

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

NUMBER 8



the naturals

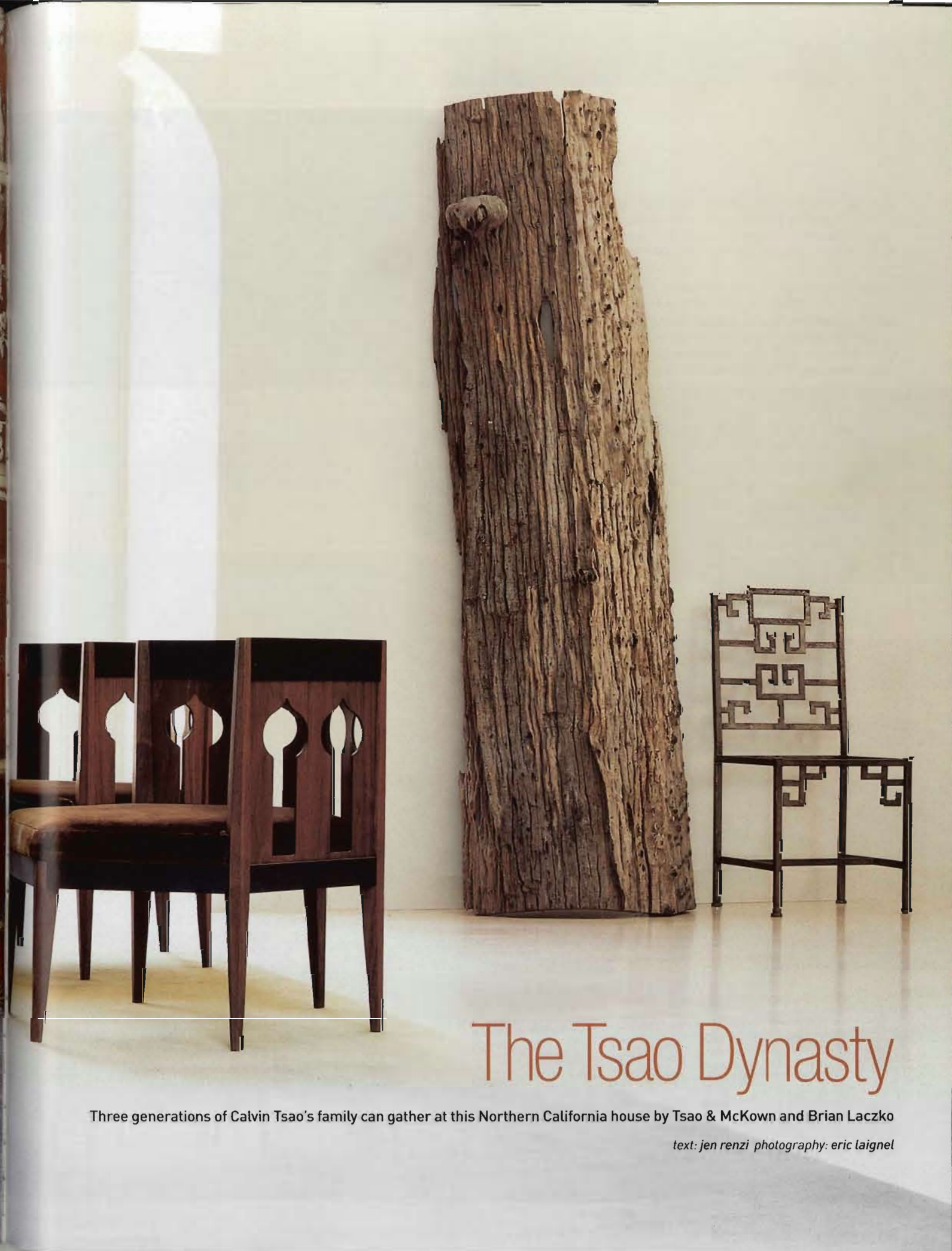
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The Tsao Dynasty

Three generations of Calvin Tsao's family can gather at this Northern California house by Tsao & McKown and Brian Laczko

text: jen renzi photography: eric laignel



Wanderlust seems to run in Calvin Tsao's blood. "My entire family has led a very nomadic life," says the jet-setting, slightly jet-lagged New Yorker. "My grandparents moved from China to Brazil, my parents to London. I grew up all over Asia, from Tokyo to Singapore." Eventually, the Tsaos settled near San Francisco.

Even then, the family was more restless than rooted: "We lived in a series of hand-me-down houses. Which was fine for my dad, but my mom always longed for a real home." Well, she finally got one, thanks to her eldest son, who grew up to become a principal of Tsao & McKown Architects. Located in suburban Piedmont, the 8,000-square-foot house is appointed with a multicultural mix of Asian antiques, custom upholstery, and sculptural accessories.

Designed by Tsao & McKown with Finn-Laczk Architects, the house is a year-round residence for Tsao's parents. A few times a year, the architect, his brother and sisters, and their offspring convene there, too. Thus the need for a flexible layout. "It had to be big enough so we would all not kill each other," Tsao says. "We love each other, but of course we drive each other nuts."

The cedar-clad structure occupies a clearing on a densely wooded, sloping 3-acre lot.

Previous spread, left: In the dining room of the house Tsao & McKown Architects and Finn-Laczk Architects designed in Piedmont, California, hangs a tapestry that Luisa Cevese fabricated by applying resin squares to a Chinese bedspread, peeling them off so that just an imprint of the pattern remained, and then affixing them to Belgian linen.

Previous spread, right: Where the dining room meets the living room, a French tree-bark sculpture stands beside a French 1940's wrought-iron chair.

Top, from left: Cotton-covered cushions lining the terrace outside the living room. Cladding of western red cedar. The front terrace's pavers, chipped granite set on end. A chinoiserie chair in the entry. **Bottom left:** In the living room, custom wool-upholstered sofas are anchored by a hand-tufted wool rug. **Bottom right:** For better feng shui, a mirror in the entry faces a scholar's stone and a Chinese stool.

"There are some unusual trees, like dawn redwoods and northern birches—the former owner must have been an amateur arborist," Brian Laczko says. "We had countless arguments with the building crew about leaving as many branches as possible untouched."

Those trees shaped the geometry of the house, from the over-

all form, a series of cedar boxes, to the porousness of the envelope: Cleverly placed windows frame intriguing views from every angle. "But it's never a clean view," Laczko notes. "In Chinese culture, nature is not benign. It's something to be respected and tamed." Sliding glass doors open onto chipped-granite terraces—outdoor →





rooms, really. And flooring is fumed bamboo, resilient enough for the indoor-outdoor lifestyle.

On the ground level, four wings radiate from a central dining space: kitchen and family room, living room, master suite, and guest annex. "My mom is a Buddhist who lives in a cruciform house," Tsao jokes. In fact, the floor plan gives a nod to traditional Chinese compounds oriented around courtyards—the "courtyard" here being the dining room, expansive and double-height. "Eating," he continues, "is the most important part of our family time."

The Tsao clan enjoys meals at a dining table of stained cerused oak—over which hover a pair of lanterns draped with white parachute silk from →



Top left: A Chinese console stand's in the hall to the master suite. **Top right:** The dining room is overlooked by a balcony leading to upstairs guest rooms. **Bottom:** Silk from World War II parachutes drapes the dining room's vintage Chinese lanterns.

Opposite: Linen-upholstered art moderne chairs pull up to the dining table of stained cerused oak. The ceramic bowl is by Jean-François Paguay.



1. ENTRY
2. LIVING ROOM
3. DINING ROOM
4. MASTER SUITE
5. KITCHEN
6. FAMILY ROOM
7. GUEST ROOMS

0 10 20 40



Top, from left: The upstairs study's trio of mohair-upholstered 1960's armchairs. Custom bronze sconces on the master suite's terrace. Flooring of fumed bamboo. The master bedroom's Chinese prayer niche. **Bottom left:** Custom lacquered tables flank the bed in one of the five guest rooms. **Bottom right:** The master bedroom features a sofa upholstered in wool sateen and a reclining chair covered in faux suede, both custom.

World War II. "They still have the government printing on them," McKown notes. A French 1940's wrought-iron chinoiserie side chair, like many of the antiques in the house, was purchased locally. "In the spirit of making the project feel very West Coast, we relied heavily on the curatorial brilliance of San Francisco shops," Tsao explains.

On the dining room's far wall hangs a tapestry rendered in rust and cream tones and embellished with calligraphic flora and birds. The piece was fabricated by applying resin squares to a Chinese bedspread, peeling them off so that just an imprint of the pattern remained, and

then affixing them to a backing of Belgian linen. "It's like the Shroud of Turin," McKown says with a laugh.

Public spaces are designed to facilitate togetherness. In the living room, wool-upholstered sofas or wooden chairs with Moorish detailing provide seating for impromptu recitals played on the heirloom grand piano. For less formal moments, i.e. TV watching, there's the family room's pillow-strewn U-shape sectional upholstered in midnight-blue linen. The adjacent kitchen seats 10 at a circular olive-lacquered table, set below a chandelier of bent rattan.

Inspired by Asian homes, the architects designed the kitchen as two-in-one. A glorified butler's pantry with a wok and an extra refrigerator can be sealed off from the stainless-steel main kitchen via a pocket door. The master suite is likewise divided. A partition separates the plush sleeping quarters from a study, which has its own daybed. ("Dad is an early bird. Mom is a night owl.")

The guest rooms feature Eero Saarinen chairs, lacquered bedside tables, and slate-gray accent walls—and all four siblings have their own room. "My mom likes the house to appear as if we grew up there," Tsao explains. So strong is the desire to have →





roots, it seems, that one is not beyond fabricating history. "The irony," he goes on to say, "is that, growing up, we were all *smooshed* together."

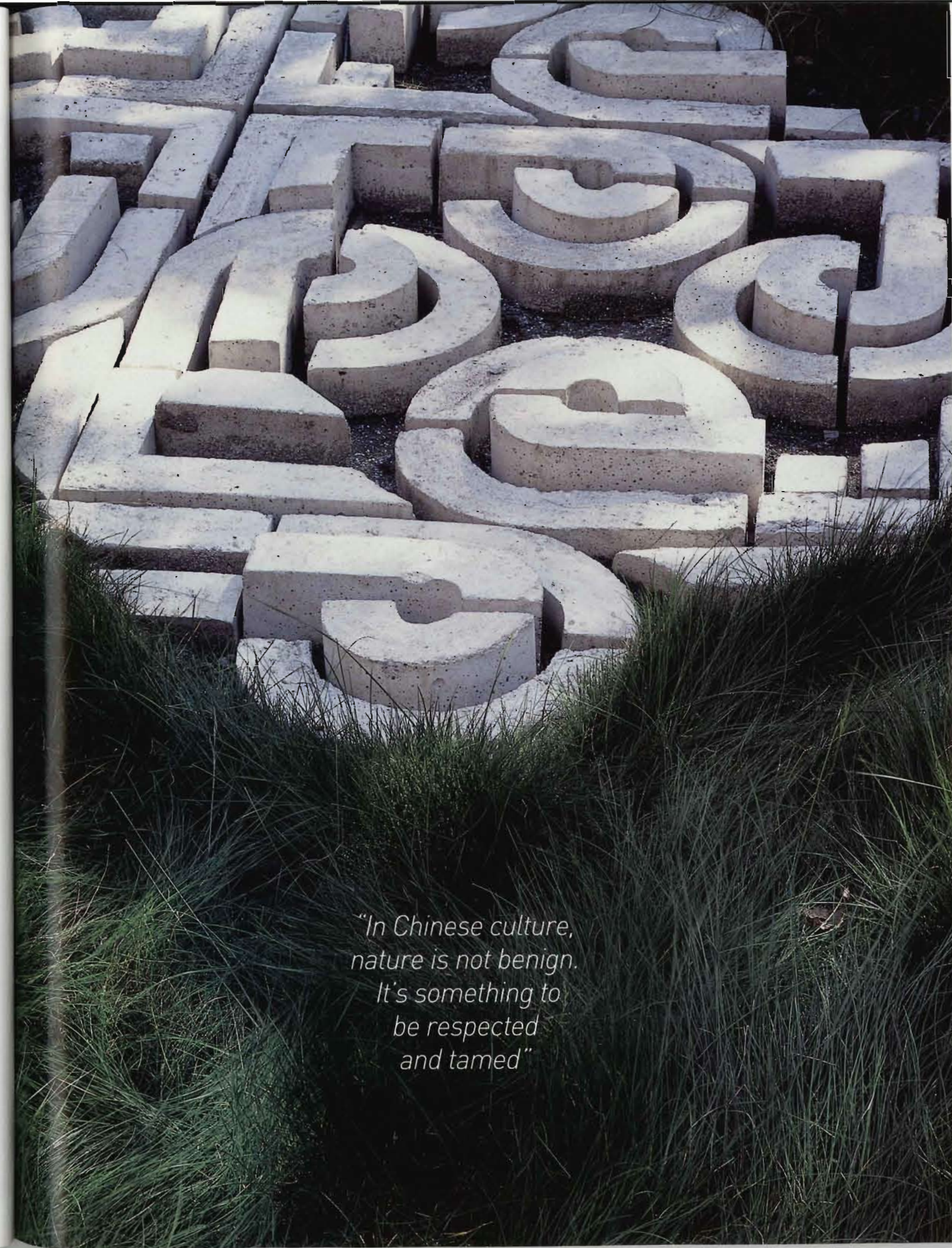
PARTNER IN CHARGE (FINN-LACZKO ARCHITECTS): DAVID FINN. PROJECT ARCHITECT (TSAO & MCKOWN ARCHITECTS): ADAM ROLSTON. PROJECT TEAM (TSAO & MCKOWN ARCHITECTS): MARK ANDERSON; KYO CHIN; LENA BRAGINA; VICTORIA KIRK.

TAPESTRY (DINING ROOM): LUISA CEVESE RIEDIZIONI. BARK SCULPTURE, WROUGHT-IRON CHAIR, BOWL (DINING ROOM), SCULPTURE (KITCHEN): THROUGH MARCH. PAVERS (TERRACES): THROUGH RHODES ARCHITECTURAL STONE. ARMCHAIRS (LIVING ROOM): THROUGH FORTUNE ANTIQUES & DECORATIONS; GLANT TEXTILES CORPORATION (FABRIC). TABLE, LAMP: THROUGH AERO. CUSTOM RUG: GROUNDPLANS. SOFA FABRIC: JOSEPH NOBLE. CUSTOM CURTAINS (LIVING ROOM, MASTER BEDROOM): DELON FRÈRES. CURTAIN FABRIC (LIVING ROOM, MASTER BEDROOM), CHAIR FABRIC (DINING ROOM): DONGHIA. CHAIR FABRIC (LIVING ROOM), SOFA FABRIC (FAMILY ROOM): NOBILIS. SOFA UPHOLSTERING (LIVING ROOM), CHAIR UPHOLSTERING (KITCHEN): KAY CHESTERFIELD CO. CHAIR UPHOLSTERING (DINING ROOM), CUSTOM SOFAS (MASTER BEDROOM, FAMILY ROOM): GBCUPHOLSTERY. CUSTOM SCONCES (MASTER TERRACE): NAUSET LANTERN SHOP. PRAYER NICHE, STATUES (MASTER BEDROOM): THROUGH EVELYN'S ANTIQUE CHINESE FURNITURE. CUSTOM LAMP: TRANS.LUXE. BED (GUEST ROOM): THROUGH FORMAT. BED LINENS (BEDROOMS): NANCY KOLTES FINE LINENS AND HOME. CUSTOM CARPET (MASTER BEDROOM): AM COLLECTIONS. SOFA FABRIC: POLLACK. CHAIR UPHOLSTERING: SHOOMINE.



CUSTOM TABLETOP (FAMILY ROOM): GALLERY GEN. PENDANT FIXTURE (KITCHEN): BONACINA PIERANTONIO THROUGH PROPERTY. FURNITURE (GARDEN): JANUS ET CIE. MILLWORK: MUELLER NICHOLLS. LANDSCAPING CONTRACTOR: SITEWORKS LANDSCAPE. LANDSCAPING CONSULTANT: GLS LANDSCAPE/ARCHITECTURE. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: ALICE PRUSSIN LIGHTING DESIGN. ENGINEERS: GOLDEN GATE ENGINEERING (ELECTRICAL); INGRAHAM DEJESSE ASSOCIATES (STRUCTURAL); MECHANICAL DESIGN STUDIO (MEP). GENERAL CONTRACTOR: CREATIVE SPACES.

Top left: The family room shares a wing with the eat-in kitchen, where a rattan pendant fixture by Tomoto Mizu hangs above a teak sculpture by Jerome Abel Seguin. **Top right:** Stools line the oak kitchen island. **Bottom:** The concrete sculpture in the rear garden is by Rachelle Miller. **Opposite:** Native fescue grass surrounds Miller's sculpture.



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