TRANSITIONS

Light and motion find new interpretations in an art-lovers' retreat that's at once opulent and intimate

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Mark DuBois is a bit of a magician: In a stunning feat of architectural sleight-of-hand, he's managed to make the walls of a hillside Tesuque home disappear. Ingeniously wrought floor-to-ceiling glass panels, an absence of interior doors, and a subdued palette of wood and matte metal finishes leave only the play of light and the proportions of the space to divide the home into its various living areas and mark the distinction between inside and out.

"'Objects embedded in space' was the organizing principle of the project," says DuBois, a partner in Manhattan-based Ohlhausen DuBois Architects. "The home was conceived to showcase the owners' amazing collection of paintings and sculpture, but it also had to have its own nature. The best architecture is always about how transitions—outdoor to indoor, public to private—are managed, and that's especially pertinent in New Mexico, where the sun is so strong that going from outside to inside can be very abrupt. We softened this by designing a sunscreen of frosted-glass panels that create a porchlike effect as well as a soft shadow that becomes almost like a sculpture, with patterns of light and dark emerging from the gaps in the shield. Once inside, you find there are no actual rooms, just spaces, and going from one to another becomes a kind of journey. Even the shift in materials as you move through the house, from concrete to wood to glass, contributes to the feeling of lightness and mobility."

The house is indeed all about movement: One can travel within it from east to west, parallel to the mind-boggling views that merge with the interior via structural glass walls, or go against the grain to encounter the concrete walls delineating the home's wings. At the heart of the structure is a "skyspace" designed by James Turrell, the artist famous for larger-than-life installations that explore light and space in transcendent ways. The 20'-by-20'-by-20' room is lined in teakwood and features a square opening in the ceiling that treats the sky as a painting—a shifting tableau distorting and reconfiguring the light that flows through it in a pleasantly disorienting way.

"Putting the skyspace inside changes the nature of the experience," observes DuBois. "When this kind of room is built apart from the main house, people tend to treat it as an object of worship, and going there is like a pilgrimage. Putting it indoors makes it more accessible, which encourages you to use it at different times of the day for a different experience each time. We lowered it into the ground to keep the height within the scale of the building, and that formed a kind of transition zone, allowing for a subtle shift in attitude as you descend the stairs to enter it."

In fact, the entire house plays with attitudes—toward art, nature, and living spaces generally. "We had to get creative as we built," says DuBois, "because we had to cope with the inherent paradox of opening the house to the spectacular views while providing enough wall space for the art. We tried putting in more walls, but it didn't work—that wasn't what the house wanted to be. It kind of developed its own logic as we went along, creating a distinct set of relationships within the house."

Another challenge was dealing with the effect of the unforgiving sun on the art. "People said, 'A glass house in the desert? You're nuts!'" laugh the owners, avid collectors and supporters of the arts who divide their time between Santa Fe and Austin, Texas. "But we did studies of the sun's position throughout the day, and installed retractable shades everywhere to shield the artwork." They also commissioned their collection manager, Andrew Gellatly of Santa Fe, to devise custom covers for the pieces to protect them whenever the house is not in use.

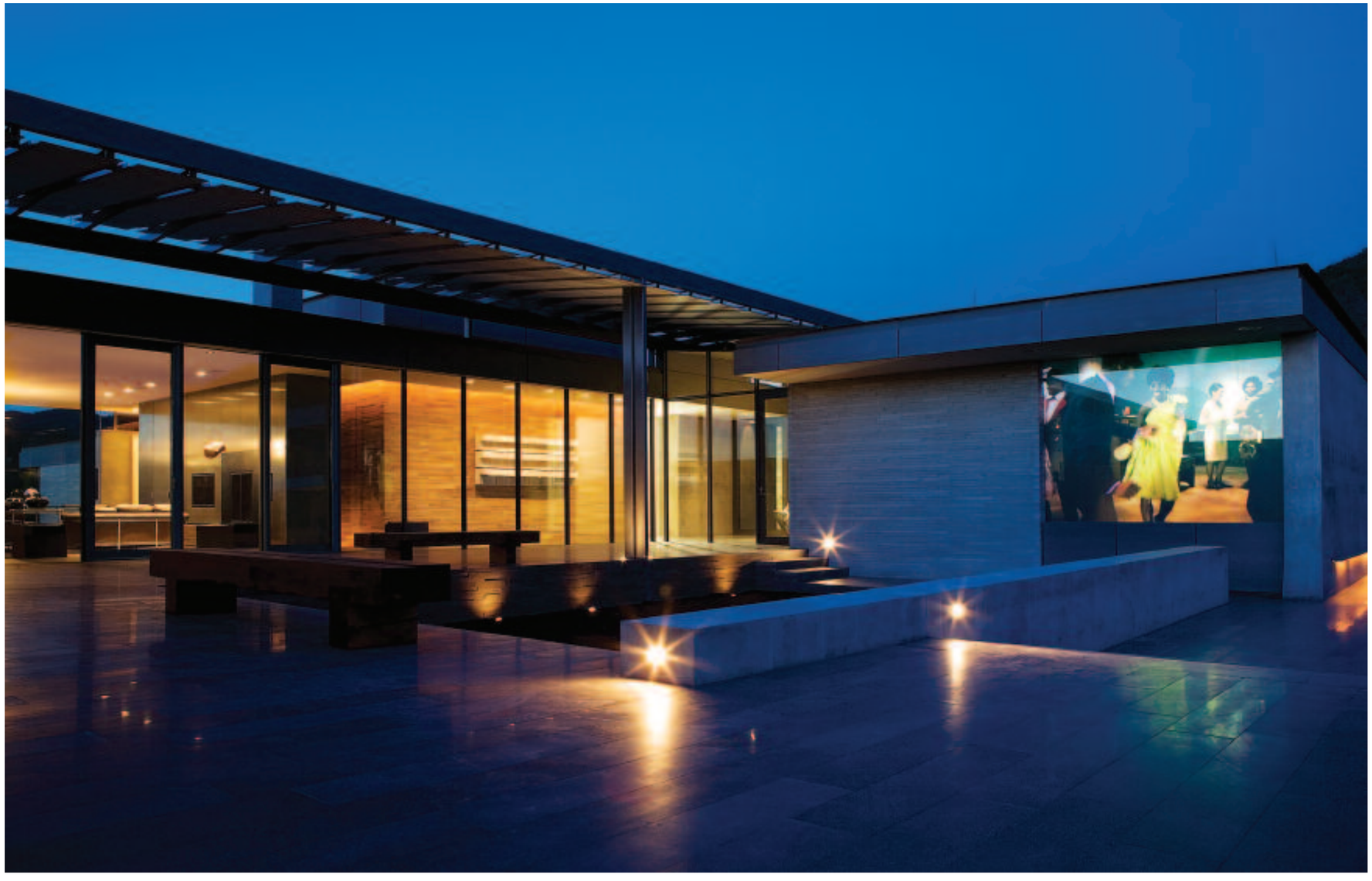
The art is certainly worth protecting: paintings by such luminaries as Agnes Martin, Richard Tuttle, and Robert Rauschenberg; sculptures by Richard Serra, Ellsworth Kelly, and Rachel Whiteread; installation art by Olafur Eliasson. "The art is a special bond between us," say the owners. "It's almost an addiction, the visual excitement that it generates. It's not an artist's job to teach you what's happening in the world, but art can teach you new ways to see the world. So art becomes a conversation, and our home is a setting for that conversation."

DuBois expresses pride and delight in this unique creation, citing the invaluable contributions of the local artisans and workers who came together as a team and shared the excitement of the project. "People in the Santa Fe area have a strong tradition of craft, the sensibility and feel for it," he observes. "It was a real pleasure to work with them. The quality of the house is due in large part to their efforts."

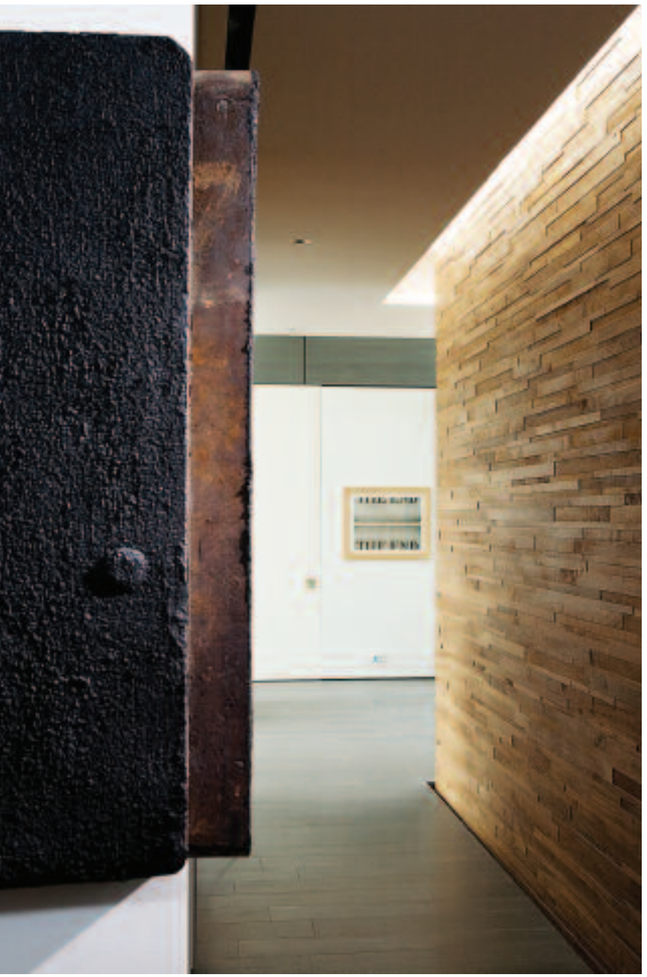
"The Santa Fe crew was outstanding," concur the owners. "John Wolf of Wolf Corporation and John Jones, the foreman, truly lived and breathed the project. It was a huge challenge, since so much about the house is unique. For example, this is the first time glass bearing walls have been employed in a residential setting in the U.S., and the use of concrete here was elevated to an art form."

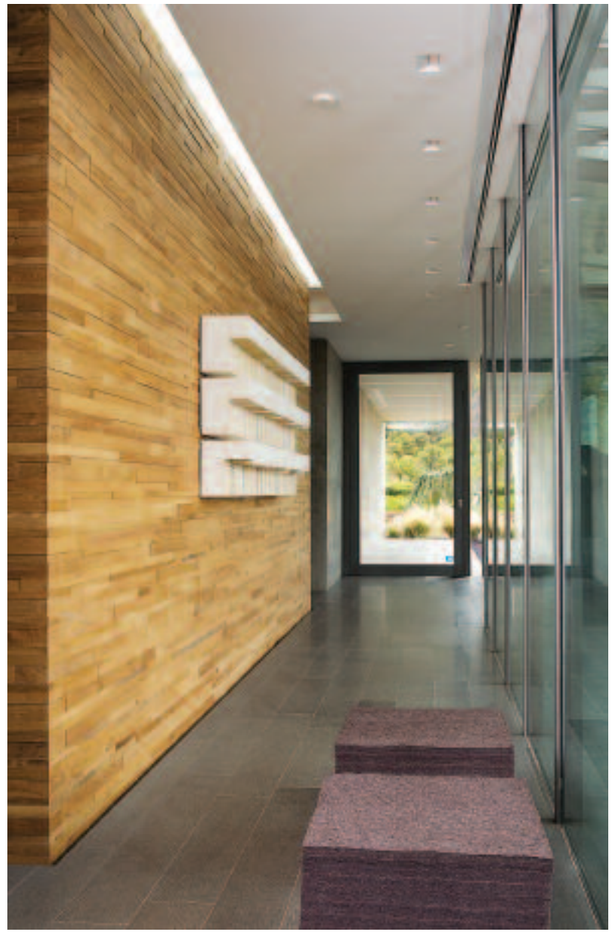
DuBois also gives credit to the couple's adventurous spirit. "They were willing to experiment and allow the house to become what it needed to be," he says. "A building project like this can only be planned so far, and then it takes on a life of its own. You have to be willing to be flexible throughout the process."

Conclude the owners: "We can't believe we're fortunate enough to have this home—to plan it, build it, live in it. It's very special."



James Turrell's skyspace, open to the heavens and the elements, is an otherworldly retreat in the heart of the home (left). The double staircase leading to the skyspace is mirrored on the far wall by Gerhard Richter's photograph, *Nude Descending Staircase* (preceding page). The interior's neutral palette, which has a cooling quality that contrasts with bright daylight, acquires a warm, welcoming glow as the sun sets (right). A rear-projection screen designed by Isaac Julien to display the owners' collection of video art encourages outdoor relaxation.



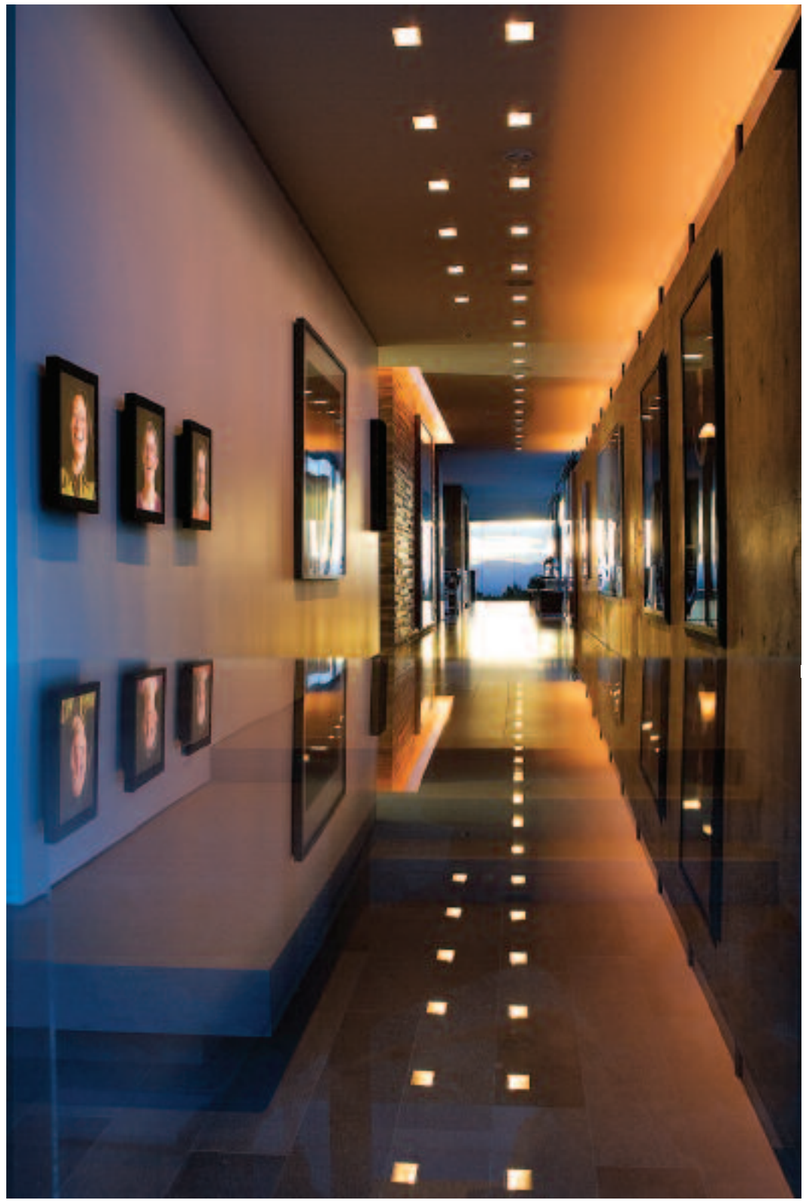


DuBois intended for the residents to constantly experience subtle changes and contrasts in light and materials within the home. Richard Serra's steel wall sculpture (left), *Forged Corner*, juxtaposes metal with the richness of the sculptural wood walls, whose layered technique evokes a sense of "things accumulating over time, like sediments," says the architect. In the gallery hall hangs Rachel Whiteread's plaster sculpture, *Untitled [Books]* (above). Artistic flourishes in the kitchen area include a plaster and polystyrene chandelier by Richard Tuttle and a collection of ceramic vessels by George Ohr, Lucy Rei, Hans Coper, and Otto Natzler (opposite).

With no columns or mullions to interrupt the expanse of glass, indoors and out merge seamlessly. The proportions of the living-room wall were calculated to accommodate the steel sculpture by Ellsworth Kelly (above). The coffee table is by wood artist George Nakashima, who also designed many of the furnishings for the dining room and kitchen-lounge area; the lamp is a Serge Mouille original from the 1930s. An installation by Kiki Smith, *Tears*, bends the light flowing through the structural glass walls, adding drama to the minimalist space (left).

The gallery hall houses Ed Ruscha's acrylic on canvas, *Futures* (left). The walls are of unpunctured concrete, which makes hanging art a challenge. In the entryway sits *Lilith Half Moon*, an industrial-strength sculpture constructed of air-conditioning vents by John Chamberlain (right). The floor stone, Basaltina, from a quarry outside Rome, looks the same inside and out and is slip-resistant.

The wall-less, open design flows into the private living areas as well. Teresita Fernández's *Untitled*, made of glass cubes, adds a subtle play of color above the tub (left). The bedroom's serene spaciousness (right) lets the art stand out: Donald Judd's wall sculpture of red anodyzed aluminum; Frank Stella's ink on paper, *Untitled Blue Cross*; and a Japanese basket sculpture from Tai Gallery in Santa Fe.



The gallery hall separating the bedroom wing from the public living areas displays a constantly changing interplay of light and reflection (left). On the left side is a three-panel video installation, *Witness,* by Bill Viola. The home's transparent presence on the site barely interrupts the space, creating an unexpectedly organic interaction with the landscape (right). Comments DuBois: "So many things came together—volume, structure, light, materials. The results actually exceeded our expectations."