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## LOS ANGELES MINIMALISM

Los Angeles, the capital of laid-back living, is known for its sun-drenched skies, palm-fringed gardens and Santa Ana winds that blow inland from the Pacific. The moderate climate promotes a unique indoor-outdoor lifestyle that makes California the envy of the rest of North America. Added to that, Los Angeles is a haven for 1950s architecture: Case Study houses (see page 18) were introduced there before spreading to other cities, and many leading mid-century designers designed homes in Beverly Hills, Bel Air, the Hollywood Hills and Brentwood.

Los Angeles is also known for its highly priced real estate, which for decades has been divided up into small plots or narrow tracts of land. When the architect Richard Neutra was commissioned to design a house for a tapering canyon slope in 1959, he conceived it as two interconnected structures rotated 30 degrees away from each other. By angling the house around a central courtyard and taking the structure close to the boundary walls, he maximized the amount of patio space in the courtyard, which was then naturally secluded from neighbouring homes. Almost every room on the ground floor opens onto the patio, enabling the owners to step out into a wonderfully light, tranquil space that is completely open to the sky. Planted simply with cacti, variegated grasses, aloes and other succulent plants, the quiet courtyard is the essence of the house's indoor-outdoor focus.

The U-shaped living area encircles the courtyard on three sides, set behind walls of plate glass bordered by sliding glass doors. Although this living space is open plan, it is cleverly zoned, with separate areas at either end for gathering in



**LEFT** Designed by Richard Neutra in 1959, the overhanging roof is cantilevered over the structure, supported by an exposed frame that extends into the garden. Parts of the split-level house are on stilts while others are bordered by a low retaining wall.

**THIS PAGE** Conventional partition walls are not found in this home, enabling separate living spaces to merge together. Instead of solid outer walls, plate-glass windows open up the exterior, and sliding glass doors glide aside to invite the garden in.



**ABOVE** The design is split-level, and the upper floor is accessed by a half-flight of stairs. This cowider staircase is atypical of mid-century homes, which usually featured open-tread staircases or spirals. **ABOVE RIGHT** The vested construction of the roof overhauling the courtyard enables the house to adjust to the growth of the tree, which

provides shade from the harsh midday sun. **RIGHT** The den is a treasure trove of mid-century American classics, exemplifying the West Coast modernist style. The built-in desk is paired with a moulded-plywood DCW chair designed by the Eames in 1947, while Saarinen's Tulip chairs and dining table sit beneath George Nelson's Bubble lamp.



[The core of the home was conceived as a light-filled, tranquil terrace that opens to the sky above.]

front of the fireplace in the evenings or relaxing in the den and watching television. The flat, stacked bricks of the fireplace adjoin the room's outside walls and demarcate a smooth hearth set flush with the floor. The overhanging chimney breast is abutted by a single steel support that extends from floor to ceiling, echoing the structural framework that remains visible alongside the house's exterior, supporting its flat roof.

A half-flight corridor staircase cuts a passage to the next floor, which, because of the sloping landscape, is higher than the main part of the house. The bedroom suites are on this level, where they access a sundeck on the flat roof above the living room, and have a panoramic view over the patios below.

Back on the ground floor, the plywood wall units in the den provide an abundance of workspaces, display surfaces and shelves for books. The Saarinen dining table is a favourite spot for the children to do their homework after school, and it was moved closer to the bookcases so that they could make full use of the family's library. Sleek plywood surfaces also feature in the kitchen, where built-in units and cupboard doors were varnished in a glossy finish that shimmers in the passing light now just as it did more than fifty years ago. The stainless-steel kitchen appliances are hard-wearing vintage pieces that continue to function perfectly, and the current residents reckon they will see out another fifty years.

The owners are building their collection of mid-century furniture slowly, concentrating mostly on American designers including Eames, Noguchi, Saarinen and Nelson. The Danish designer Arne Jacobsen's Egg chair is the odd one out in their collection, but it suits the style of this American house as well as it does Danish homes. The Egg chair was inherited from the previous owners, who did not have space for it in their new place. As with the vintage kitchen appliances, its new guardians expect that it will still look great many years from now.



**ABOVE RIGHT** The galley kitchen was designed with space for state-of-the-art appliances and an abundance of storage. The glossy finish of the cabinets and the stainless-steel appliances reflect the light flooding in, making the compact space seem larger than it is.

**RIGHT** The single bunks in the children's rooms were built into the interior architecture along with shelves, wardrobes and writing desks. During the space craze of the 1950s, a vogue for rockets, comets and spaceships took hold, which clearly continues in the present day.

