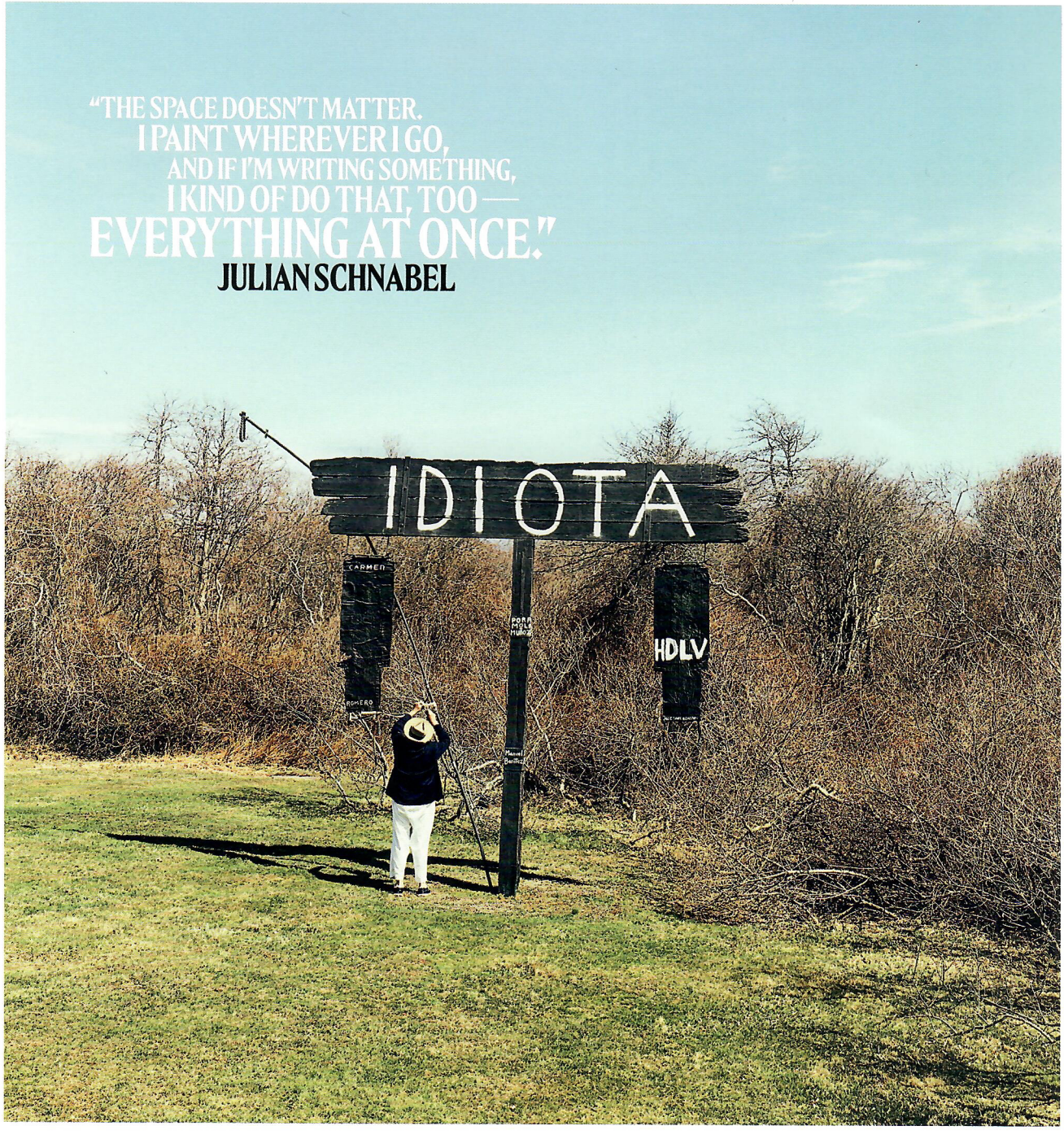
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The House Always Wins

Breathing new life into Charles and Ray Eames' iconic home and studio

Words Emma Fiona Jones

Photography Chris Mottalini

Looking into the living room from the boardwalk, the Eames Lounge Chair and a Noguchi paper floor lamp. **Opposite page:** The south court features an extended tallowwood wall and carved driftwood seat.









Clockwise: The entryway of the residence. The double-volume living room. In the kitchen, four Eames DCM chairs. The southern corner of the structure.

THE EAMES HOUSE, also known as Case Study No. 8, is a paragon of midcentury modernism that transcends its own footprint. The house was devised by husband-and-wife team Charles and Ray Eames in the wake of the Second World War and constructed in 1949. It served as their home and workspace for the rest of their lives, and a space of repose and play for their children and grandchildren. A sleek glass jewel box framed in thin ribbons of black steel, nestled into a verdant bluff in Los Angeles' Pacific Palisades with a line of silvery-white eucalyptus trees towering over the meadows below, the structure is instantly recognizable for its gridded façade flecked with bands of primary colors.

But it was never meant to become a fixed image in the cultural imaginary.

"For Charles and Ray, it wasn't modernism. It was good design," says Eames Demetrios, director of the Eames Office, chairman of the Charles & Ray Eames Foundation, and grandson of Charles and Ray Eames. The residence and studio — each a rhythmic composition of glass, Cemesto, and fiberboard linked by a plant-filled brick courtyard — distill the couple's living-laboratory philosophy into a deceptively compact space.

In a sense, Case Study No. 8 was, as its name implies, meant to be replicated: it was created as part of *Arts & Architecture* magazine's Case Study House program, for which editor John Entenza commissioned major architects to design inexpensive and easily duplicable homes in response to the impending housing boom. But Demetrios is quick to point out, "The idea was not that you were going to necessarily walk into a case study house and say, 'I want this one.'" Rather, he explains, "You might say to the Eames house, 'I love the two-story living room because I really find that volume liberating and fantastic.' But you might say, 'I am not going up and down the spiral staircase all the time with my laundry. I'm just not doing it.' But you were invited to say, 'Hey, I can use that part, but then I'm going to go look at Pierre Koenig's house and choose this detail.'"

This spirit of ingenuity and freedom is a distant fantasy for many young creatives today. Born on the cusp of Gen Z — not old enough to experience the impact of the market crash but attuned to the lingering dread that seeped into the collective psyche in its wake — I can say with certainty that many in my circle consider expatriation a more realistic long-term plan than owning a home in the U.S., never mind designing one. But at the Eames Office, the playful pragmatism of Charles and Ray is alive and well. And they're determined to make this vision attainable.

During Milan Design Week in April 2026, the Eames Office, the practice founded by Charles and Ray in 1941 and now led by the Eames family, unveiled their newest initiative: a kit-of-parts design called the Eames Pavilion System. Once available, the kit will allow customers to create a custom home for much less than most custom homes cost. Developed in collaboration with Barcelona-based manufacturer Kettal, the Pavilion System is rooted in Charles and Ray' ethos rather than any one particular design.

In their research for the project, the team intensely studied the eight houses that Charles and Ray designed between 1945 and 1955. "What became clear is that in that time, Charles and Ray were constantly evolving this module," states Demetrios. "We've intuitively felt that whatever we do should be modular and allow you to customize your own house."

In other words: They're not asking anyone to make an Eames House per se. "In fact," Demetrios says, "we're inviting you to figure out a whole new house that can be done within the system." The point is "to invite people to solve their particular problems with a certain toolkit," he explains.

That's not to say the Eames aesthetic is absent. I was delighted to see that the two-story model presented in Milan featured the iconic blue, red, and yellow panels minimally integrated into the Eames House's exterior. "What I think Charles and Ray understood, and what I think people are [still] responding to in their work, is that aesthetics could be a part of function," Demetrios reflects. Ray, in particular, who studied painting with Hans Hoffman in Provincetown and Rockport, MA, had a nuanced understanding and appreciation of color. But they also both loved gray; it really all came down to application.

A simple, one-story iteration of the Pavilion System will be available for interior uses — such as adding a conference room to an open-plan office — by the end of this year. By the end of 2027, home builders will be able to buy the parts for outdoor houses as well.

"I suspect that a lot of interesting things can happen," says Demetrios. For instance, "it certainly does lend itself to making a communal structure," with four or five different families, "whether each family is one person or four people or whatever the case may be," clustered around a courtyard.

Of course, today's existential housing angst is not only economic, but environmental.

THE ORIGIN STORY OF CASE STUDY NO. 8 MAKES IT EASY

to romanticize its fairytale setting: The house was first set to be built in 1945. However, due to postwar material shortages, its construction was delayed until 1949. The pair spent the interim years wandering the grounds and picnicking on the site of their someday-home. They fell in love with the trees and the meadows below and significantly altered their design, opting to tuck the house into the hillside to minimize interference with the landscape, and preserve the existing line of eucalyptuses. On Christmas Eve, 1949, the house was finally ready for them.

And yet the site's fragile ecology complicates this narrative. Demetrios and his siblings and colleagues are painfully aware of the threat that the changing climate poses: In January of 2025, the Eames Office narrowly escaped the Palisades Fire. Mercifully, the structure survived. This was in part due to foresight, as the Charles & Ray Eames Foundation had begun pruning and occasionally felling the much-beloved eucalyptus trees to maintain the site's health prior to the Palisades Fire. But the role of luck cannot be understated, Demetrios tells me.

Perpetuating Charles and Ray' legacy is the crux of the Eames Office and Charles & Ray Eames Foundation and pre-



The living room boasts a movable aluminum planter bed with the Eames' original monstera plant.Featured here are the Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman. **Opposite page:** The studio was a flexible space for working and hosting throughout the decades.



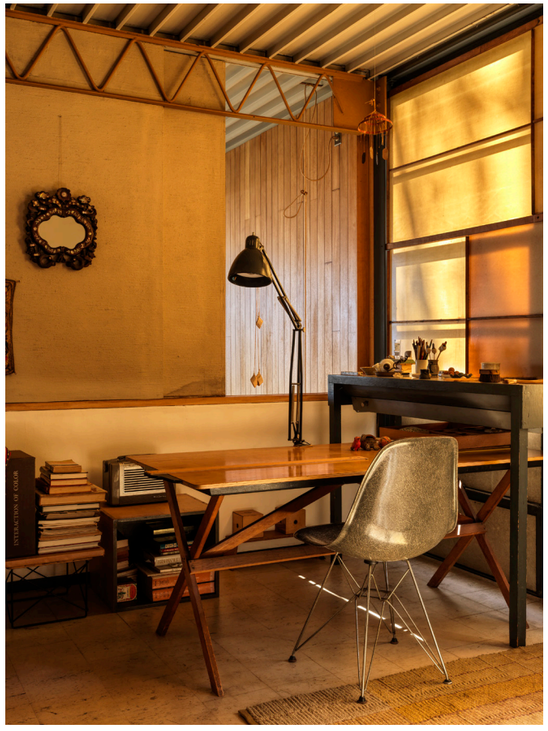


The guest bedroom, upstairs, shares a flexible dividing wall with the master bedroom.





Clockwise: A stack of DSS Eames chairs in the studio. Ray's custom-made jacket and skirt set. The entryway staircase. A DSR Eames chair and sliding screen separate the upstairs bedrooms from the living room below, while translucent Plyon screens slide across the windows for privacy and shade.






A corner for hosting, listening to music, and reading.

serving the house itself is as central to this mission as sharing their philosophy through fresh endeavors. Going forward, Demetrios says, "we're definitely continuing that work with arborists in particular … trying to replace [some eucalyptus trees] with native trees such as oaks, which have more fire resilience," in addition to developing protocols pertaining to on-site water sources and other needs. "It's going to be a long-term process, because we want to enrich the site's ability to protect itself if there was ever a similar event," says Demetrios. "And, unfortunately, there is likely to be one."

Their stewardship extends beyond the property and into the wider landscape. Case Study: Adapt is an initiative led by ten Los Angeles architects in partnership with the Charles & Ray Eames Foundation rethinking residential architecture with resilience in mind. Demetrios believes the sustainable designs brought to bear through this program, which is a nod to the original Case Study House program, will illuminate solutions that can be applied to both future and existing West Coast structures.

TRUE TO ITS ORIGINAL RAISON D'ÊTRE, EAMES HOUSE is open to the public. Walking up the wood-planked path, visitors are bathed in the fresh scent of eucalyptus. Inside, honey-colored timber-panel walls find echoes in the kitchen cabinets, spiral staircase, and smooth shades that allow the sunlight to filter into the double-height living spaces. A slender wooden ladder mounted on a track both thrills my treehouse-loving younger self and conjures endless lighting and storage possibilities. A medley of fine and folk art as well as the Eames' own prototypes cover every surface, though curiously maintaining a spare, unpretentious ease.

As the House's Lego-like essence and kunstkammer interior imply, the element of play is at the heart of the Eames spirit. This lighthearted experimentality also infuses their short films (which number over 125). They often used video as a medium to explore a new idea or material. Demetrios recalls Charles once saying they didn't consider them to be films at all — just tools to get across an idea.

Their films feel shockingly contemporary. "They didn't hire dedicated camera people and editors," Demetrios says. "Instead, they often trained staff members in the basics." This meant that a short film could be done with a certain spontaneity. "Now, with cell phones and the like, we take that for granted — Charles and Ray got there 70 years ago," he notes.

I'm unsurprised to learn that they were quite fun as grandparents. "You could run from being in a meadow to then being in a very enclosed environment and it was just as joyful and incredible," Demetrios remembers. A simple swing, a plank of wood suspended from two lengths of rope, still hangs from a eucalyptus branch across the meadow from the Eames House, where it has been for the past 70 years. Charles and Ray intended it for their grandchildren, but Ray herself also spent many afternoons sitting in the swing, looking up at the house and studio.

Their sense of childlike wonder finds its purest expression in the realm of toy design. Most famous, perhaps, is the House of Cards. But for Demetrios, the über-bouncy, synthetic-rubber Superball is unmatched. "I think [it was] one of their best designs," he says, "because if you think about it … form and function [are] completely combined in an object. The Superball is literally very playful." His older brother was quick to demonstrate that fact. "He bounced it really hard and it broke a window in the attic of our house in San Francisco," Demetrios laughs. "Our mother was appalled, but of course Charles and Ray thought that was a great proof of concept."

I can't help but imagine Charles and Ray bouncing a prototype Superball in their airy two-story living room, laughing as it ricochets off the curved molds of their plastic chairs and lunging to protect the Noguchi floor lamp.

When I wander through the American-Dream-starter-pack neighborhoods of suburbia, past rows of near-identical, vinyl-sided boxes built for four, the future feels all but inconceivable. But the afterimage of the Eames House lingers in my mind, a graciously fluid blueprint for living that allows people and ideas, flora and fauna to drift in and out at their natural pace. The endurance of the Eames House and its conceptual offspring is a testament to design as an expression of care rather than an imposition of values — a sign to adapt to the flux state in which we find ourselves rather than fight it. UD

eamesfoundation.org

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