

# Beyond the Canyon

Inside Epic  
California Homes

Roger Davies

MONACELLI





# The Segel House

Malibu

Architect  
**John Lautner**

Resident  
**Jamie McCourt**



I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunities that magazines have given me over the years to photograph exceptional residences, and this John Lautner–designed house on Carbon Beach in Malibu, shot for *Architectural Digest*, was as good as it gets.

Commissioned by a dance therapist, Joann Segel, in 1979, the house originally included a dance studio on the upper level. Lautner considered this a breakthrough project for him, with its arcing, shell-like form producing a sense of refuge and its expanses of glass enhancing observation of the shoreline. With the beach just steps from the living room, the house is closely connected to the water, and I returned to reinforce this relationship with dusk shots (i.e., I should have done this more successfully the first time around).

Over the years the house had succumbed to a few unfortunate renovations but fell into good hands in 2006 when it was purchased by then CEO of the Los Angeles Dodgers Jamie McCourt, who later became the United States ambassador to France and Monaco. When I was arranging a second shoot with McCourt on a call from her residence in Paris, she said of the Segel House that she had tried to imagine how Lautner would have liked it.

Under the keen eye of architect Michael Kovac, McCourt managed an impeccable restoration that included removing an addition and adding a seamlessly integrated eighty-foot indoor lap pool separated from the iconic arched living room by only a sheet of glass. That's the sexy stuff, but passionate restoration goes deeper, and McCourt and Kovac started by getting down to the essentials—replacing glass, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing.

The house's wavelike curves are visually stunning but far from straightforward for a decorator, so McCourt hired the best—her friend and sometimes collaborator Los Angeles legend Waldo Fernandez. Fernandez placed furniture by French modernists Charlotte Perriand, Jean Royère, and Pierre Jeanneret alongside contemporary art by Doug Aitken, Jules de Balincourt, Robert Irwin, Jonas Wood, Iza Genzken, and others to create warm, intimate spaces within a rather sophisticated cave.

I get such a rush photographing any house by John Lautner, and after finishing the night shots from the beach with my assistant Huey (and losing another tripod to the sand and sea), I was filled with adrenaline driving home on the Pacific Coast Highway, watching the moon reflected in the crashing waves.











In designing the interiors of the house, Waldo Fernandez, like Jamie McCourt and Michael Kovac, respected John Lautner's original vision. "Architectural houses are always difficult to work with," says Fernandez. "They tell you, 'Don't screw around with me!' They demand to stay the same."









Nature absolutely permeates the cave- or shell-like residence: boulders seem to burst through interlocking stone floors; plants grow along board-formed, wood grain-imprinted walls; and sweeping windows bring in the ocean and sky.







