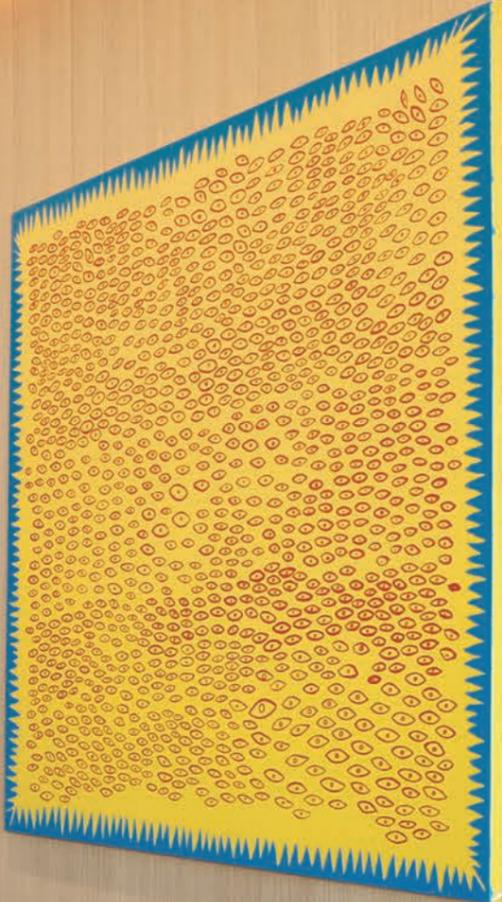
In many ways his ethos is a useful starting point for anyone wanting to create their own house: if you're building a bespoke home, every single thing about it

should make your life better – more functional, more aesthetically pleasing, more pleasurable.

Architect Magnus Ström, who has proposed the concept blueprint for Superhouse 00/30 – an elegant stone and timber villa nestled on the edge of a bay on a small Mediterranean island – has a similar philosophy. The house boasts a distinctive layout, divided into two living spaces with two functions. The first contains the kitchen, dining area, stores and staff accommodation. A grand flowing open space between the kitchen and dining area is ideal for day-to-day family living, but can also be closed off with sliding screens that sink completely into the floor for a more intimate 'entertaining mode'.

The second contains the master suite, along with three further bedrooms, all of which have direct access via a staircase to the spa and gym underneath. The sprawling grounds comprise a 50m salt-water infinity pool stretching





along the house to the beach, secure parking for eight cars and a separate basement with a wine cellar, large home cinema, anti-gravity yoga studio and indoor driving range.

Ström's Superhouse 00/30 may still be at concept stage, but his approach – building a dream home that isn't just a place to live but a place that encapsulates who you are – is a growing phenomenon among design aficionados. 'When a house is commissioned,' he explains, 'the investment is not just in a design for a home, but in a design for a lifestyle. Whether it's a primary residence or holiday retreat, it's not about having something no one else has, it's about having something exactly as you want it.'

As Oppenheim says, it's about 'creating the most incredible space possible. It's about having a feeling – and acting on it.'

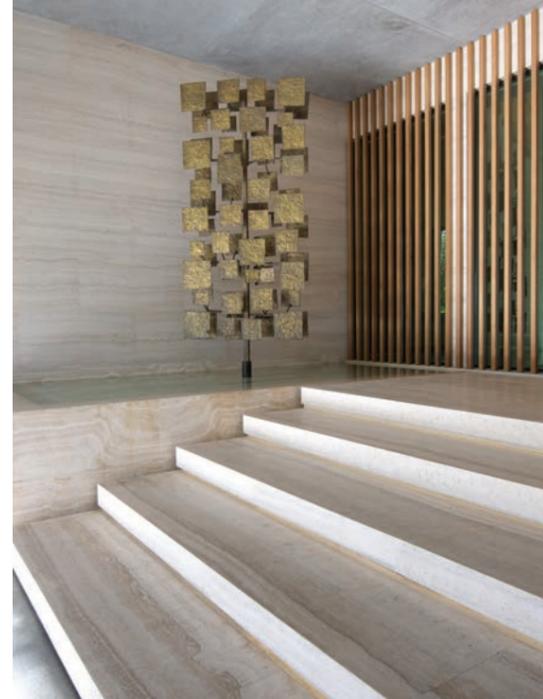
So how does a successful Superhouse get commissioned? Firstly, of course, you need to find your perfect plot. There's a whole science to this, of course, and a number of different routes. Some architects will help find land as part of their service – they are often the first to hear about coveted spots. You can go direct to land agents and estate agents and there are a number of good websites (for example, [plotfinder.co.uk](http://plotfinder.co.uk)) that help to give an overview of prices and what's around. As ever, making personal contacts is always the best route to being offered plots before anyone else.

Some will insist that converting your chosen spot on the planet into your home is a conquest of imagination, ambition and sheer perseverance. If this sounds all-consuming, remember that amid this scale and breadth, the single most important task when commissioning property of this complexity is finding the right architect. To create a building that fulfils its purpose with this level of ambition requires not just technical skill but emotional intelligence. It's imperative that whomever is chosen is inspirational not just on a professional level but also on a personal one. So much time will be spent with this man or woman that you must be able to connect with them and enjoy their company. Your house, and possibly sanity, depends on it. And you must trust in them enough to allow them a level of freedom in which to work.

It's essential, therefore, that the architect you decide to work with already has the style, inspiration and projects

**Previous**  
Living, dining and entertaining areas connect to interior courtyards via sliding glass panels that disappear into the walls

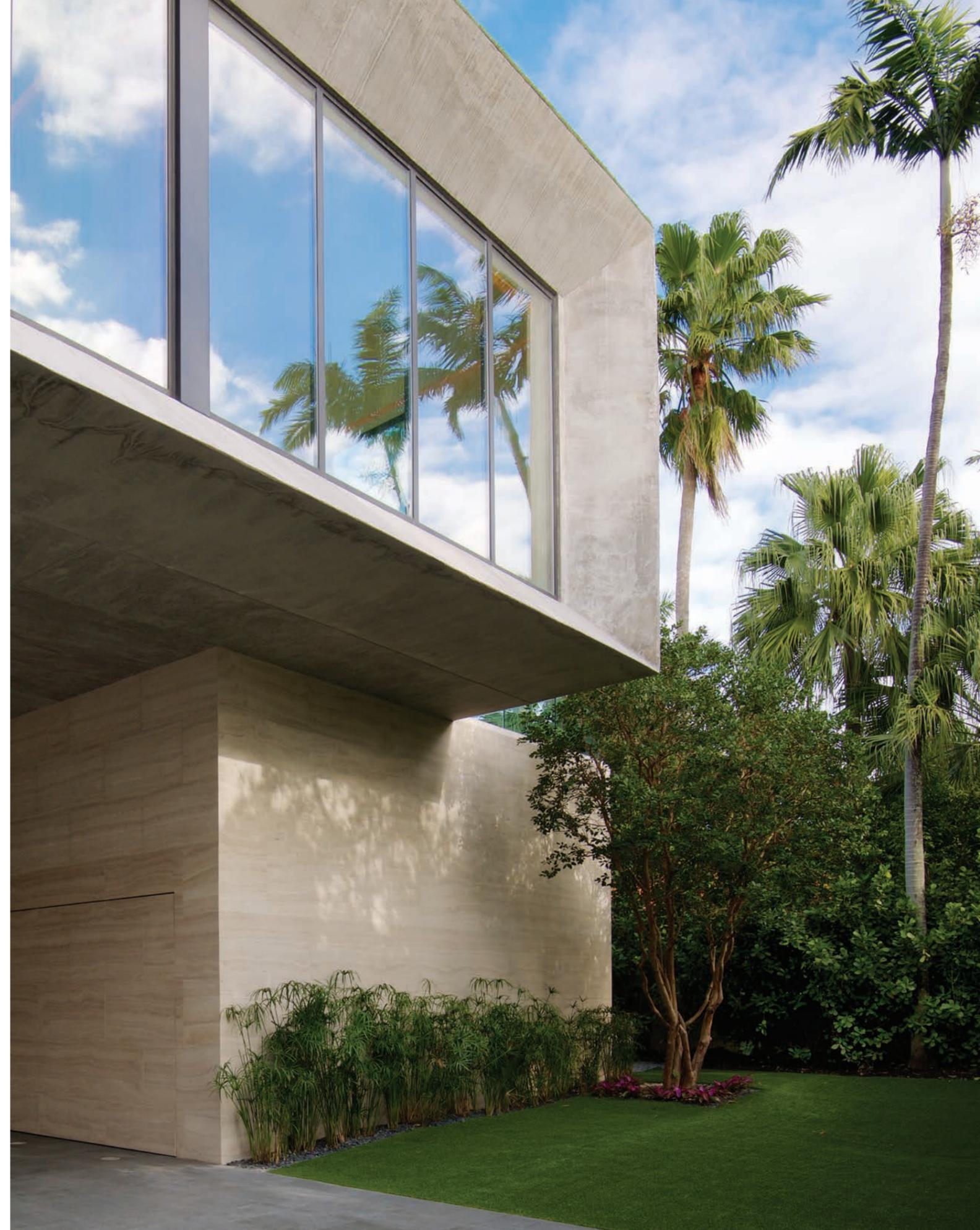
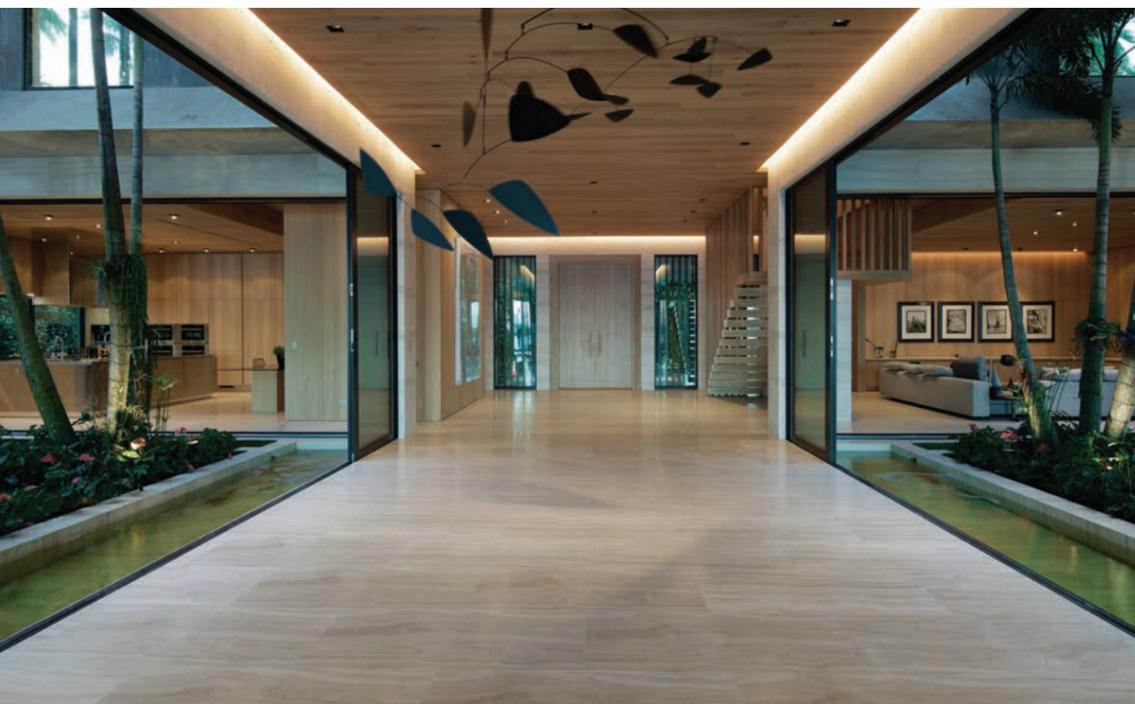
**Right, and below**  
The continuity of materials such as concrete, travertine and custom-finished wood makes interior and exterior spaces almost indistinguishable



under their belt that hit similar notes to what you're trying to achieve. This is going to be a relationship that goes to the heart of your life: it's essential to get it right. You should also be prepared to invest enough of your own time to ensure that the architect understands exactly how you want to live.

'The more we understand of the client, the more of them will be in the house,' explains Ström. 'Of course we need to know how many bedrooms they need but it's the smaller details that become essential. For one client every window in the house had a sea view except his study, as he didn't want to mix work and play. For another client a key concern was creating enough wall space to house her contemporary art collection of large canvases. For some it's all about entertaining, while for others it's about creating a sanctuary in which to retreat and connect with nature.'

**Right**  
Windows on the facade of the two-storey house allow natural light to flood into the large linear first floor room, which also has four skylights





**Above**  
The enormous rooftop pool, like the natural areas at ground level, leads the eye to the bay beyond

The architect leads the initial design process and translates the client's vision into a series of blueprints and structural drawings for discussion and development. This is often the most compelling part of the process, as loose concepts take shape. The architect should also take over the entire permit and building control process as well as appointing the right consultants, structural engineers and quantity surveyors.

Increasingly integral to the process, for both architects and clients, are companies who can create 3D models or computer imagery, which represent the easiest way to ensure that all parties are aligned before the bulldozers break ground. One such ensemble is The Boundary, set up in 2014 by architects Peter Guthrie and Henry Goss. With a team of model-makers, artists, photographers, animators and even virtual reality experts on hand, they currently create incredibly intricate architectural visualisations for the likes of Herzog & de Meuron, Tadao Ando and Renzo Piano. And it's not uncommon for clients to end up displaying the model of their house in the completed space, as a design object in its own right.

Once all is agreed – and a phalanx of support staff in the shape of project architect, project manager and costs

consultants has been engaged – attention turns to the interior. Don't imagine that the itch to create something fresh and wholly individual can be satisfied by simply building a structure to match the way you work and play. A tailor-made home these days comes with a bespoke interior fit-out and often a handful of site-specific one-off design/art installations. It may be that resale value isn't a concern, but choose the right artists and craftsmen and these extraordinary pieces will only add to its desirability – for the right buyer.

Clients often have a very specific idea of how they want their custom-built wine storage to look, or the exact way the lighting system in their gallery should be hung – an attention to detail that works well with architects who take a holistic approach, plotting the mechanics of the exterior along with structured thinking around the interior and surrounding landscape. As well as making sure the home has the highest spec sliding windows and lighting concepts, many will design the kitchen and bathrooms and/or create bespoke furniture.

Some clients find, however, that the combination of imagination and a honed eye for living demands a standalone interior designer. Studioilse is a design

**Right**  
Bal Harbour House has two separate marble-clad master bathrooms, one with a spa, one with a gym



company headed by Ilse Crawford, who is determined to create beautiful environments where humans feel comfortable. In a portfolio that also takes in some of the world's finest boutique hotels, members' clubs and airport lounges, she creates residences with a harmonious and sensory balance of contemporary and vintage design. Other interior designers worth investigating include Martin Brudnizki, Ben Pentreath and Suzy Hoodless.

For those looking for someone to take their existing collection of investment pieces, show-stopping art and future heirlooms and work their magic in uniting them, designer Hubert Zandberg has become the name to mention. A passionate collector himself, he set up his architecture and interiors studio in Notting Hill back in 2002, and has since become a master in investigating the relationship between different objects and pushing the envelope of design and display.

It's possible to get even more granular with the interiors process: a growing trend is to seek expert advice for individual aspects of the design, either in addition to, or instead of, an overall interior designer. So there are colour consultants (Farrow & Ball may feel

a little obvious now, but they do have an excellent advisory service; ask for the leading lady Joa Studholme); kitchen and bathroom layout specialists (bulthaup's Kitchen Architecture service and CP Hart's design team); lighting designers (call Nulty Lighting) and reclamation masters Retrouvius, who will source unique architectural details, materials and furniture with fascinating provenance.

The final flourish for many is to commission a one-off, truly exceptional piece to provide a focal point. Whether it's commissioning a statement chandelier, hand-painted mural or exceptional cocktail cabinet, there's a significant return to old-fashioned patronage: matching a maker to the client's domestic design vision not only offers a relief from humdrum mass production, but offers provenance, authenticity and story to the objects they choose to live with. For innovative avant-garde design statements, Valerio Capo at Gallery Fumi teams clients with the latest design virtuosos. But for a more rustic take on luxury, The New Craftsmen in Mayfair offers introductions to master artisans.

Just like your home, such a piece will be made just for you and there won't be another like it. Anywhere. Ever.

## So you want a Superhouse? Pick your visionary...



### Statement marvel that breaks all the rules

Practice: **MVRDV**  
Project: **Balancing Barn, Suffolk**  
Style: **bold and daring.** This Dutch firm has won a worldwide reputation for the ingenuity, playfulness and comfort of its designs

### Retirement home for art lovers

Practice: **Ström Architects**  
Project: **The Quest, Swanage**  
Style: **a new-build to replace an ageing bungalow.** Created for clients with a keen interest in design and a love of abstract and modern art

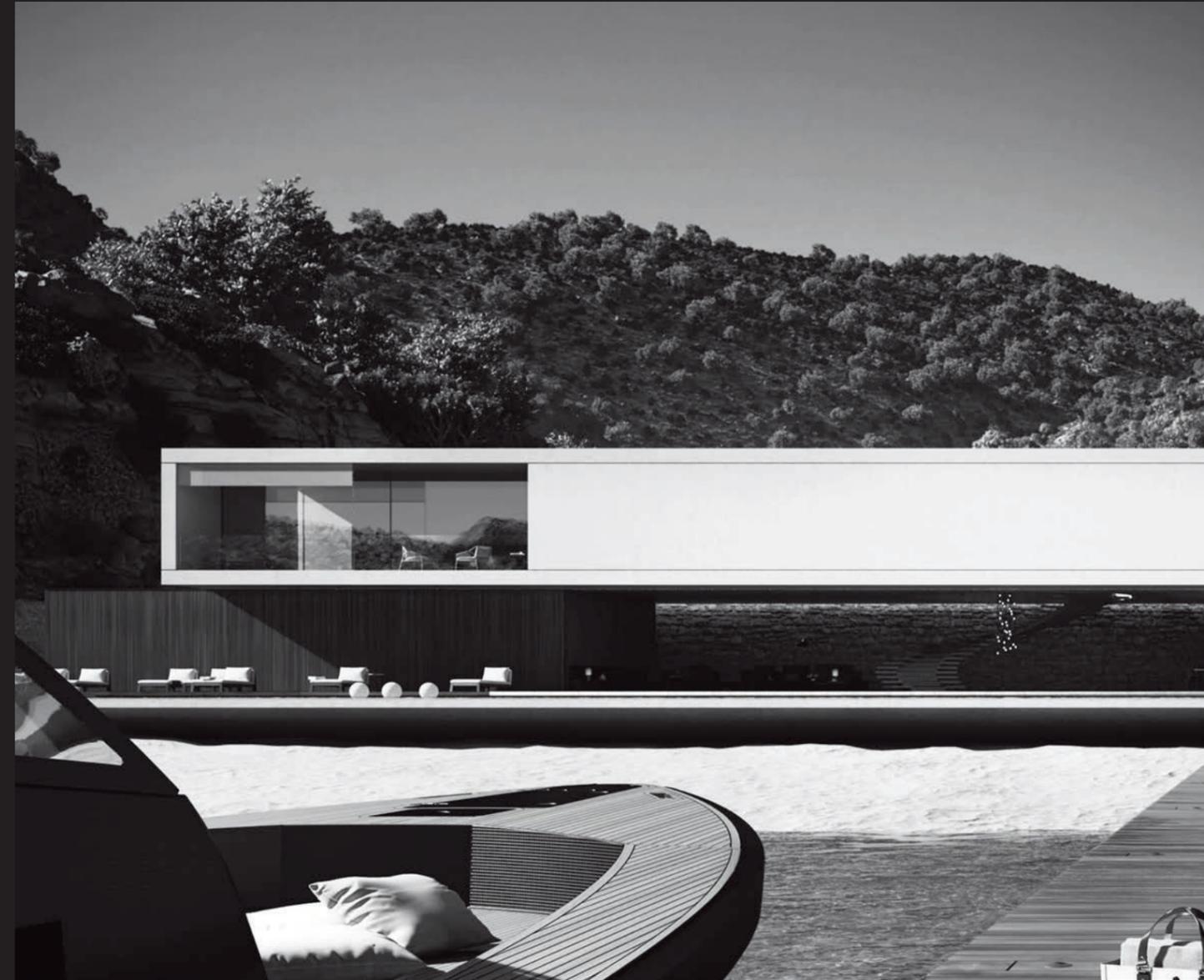


### Inner-city plot requiring ingenious feats of design

Practice: **Michaelis Boyd Architects**  
Project: **Michaelis House, Notting Hill, London**  
Style: **an individual answer for each project.** Playful family dwellings contained within simple, elegant architecture

### Modern country home

Practice: **Ström Architects**  
Project: **Superhouse (concept)**  
Style: **a vision for what's possible in contemporary residential architecture.** Ström Architects plans to create only 30 Superhouses in a series it likens to limited-edition artworks or watches



### Contacts

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