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Clean Living

Inspiring spaces.

BY AMANDA DAMERON

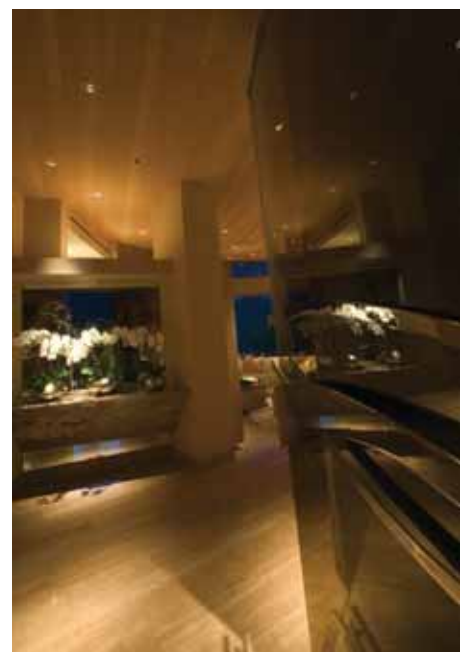
Desert Diamond

“We wanted to build our dream home in the desert, and our search for the right person led us to Narendra Patel,” says a Palm Desert, Calif., resident, who commissioned the architect to conceive a modern structure that would harness the area’s winds and intense solar power. “Everything starts with the orientation,” says Patel, who carefully plotted the sun’s 365-day course to maximize heating potential in winter and cooling properties in the hot summer months. Natural ventilation, low-emissive (Low-E) glazed glass, and clerestory windows throughout help to capitalize on natural light and lessen the home’s overall energy usage during the day. “Environmentally responsible architecture means doing more with less,” says the architect.

Patel Architecture, 760.776.5031, www.patelarchitecture.com

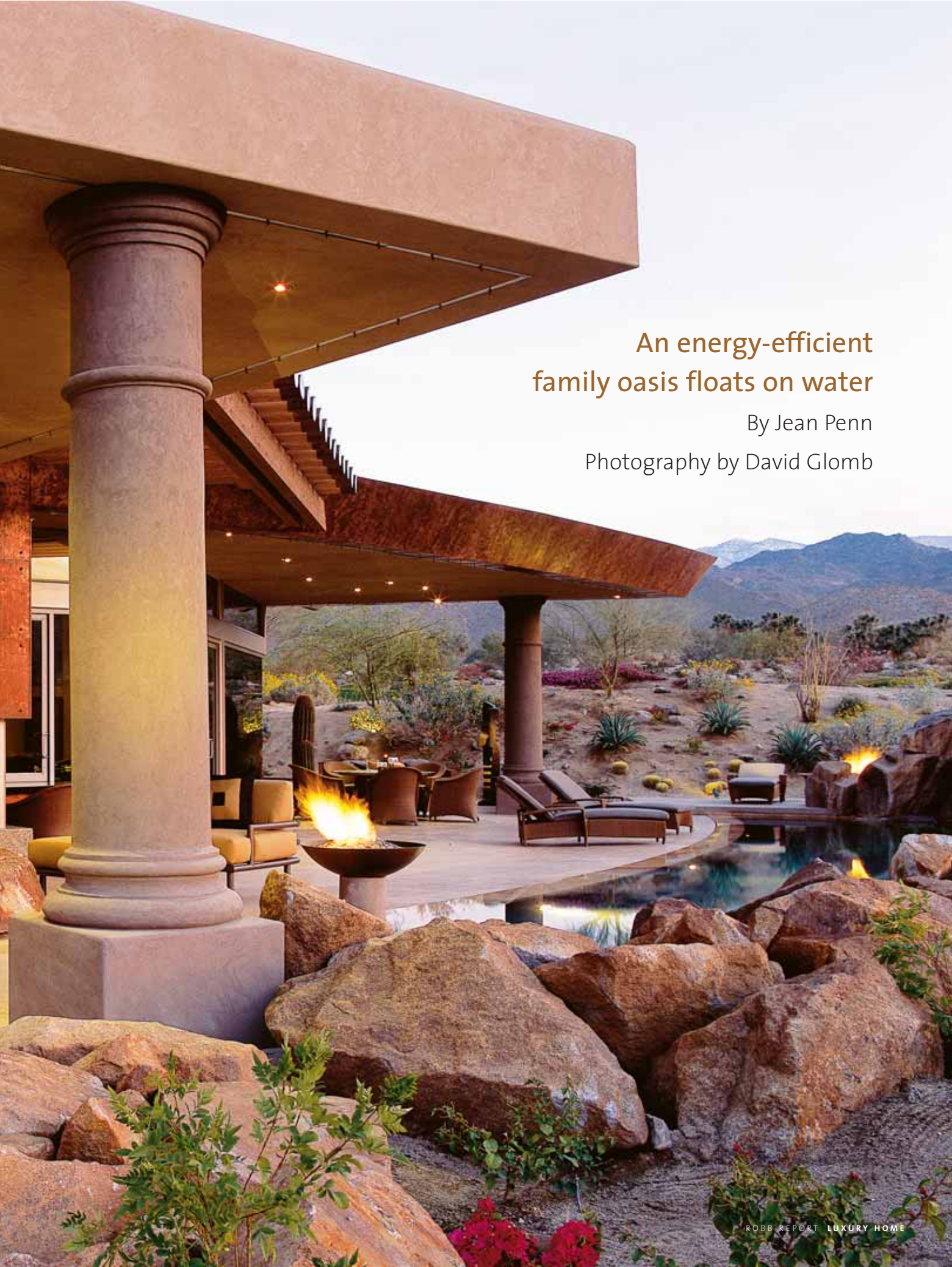
Photography: Arthur Coleman

General Contractor: Steve Ruffolo



Desert Mirage





An energy-efficient family oasis floats on water

By Jean Penn

Photography by David Glomb



When

architect Narendra Patel was called upon to conjure up a dream home at Bighorn Golf Club in Palm Desert, Calif., the end result was a house that both defies and defines nature.

Patel used all his sorcery to summon this live-in sculpture, which dances with shadows and light and is surrounded by water so that it seems to float atop the desert canyon. Still, it is massive and stony, chained to the ground by huge boulders and bolts of man-made steel. Inside, water flows through spotlighted channels, and walls and portions of ceilings disappear, so the homeowners, a husband, wife and their two grown children can gaze up at the stars from their magical desert tent.

Patel treats water with the reverence it deserves in the desert, allowing it to pour from fountains, putting it under glass, both indoors and out, and letting it flow over polished stones and around fiber-optic lights and glass art. The effect is mind-boggling and sculptural.

After visiting another Bighorn home that Patel had designed, the couple visited the architect's offices. They were impressed by a bathroom television behind a pane of black glass, placed so that the image appears at the touch of a button and disappears when the TV is off.

"We figured we would at least want to talk to anyone with his obvious design ability," says the client, who felt they were on the same wavelength. "I loved the



Preceding pages: Water channels flow around and through the house.
Brown Jordan seating. Left: Onyx coffee tables are lit from within; the living
room's fireplace consists of a stainless steel log. This page: Glass chandelier
and vases by Bruce Freund from Creative Beginnings, Laguna Beach.



Above: Architect Narendra Patel gave a media room/bar with multiple TV screens.



excitement he had. His brain was always processing.”

Patel was given the freedom to exercise his imagination in designing not just the home but everything in it, including the artwork. All they asked was that the indoors and outdoors be connected and that he make the house casual yet sophisticated, rugged and low maintenance. “Our only other request,” says the client, “was that he use lots of water, inside and out.” Since they had admired his underground water treatment at the entrance to the house, they suggested he continue the water inside their home.

The whole family, including their son, 19, and daughter, 24, became intrigued with the notion of walking on water after dining at Crustacean, a stunning Eurasian restaurant in Beverly Hills with a walkway that is a sunken

aquarium of rare koi and exotic fish. “He took the concept of having something in the house with water running through it and totally ran with it,” says the client.

The couple visited the site monthly from their Central Coast home, and for a long time saw a large boulder in the middle of the dining room, and nothing else. “The biggest challenge was doing it all long distance,” says the husband. “We had to put enormous trust in the architect, but it paid off.”

“What I enjoyed most was that at every meeting, he would have another great idea,” says the wife, mentioning the hood of the stove held up by stainless steel cables. Inspiration often sprang from necessity. For instance, the massive outer wall was necessary to hide a motor court, so Patel based his design on an ancient castle that is impervious to the outside, with tiny openings for windows from which water flows. The entry gate of welded steel tubes and glass opens to a large courtyard with a reflecting pool that continues inside the house.

The glass-covered channel that surrounds the dining room is lit with fiber-optic lights, and water flows over stones and chunks of art glass, made from the same materials used in the sculpted glass chandelier and vase on the dining table. With totally disappearing walls, the dining room seems to float above the reflecting pool. The boulder under the glass dining table was fork-lifted in after the cement was poured, and the house was built around it. The table, which has no visible means of support, is suspended and balanced by stainless steel spider fittings, another seeming act of magic that Patel terms a “structural sculpture.”

Patel relishes the home’s dramatic touches. A stainless steel arc begins on the stone wall behind the fire and penetrates the exterior wall to the front entrance. He heads to the living room’s wall of stacked stone and points a stainless steel log lighter, like a magic wand, to the stainless steel cylindrical pipe suspended over water. Kazaam! The fireplace ignites. Onyx coffee tables are lit from within and glow at night. The family has four televisions behind glass. The black pane of glass that



Left: The media room has seating by Acoustic Innovation, walls padded in acoustical silk by Andaru Sutra and wall sconces designed by Patel. **Above:** A water channel flows from the outer courtyard into the powder room. Travertine counter from Classic Marble; granite sink by Stone Forest; Hansgrohe-Axor fixtures.

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hides the television in her bathroom also provides openings from which water streams, as if from nowhere, with the turn of a knob. Adding to the effect of pure magic, a huge boulder over the tub continues outside and is surrounded by a window.

Patel confesses to using all his sorcery to tie together this magical house with its environment. The connection with nature extends to his goal of creating an environmentally responsible and healthy home. That means, he says, energy-efficient lighting, heating and cooling systems, as well as environmentally friendly building and construction methods. “All materials, fabrics, paint and stain are low in emissions, no toxins,” he says. “Eighty percent of our construction material waste was picked up and recycled.”

The art, which was commissioned by Patel, mostly has a musical instrument theme, reflecting the daughter’s pursuit of a singing career. In most cases, paints or patinas are applied on industrial canvases. The large sculpted piece above the living room sofa by Laddie John Dill is a composition in glass, concrete and stainless steel.

“Every time I come here, I notice another unique architectural feature,” says the son, who took a great interest in the design process and likes to de-stress here on weekends and study for his college business classes in the sumptuous guesthouse on an upper floor. At a recent party with a carnival theme, stilt walkers greeted guests, golf carts were decorated like Rio floats and a fortune-teller presided in the guesthouse. “It’s one of the best homes I’ve ever been in,” one guest from Rancho Santa Fe told the host and hostess. “Narendra was there, beaming from ear to ear,” the wife recalls. “He didn’t stop smiling the entire evening.” 



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