

Mayer Rus, “Step Inside a Bewitching Ranch House in Malibu,” *Architectural Digest*, October 8, 2024.

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Step Inside a Bewitching Ranch House in Malibu

Artist Jorge Pardo fashions an otherworldly lodge for Lauren and Benedikt Taschen

By Mayer Rus

Photography by Mark Seelen

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Artist Jorge Pardo reimagined the cottage as a conglomeration of highly patterned surfaces, each one amplifying the other. His purview extended to the design of the standalone furnishings.

There's a fairy-tale quality to the home that artist Jorge Pardo conjured for publisher Benedikt Taschen and his wife, Lauren, in a remote stretch of Malibu. One almost expects to find Hansel and Gretel wandering nearby, seduced by the hints of toothsome color and pattern visible from the exterior of the otherwise quiet, classic shingled structure. Of course, the setting deviates from the dark, moody woods one associates with the Brothers Grimm—instead of the Black Forest, this enchanted cabin is surrounded by palm trees and California live oaks, basking in the sunshine. But there is wonder aplenty, a sense of something truly strange and bewitching awaiting visitors just beyond the front door. The house does not disappoint.

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Colored panels set in the shingled exterior envelope pop against the verdant Malibu scenery.

Taschen acquired the old ranch house—a surprising survivor of the wildfires that regularly plague the area—and the 200-acre plot on which it sits roughly 13 years ago. “This is the non-coastal part of Malibu, an entirely different world,” the publisher says, underscoring the physical and cultural distance from the Malibu of super-expensive beach houses and posh restaurants packed cheek by jowl along the Pacific Coast Highway. Fruit and vegetables are cultivated on the ranch, much of it earmarked for the popular Jon & Vinny’s restaurant group, of which the Taschens are primary backers. Bleating goats, barking dogs, and buck-buck-bucking chickens only add to the land’s rustic charm and ravishing natural beauty.

Taschen left the reimagining of the ranch house entirely in the hands of Pardo, with no preconceived conceptual directive and no prescribed program beyond the utilitarian. “Benedikt and I have been friends for 30 years, and he leaves his friends alone,” the artist explains. “This project was an investigation into what was possible. As long as we maintained the footprint of the original house and stayed within the existing envelope, I could let my imagination run wild. I just wanted to ornament the shit out of it,” he adds emphatically.

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The kitchen has CNC cut/engraved MDF cabinetry panels and orange Corian countertops.

Despite the eye-rolling hauteur of the word *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, it is the mot juste to describe what Pardo has wrought: a dizzying, kaleidoscopic fantasy interior in which the floors, walls, ceilings, and furnishings filigree into a single orgasmic organism, brought to life through the artist's signature experiments with form, pattern, and color. There's a primary bedroom suite at one end of the structure, two guest rooms at the other, a kitchen/dining zone, and a sunken living room, the latter two mediated by a floor-to-ceiling storage volume clad in quotidian prefab wood shingles that strike a dramatic contrast note amid all the calligraphic finery. "It's really a simple building, but when you step inside it's optically extreme," Pardo says, describing the symphony of engraved, punctured, and otherwise manipulated walls, windows, doors, and furnishings, all fabricated using CNC computer-driven machining processes.

Pardo deployed a variety of pattern languages on the ceramic tile floors and bath walls, the CNC-engraved plywood shutters with glass inserts, the vaguely Western-inflected wall and ceiling panels, and the clustered pendant lights of laser-cut wood, plastic, and aluminum. "There's a bit of midcentury California and a bit of Old West in the colors and patterns," the artist notes. "Some of the ornamentation on the furniture refers to the stitching on cowboy boots or the native flowers. The iconography is subtle but present." Natural light is a critical component of Pardo's alchemy,

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animating the interior and amplifying the overall pattern play with a dappled light show that is particularly dramatic as the late afternoons kindle into night.



View of the hallway from the sunken living room to the primary bedroom.

“It’s hard to compare this place with any other,” says Taschen, who counts John Lautner’s Chemosphere House among his portfolio of architecturally significant private residences. “What Jorge has conceived is nothing short of magical.”

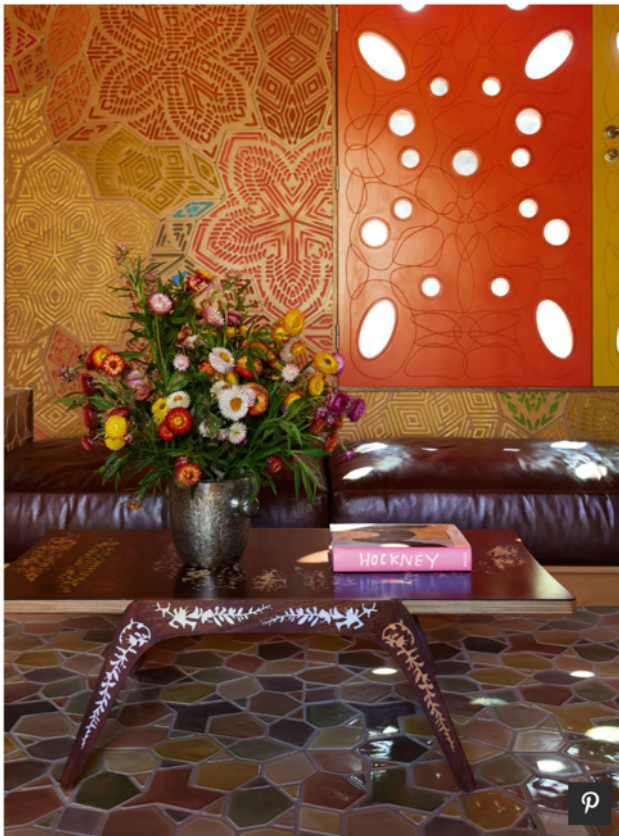
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The house is located on a 200-acre ranch.



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Decorative inlays on Pardo's living room table reference local flora.

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The dining table is crowned by clustered Pardo pendant lights of laser-cut wood, plastic, and aluminum.



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The design of the primary bedroom remains consistent with that of the social spaces.

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In the guest bath, watery blue tiles relieve the predominant palette of reds, oranges, and yellows.

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A guest bedroom has custom furnishings by Jorge Pardo.



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View of a guest bedroom.

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Publisher and art collector Benedikt Taschen with two of his Nubian goats.



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At night, Pardo's ministrations to the exterior give the house a lantern effect.

<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/step-inside-this-fairy-tale-californian-ranch>