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Hot house

Architect Steven Ehrlich's eclectic home brings 'architectural anthropology' to Venice Beach

Steven Ehrlich has been building lofts, houses and civic buildings in California for almost three decades, so when it came to creating his own home in the state, he knew exactly what he wanted and where he wanted it. Ehrlich bought himself a narrow plot of land on the intersection of two streets in Venice Beach, Los Angeles, and set about designing a home that would indulge his passion for sustainability and also blend the international influences he had been exposed to during the course of his career. The result is a space that verges on the industrial but has a caravanserai feel; one that has slick modern touches >>

BRIGHT AND EHRlich
The living area opens on to a courtyard thanks to a 5m-tall sliding window. The interior includes Richard Neutra 'Boomerang' chairs (left) and Moroccan rugs and pouffes



yet also references the souks and courtyards Ehrlich has visited in Morocco and Nigeria.

Apart from its steel-panelled exterior, which Ehrlich notes is weathering nicely, the house is surprisingly low-tech by Californian standards. There's no air-conditioning, few mod cons, and concrete is kept to a minimum, used only on the floors in order to absorb the sun's warmth during winter. Windows and sliding doors are strategically placed to provide natural ventilation, while multidirectional, roll-out fabric screens are used to cover the lap pool and form an ad hoc parasol over the courtyard. It is a vision

that evokes the screening more common in Japan. Other materials are consciously low-maintenance and often recycled, including Trex, a compound of recycled plastic and sawdust usually used for decking.

The house is set around three mature trees and divided into two parts; studio and guest rooms are in the smaller part, while the living and dining areas are in the larger part, stretching out to the garden on one side, shaded by pines, and the lap pool on the other.

Inside, a glass and steel tension bridge spans the living area. Below it, a walnut staircase is inspired by Japanese tansu chests. Stern tones and varied hard >>

HOME ON THE RANGE
The kitchen combines industrial steel with warmer timber. Ehrlich chose dark, polished concrete for the floor to absorb warmth from the winter sun and unify the interior



textures, including waxed steel on the inner walls, give an urban feel that's countered by the lush garden and the Moroccan rugs collected by Ehrlich.

'The design presents raw, honest materials that are appropriate to the grittiness of Venice Beach,' he says. It also maximises volume, light and privacy, while blurring the barriers between inside and outside. It's a flexible house that takes advantage of the benign local climate, as did the Californian houses of Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra in the past.

Ehrlich's international influences began when, after graduating, he joined the Peace Corps; in 1969, he was

the first architect to be sent by the organisation to Morocco. For several years he travelled and studied local architecture in north and west Africa, returning to settle in Los Angeles in 1977. Since then, in his quest to explore beyond Western sensibilities, he has developed a style he calls 'multicultural modernism'. Nowhere sums up his personal experiences and vision of himself as an 'architectural anthropologist' more than his Venice Beach home. ★

Hot Homes: Creating Cool Contemporary Spaces For Hot Climates, by Suzanne Trocmé (Jacqui Small, £30). Steven Ehrlich Architects, www.s-ehrllich.com

SOUKS YOU
A glass and steel tension bridge hangs above the living area, connecting two sets of stairs, including the Japanese-inspired open walnut steps, pictured