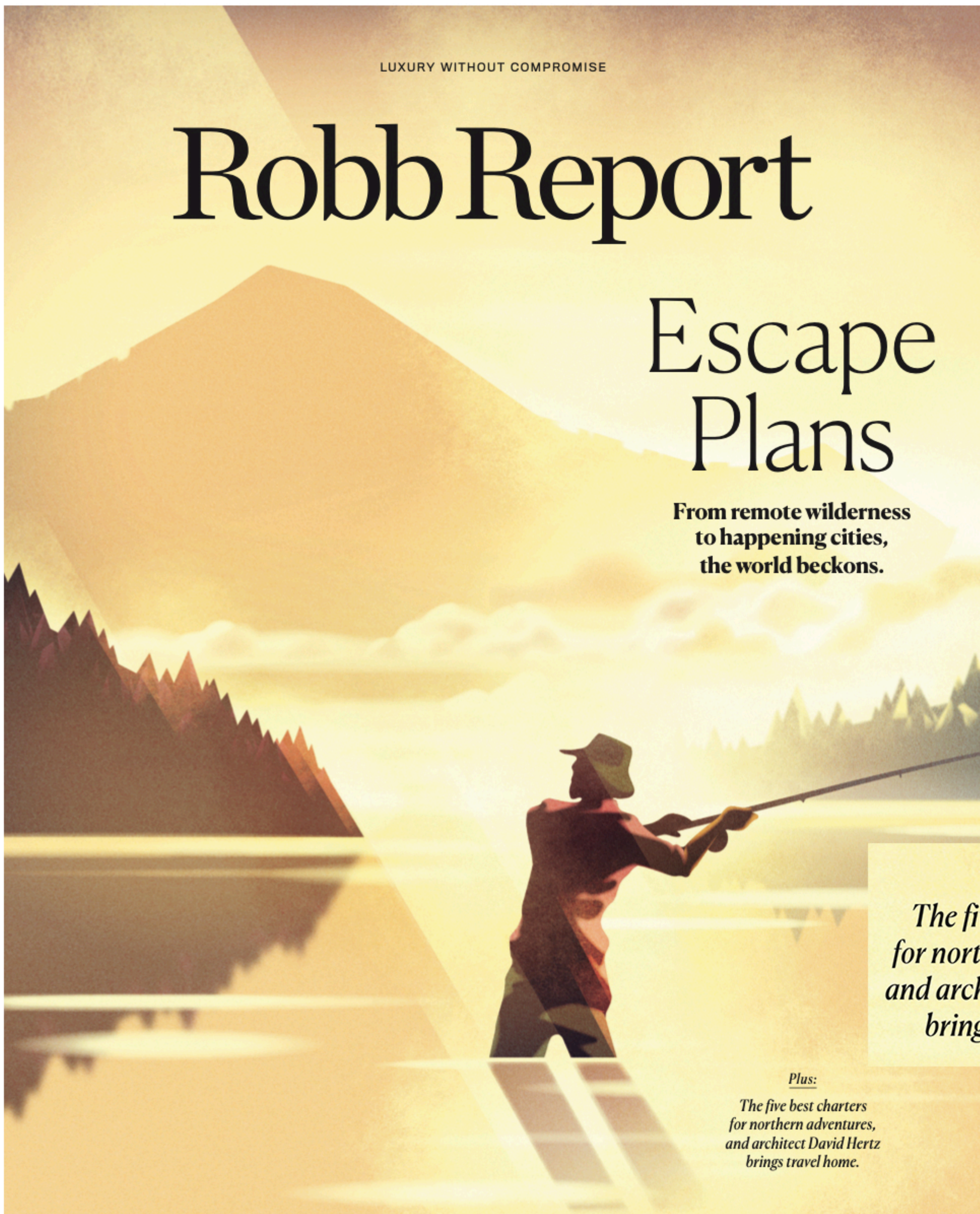


LUXURY WITHOUT COMPROMISE

Robb Report

Escape Plans

From remote wilderness to happening cities, the world beckons.



Plus:

The five best charters for northern adventures, and architect David Hertz brings travel home.

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MAY 2022

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At his Malibu home, David Hertz has restored the eccentric structures the late Hollywood designer Tony Duquette left behind. OPPOSITE: A terrace overlooking the Santa Monica Mountains.

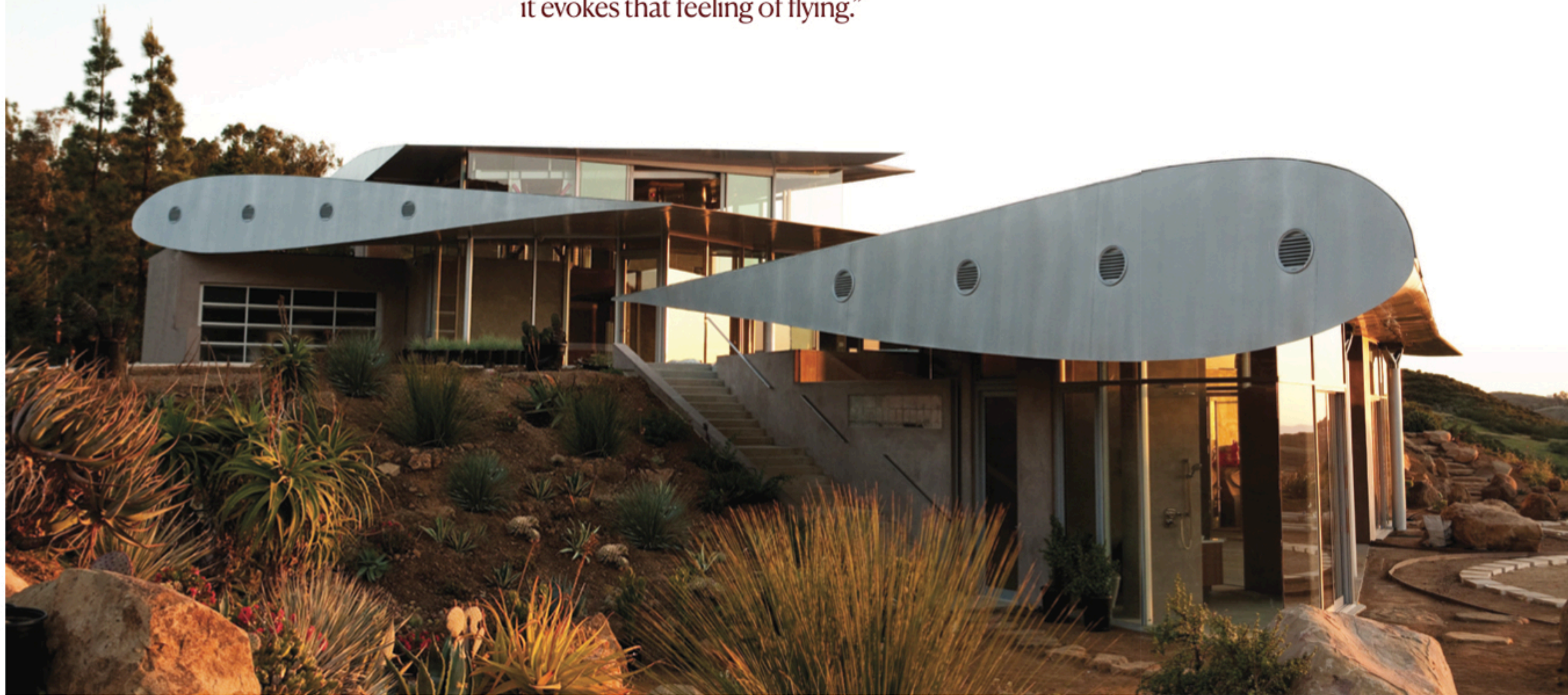


JOURNEY HOME

Building a house from a real 747 or designing roofs that look like billowing sails, architect David Hertz has an uncanny ability to transport you.

By **Justin Fenner** Photography by **Jessica Pons**

“When it’s foggy and you can still see the wings . . . it evokes that feeling of flying.”



There are versions of the story that imply a teenaged David Hertz was nabbed breaking into one of famed California architect John Lautner’s construction sites. Forty-five years later, Hertz tries to keep a straight face as he quibbles with that characterization.

At the time, he explains, his parents owned a condo not far from what would become the Segel House, known for its curving forms, copper-topped roofs and enviable position on Malibu’s Carbon Beach. They also knew the owners, Joann and Gilbert Segel, so Hertz didn’t feel like he was trespassing on the days he’d wander over and jump a fence onto the site to have a look around.

Still, when the Segels arrived and discovered Hertz there one weekend in the late 1970s, they

were rather curious to know what he was up to. And when he confessed his fascination with the house’s unique aesthetic, they invited him to lunch with the man who designed it.

The two wouldn’t sit down together until the house was finished in 1979, but by that time Hertz was already sure he wanted to be an architect. That a pessimistic high-school guidance counselor had told him his math grades were too low for his chosen field only served to fortify Hertz’s determination.

Lautner, however, saw his potential immediately. “I think he appreciated my enthusiasm,” says Hertz, who’s now 61 but looks a fair bit younger. The elder architect offered him a job, and the teen spent a summer doing menial tasks, then stayed with the studio for another four years.

The experience launched a career distinguished by the kinds of awards and accolades that should make that guidance counselor blush.

While Hertz has designed everything from furniture to retail interiors over the course of his four-decade practice, his most acclaimed works are his houses, which are unified by their green building methods, his preference for clean lines and a transportive quality that’s heavily influenced by childhood vacations to Hawaii and Mexico and surfing trips to Bali, Peru and beyond. “My travel informs my architecture, but my architecture can also create a travel-like experience,” he acknowledges. One of his most notable homes is constructed from rammed earth and the wings of a decommissioned Boeing jet. Another looks as if a group of sailing yachts managed to moor

DAVID HERTZ

childhood shuttling among construction sites. He and his younger brother, Brad, were conscripted to help build sets at Paramount Ranch’s Western Town, the filming location their grandfather William Hertz purchased and started running in the early 1950s. (If you’ve seen *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* or the befuddling HBO series *Westworld*, among other movies and TV shows, you’ve seen the fruits of the family’s work.)

His parents, Bob, an oral surgeon and sculptor, and Joanne, an artist, continued this tradition at home. The family’s ranch-style dwelling, high on a promontory in suburban Santa Monica, existed in a near-constant state of renovation. Brad remembers that their father loved when their friends came over because it meant there’d be more people to assist with various projects.

“Our dad would kind of do anything for our mom,” Brad says. “She would say, ‘I wonder what a skylight would look like in this room.’ The next day, our dad would be building a skylight and having us help him.”

Bob’s DIY ethos helped Hertz develop a healthy disregard for the standard approach to construc-

tion. When they weren’t surfing, the brothers spent time in the garage building their own bikes and skateboards or in the backyard adding rooms onto an ever-expanding tree house that Brad compares to San Jose’s infamous Winchester Mystery House. When Hertz pulled their vacuum cleaner apart to figure out how it worked, he couldn’t put it back together, but no one complained.

Hertz enrolled in what would become the Southern California Institute of Architecture, or SCI-Arc, in 1979. It couldn’t have been a better fit. The school had gotten its start just seven years earlier when Ray Kappe, the founding chair of Cal Poly Pomona’s school of architecture, left to create a less restrictive program than what you’d find at a typical university.

Michael Rotondi, one of SCI-Arc’s founding faculty members, remembers Hertz as being inherently curious, unafraid to dig into a wide array of architectural disciplines. He showed an early interest in “trying to figure out how to recycle the world,” Rotondi says. “His value system has manifested in a theory that eventually has become called circular economy: How do you take things that are there and make them better? David has



ABOVE AND ABOVE LEFT: *The Wing House* in Malibu, so-named for its roof, which Hertz constructed from the wings of a decommissioned Boeing 747.

themselves on a hilltop overlooking the Caribbean Sea. Glimpse them even briefly and you will wonder at their ingenuity. Step within and you’re taken somewhere wholly different from the place on the other side of the threshold. Now Hertz is working on perhaps his most personal project yet, a slice of Malibu called Xanabu that feels less like coastal California and more like Southeast Asia.

“The reason David’s architecture is so spellbinding is because of his nature to fight back against the status quo,” says photographer Laura Doss-Hertz, his wife and creative collaborator, whom he met in a sailing class. “It’s not that he’s a rule breaker. He’s able to walk within the confines of the rulebook but just likes to kind of elbow the walls.”

To hear his loved ones tell it, he comes by this pioneering spirit naturally. Hertz spent his



The Hertz family home in Venice, built from Syndeconcrete, starred in two seasons of the Showtime series *Californication*.

always been someone who can look at what is around him and figure out how to reinvent it.”

The era’s energy crisis turned out to be a formative influence. “We were very aware of our dependence on foreign oil and the emergence of solar,” Hertz says. “And there was a lot of interest in self-reliance. It was sustainability before it was called sustainability.”

SCI-Arc’s classes met three days a week, so Hertz spent the other two in Lautner’s office, helping to organize the architect’s mountain of archives and eventually taking on his own projects. He decamped only when he won a yearlong internship with Frank Gehry after graduating.

In 1984 he set up his own studio, where he developed a product called Syndeconcrete, a concrete alternative that weighed half as much as the traditional version but had double its compressive strength. While he initially created sculpture, furniture and objects from Syndeconcrete, it also had applications as a building material. Hertz even used it to make several unique terrazzo floors, including one filled with broken buttons and factory-reject zippers (so they wouldn’t end up in a landfill) for Patagonia’s first store in Tokyo. When Rhino Records renovated its corporate offices in Los Angeles, Hertz worked with members of the South Central Gang Intervention Program to break apart old vinyl and CDs to incorporate into the floors there.

He also relied on Syndeconcrete for the 1995 Venice, Calif., home he shared with his first wife (they divorced in 2009) and their three children, which would go on to serve as a set for a handful of movie and TV projects. Though Hertz originally named it the McKinley House, after the street it’s on, fans started calling it the *Californication* house when the Showtime series used it as the main residence for David Duchovny’s character, Hank.

Hertz initially designed the house as two concrete volumes connected by a skybridge, but years later he snapped up an adjacent lot and expanded the compound to four structures surrounding a lushly planted courtyard with a pool, a design heavily influenced by his travels in Southeast Asia. “I created my own kind of little mini-Bali in Venice,” he says.

Its aesthetic also cleverly dressed up the home’s secondary purpose as a laboratory for his ideas about sustainability. All of its wood is either reclaimed or certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. An array of photovoltaic solar panels on the roof provides about 90 percent of its energy needs. He even dispensed with a traditional forced-air system, relying instead on natural ventilation for cooling and floors with radiant heat.

The Venice property quickly became a calling card. The actors Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Brad Pitt, whose children are friends with Hertz’s, commissioned him to expand their weekend place in Montecito after spending time at the *Californication* house. (In 2003, Louis-Dreyfus told *The New York Times* that even though the project added two bedrooms and a bathroom, Hertz’s interventions cut the home’s energy bill by more than half.)

Another client, Francie Rehwald, first encountered Hertz’s work when she visited the *Californication* house on an architectural tour, but she didn’t immediately think of him when it came time to plan her dream home in the mountains above Malibu.

After she retired from her family’s Mercedes-Benz dealership, she wanted to build something unlike the homes she’d lived in before. In 2004 she’d purchased legendary theater and

film designer Tony Duquette’s former estate, which a 1993 wildfire had severely damaged. Rehwald interviewed a dozen talented architects, but none of them clicked. The day Hertz finally visited the property, they quickly shook hands and agreed that he was the guy for the job. Under one condition.

“I did say to him, ‘Look, I love elements of your architecture, but what I don’t like is the brutalism of it. It’s too masculine,’” Rehwald recalls. Instead, she asked him to design something sleek and feminine, with curves instead of hard right angles.

The next day, Hertz was flying to Scotland for a family vacation when he looked out the plane window and came up with the idea to use a 747 to form the structure. Rehwald loved the imaginative concept as soon as she saw it, but it would take a full six years before she moved into the final dwelling.

The wait included a search for a plane they could cut apart and the arduous process of obtaining approvals from a bevy of county, state and federal authorities. The Federal Aviation Administration, concerned that pilots might mistake the finished home for a crash site, initially recommended they paint a special signal on the wings but backed down when the property was added to flight maps. The construction team had to shut down a highway and fly the parts in by helicopter. But if the process was a challenge, the result, completed in 2013, is a shining example of adaptive reuse, an ode to our yearnings for adventure and an engineering marvel in its own right.

“One of the things that I like about the house is that it is sculptural in the interplay between the various sections and that no [two] sides look the same,” Hertz says. “As you move around it, it becomes very different.”

Rehwald is hard-pressed to name a favorite part of the house, which gained worldwide renown when it was featured on the BBC program *The World’s Most Extraordinary Homes*. During a FaceTime tour, she points out everything from the side of the plane that separates the kitchen from her office, complete with a porthole that allows her to look between rooms, to the tail stabilizers that form part of the roof. Her primary suite, which she has dubbed “first class,” is up a spiral staircase that pays homage to the original 747s. From her bedroom, she can reach out and touch the underside of the wing, and when she steps through a sliding glass door onto a terrace, she can look past its tip and out to the Serrano Valley.

“When it’s foggy and you can still see the wings . . . it evokes that feeling of flying,” she says.

The house Nicola Cornwell and Mike Wilkie commissioned Hertz to design may have been even more complicated than Rehwald’s. Both former TV executives in the UK, the couple had bought a boat and devised an open-ended plan to sail around the Caribbean. “And about a year into it,” Cornwell says, “we just looked at each other and said, ‘Are we ever going to go back?’”

The answer turned out to be no. Eventually they began scouting property and found a leafy two-acre site on a hilltop on Bequia, the second-largest island in the Grenadines. The couple considered dozens of architects around the

CALIFORNICATION HOUSE: JUERGEN NOGAI; SAIL HOUSE: KEVIN SCOTT



“The reason David’s architecture is so spellbinding is because of his nature to fight back against the status quo.”

Owner Mike Wilkie on the deck of the Sail House, a home Hertz designed in Bequia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines



Hertz with Laura Doss-Hertz and their dog Shanti at Xanabu, their estate in Malibu.
RIGHT: A view of what lies past the property's wood-and-metal gates.



globe before discovering the Wing House and Hertz's other projects online. He stood out not only because his buildings are so visually striking but also because of his environmental sensitivity. "We didn't want to just build a house," Cornwell says. "We wanted to build a house that was completely appropriate to this particular location." And because they were all sailors, Cornwell and Wilkie sensed they'd speak the same language. They had their first meeting on a boat the Hertzses rented and sailed from Grenada to Bequia in 2011.

The compound's buildings, designed over the course of two years and completed in 2020, were prefabricated in Bali—using reclaimed ironwood from a decommissioned Bornean cargo pier—and shipped to Bequia bit by bit. The six resulting structures include a main house whose lower level connects to a pool deck, three guest cottages, a villa for the house managers and a workshop with a solar roof that collects and stores

energy in battery banks, supplying the entire compound's power needs.

The property's most distinctive element, the roof structure for the five residential buildings, was one of the last details to be decided. It's made from a high-tensile material that looks like sailcloth, giving the collection of dwellings a visual link to the boats in the harbor below, and its name: the Sail House.

Even more ingenious, the eye-catching, billowing roofs are not just for show. Hertz designed them to funnel rainwater and condensation into underground cisterns that double as foundations, providing a stylish way for the buildings to collect their own water.

The Sail House may represent his most complete erasure of indoor-outdoor boundaries. "You feel like you're on a deck of a boat in the house," Hertz says. "You're very aware of the elements. You've got this mad, majestic view that

drops away, and dramatic weather patterns that are far more extreme."

The property that inspired one of Hertz's most significant environmental achievements, the ranch he and Laura have been renovating for the past four years, may be his most demanding to date. The first time Hertz saw it, he'd wandered over from Rehwald's adjacent estate—in this case, entirely by accident. "I felt like I stepped into a portal," he says of the collection of pagoda-style structures he saw that day. "It's just an otherworldly, transformative place."

Hertz quickly realized that he was on the wrong property. But after selling the *Californication* house in 2017 for \$14.6 million, setting a record for the most expensive home in Venice, he and Laura ended up buying it.

The property, Argyle Farm, was owned by

Tony Duquette's longtime collaborator Hutton Wilkinson. Duquette had first created a wonderland next door on what is now Rehwald's land, which he named Sortilegium, Latin for "land of enchantment." After its madcap assortment of structures, many pieced together from the sets he created for *The King and I* and other movies, were ravaged by the Green Meadows Fire in 1993, Wilkinson and his wife invited the Duquettes to live in their guest house. Duquette ended up moving over what was salvageable from Sortilegium and decorating Argyle Farm with the pavilions that stand there today. Though the two designers never met, Hertz feels a responsibility to preserve his predecessor's work.

"They are both visionaries, extreme individualists, very secure in their aesthetic decisions," Wilkinson says. "Tony would have gotten along famously with David while fighting to embellish everything of David's he could get his hands on."

After they took over Argyle Farm, the Hertzses renamed it Xanabu, a portmanteau of Malibu and Xanadu, the moniker Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined in his 1797 poem about Kublai Khan's legendary pleasure palace. The couple live in what was the Wilkinsons' main residence but use Duquette's fanciful compound for entertaining (and can occasionally be persuaded to rent it out for similar purposes). It has a distinctly regal quality, informed as much by its soaring, pointed domes as its shining metal gates. "The vernacular is not the jungles of Cambodia. It's not the highlands of Bhutan or Burma. It's not a monastery," Hertz says. "But it has all of those qualities mixed with the natural landscape."

Protecting it has inspired one of Hertz's most important innovations: an award-winning system called SkySource WeDew that he developed to help the property collect its own water and defend itself against the wildfires that plague its

location. The apparatus, which fits inside a shipping container, heats organic waste materials to create condensation, pulling moisture out of the air and purifying it for later use. The invention won the X Prize design award in 2018; two years later, *Time* named its finished form one of the most important inventions of 2020. (The World Food Programme plans to dispatch it to Uganda and Tanzania.) Pretty good for someone who didn't do well in high-school math.

For Hertz, building luxury homes and finding solutions to the most pressing environmental problems aren't at cross-purposes—and perhaps delineate an area where you can have your cake and eat it, too.

"I think we will get to a place where the built environment is actually giving back more than it takes over its life," he says. "I've seen it transform radically in the span of my career, and I think there's a lot more that it could do." ●