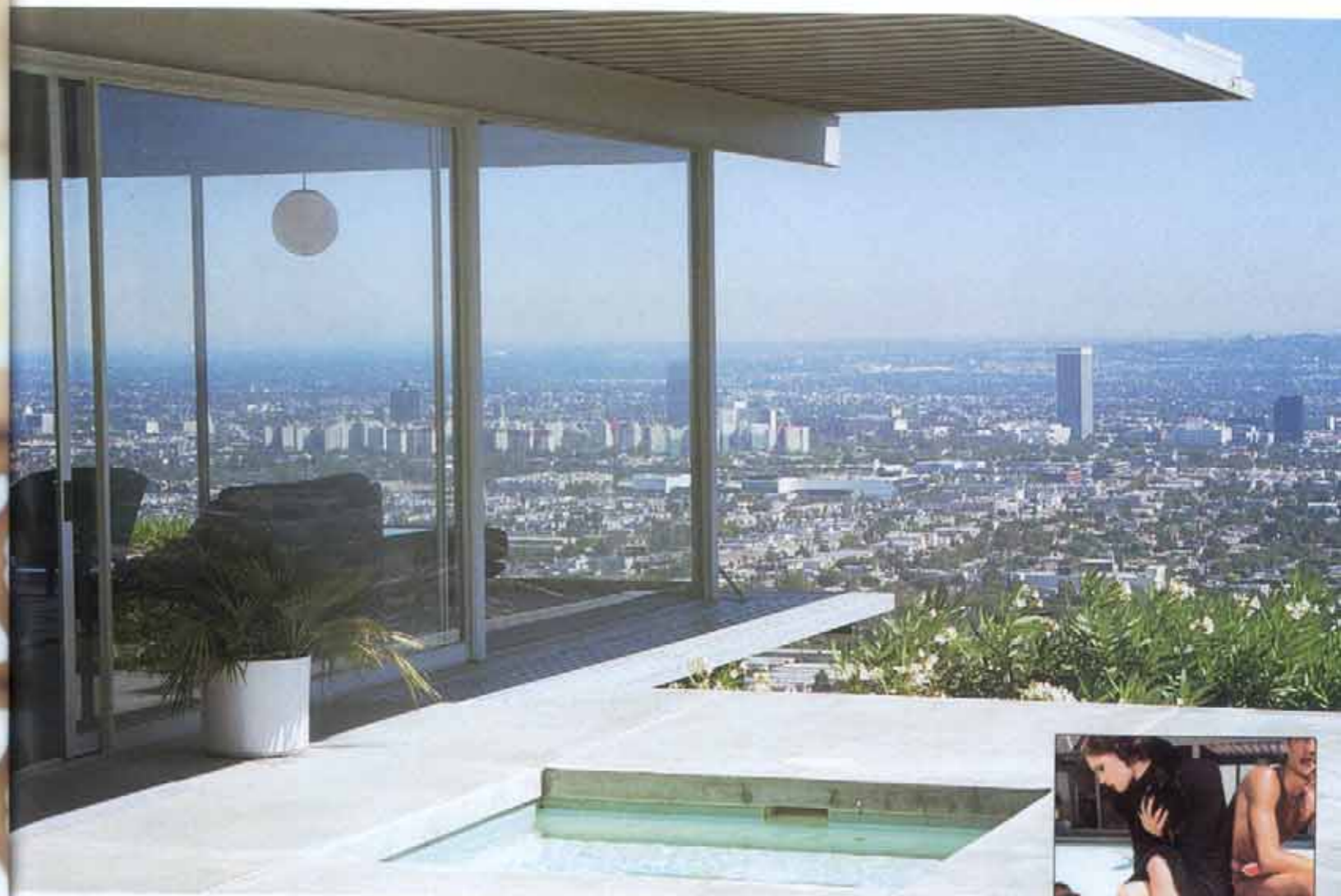
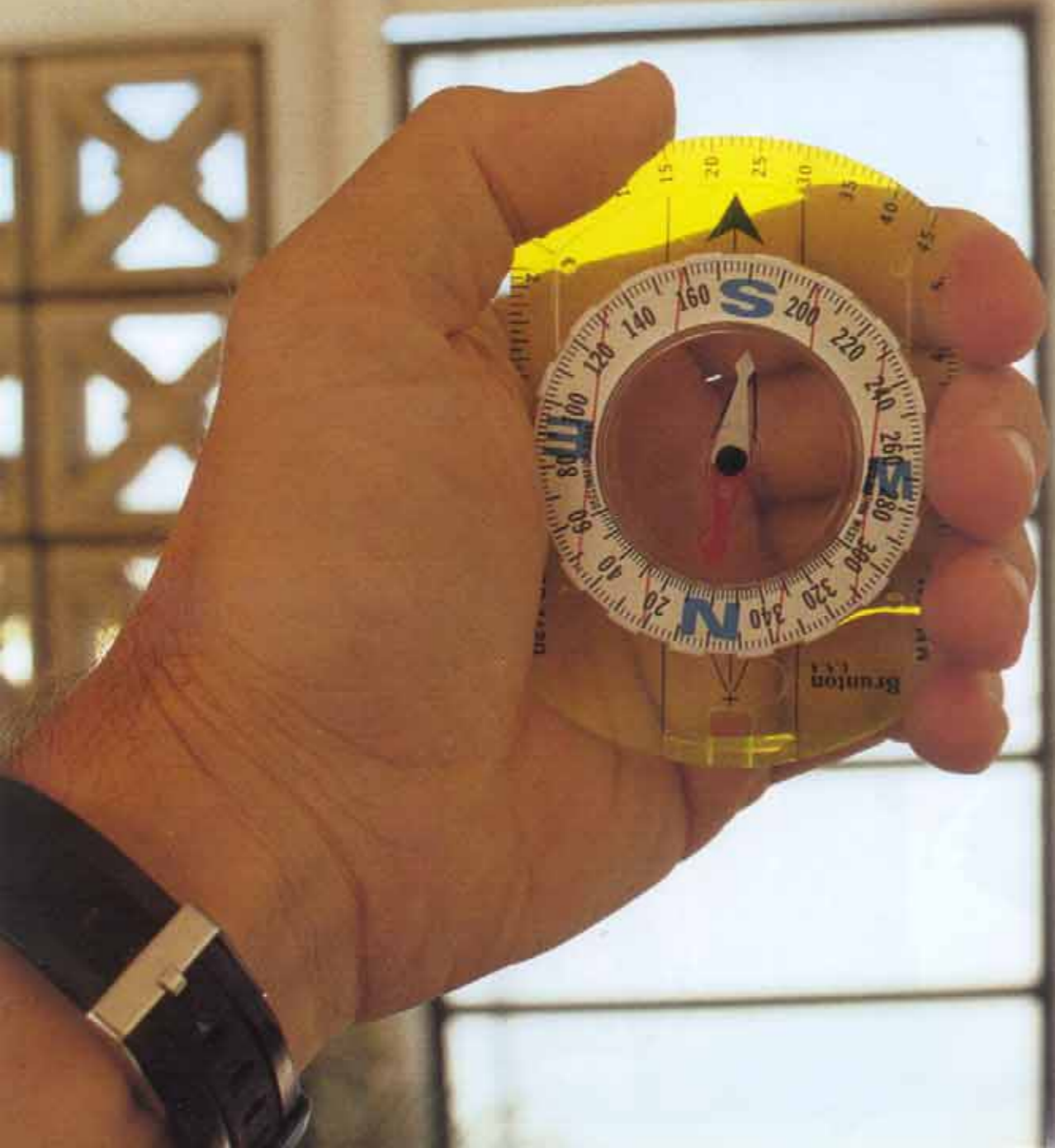


MODERN MANORS

IN LOS ANGELES, EVEN THE HOUSES HAVE AGENTS. MODERNIST MASTERPIECES COMMAND STAR BILLING AND HAVE THE WORLD'S TOP PHOTOGRAPHERS POUNDING AT THEIR DOORS **BY LAURIE PIKE**



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: THE STAHL HOUSE (CASE STUDY HOUSE #22), DESIGNED BY PIERRE KOENIG IN 1959; VALENTINO CAMPAIGN SHOT BY STEVEN MEISEL; VINCENT PETERS' MIU MIU CAMPAIGN



IF MID-CENTURY MODERNISM has become the architectural equivalent of Gisele Bündchen, Catherine Meyler—who rents the most stylish modernist houses to top photographers—is comparable to a young Eileen Ford, the woman who has access to all those great bones. When searching for flawless beauty in the form of unique, high-end houses of architectural significance, Steven Meisel, Mario Testino, and Peggy Sirota, to name a few, all turn to Meyler for help.

Meyler and Company opened just one year ago and was instantly inundated with requests from fashionistas who can't get enough of the sleek, geometric lines of

homes built predominantly in Los Angeles from the 1940s to the 1960s. She's certainly not the first person to rent out these icons of modernism designed by the likes of Richard Neutra, Pierre Koenig and Rudolf Schindler, but she's the most knowledgeable, according to many of fashion's heavy-hitters.

"She's the best," says GQ art director Jim Moore, who frequently rents from her and lists his own 1963 Palm Springs house with her agency. Through Meyler, Moore landed the coveted first fashion shoot (by François Halard) of the Kaufmann House in Palm Springs—a stunning Neutra, whose extensive restoration was completed in 1998. At the time, location agencies salivated at





INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR OF THE KAUFMANN HOUSE, BUILT BY RICHARD NEUTRA IN 1947, AND THE CALVIN KLEIN HOME CAMPAIGN SHOT BY THIBAUT JEANSON.

the thought of this modernist masterpiece becoming available, but Meyler got the exclusive: the owners were impressed by her volunteer work to preserve important architectural structures in Palm Springs, and they were aware that her commitment to the form wasn't just monetary.

Fashion designer Tom Ford was among the glitterati pioneers to relate the angular

a flat ranch house wearing clothing that matched the Zen-like neutrals of the house's décor. And Dewey Nicks chose the casual elegance of Ray Kappe's color-saturated architecture to communicate a hipper side to Lee Jeans—in the ads, Nikki Taylor and Brendan Fraser frolic romantically.

Before starting her own company, Meyler worked at other location agencies,

slew of art directors and photographers discovering the photo-friendly quality of these houses. Branching out into the relatively undiscovered trove of post-war residences in the desert, she helped launch the craze for fashion shoots in Palm Springs.

Meyler has become the expert when art directors get specific about what sort of designer house they're after. "I can say, 'I want a modernist house, but I don't want steel and glass, it has to be organic,'" says Jim Moore. "And she has the passion to find the right one." When fashion photographer Dewey Nicks indicated interest in a house by architect Ray Kappe, Meyler told him she knew Kappe himself. Nicks wound up shooting the architect's own house for the job.

At Meyler's Beverly Hills office, everything is clean, stark and well organized, with the exception of a guidebook on architecture in Los Angeles, which is tattered and brimming with Post-it notes. It's been her Bible since she got into the business in the mid-'90s. "I got this book, and a friend and I

ARCHITECTURAL: PHOTOS BY DEBBO SALZBERG



THE INTERIOR OF THE RYAN BOTEV RESIDENCE DESIGNED BY RODNEY WALKER IN 1952, AND STEVEN MEISEL'S MAX MARA CAMPAIGN.

would sneak up on houses and look over fences," she laughs. As Meyler eased into the business, she learned that not all modernist houses by famous architects made the cut for a Tom Ford, Calvin Klein or Valentino photo shoot. "What works well are houses that have soul," she says. "That's why I can't tell you how to have a house that people will want for a location."

Meyler's relentless search for undiscovered moderns led her to recently purchase a 1937 Neutra house in Palm Springs. It was the very first desert modern house in Southern California, and one of just two Neutras in the area. It's a major fixer-upper, but she's found original photographs of it taken by Julius Schulman, which has given

ARCHITECTURAL: PHOTOS BY MICHAEL KAPR

her something to dream about. And though its restoration won't be complete for years, photographers and art directors regularly keep up with its progress, angling to get the first crack at a house that will undoubtedly make waves in design circles.

So what will happen when the modernist craze goes bust? "There is a point where it will reach saturation and people will want something more decorative," predicts Jim Moore. But like most people in fashion, he thinks modernism will remain in style for at least several years to come. Meyler notes, "People are still buying houses and restoring them. And when I send out the folders with the pictures of the houses marked 'never been shot,' they go crazy."



MaxMara

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lines of Southern California architecture to the sharp contours of his clothing. In both, form follows function and anything extraneous or overly decorative is eschewed. Calvin Klein matched an austere glass-and-steel house with his clothing in advertisements for his monochromatic line a few years ago. The campaign pictured a model walking out of

dusting off the folders of houses available to rent and making photographers and editors aware of the more notable ones. As a fanatic for the houses built after the Second World War by Albert Frey, Pierre Koenig and John Lautner, Meyler befriended other modernist enthusiasts, such as Ford, Tonnie Goodman (fashion director at Vogue) and a