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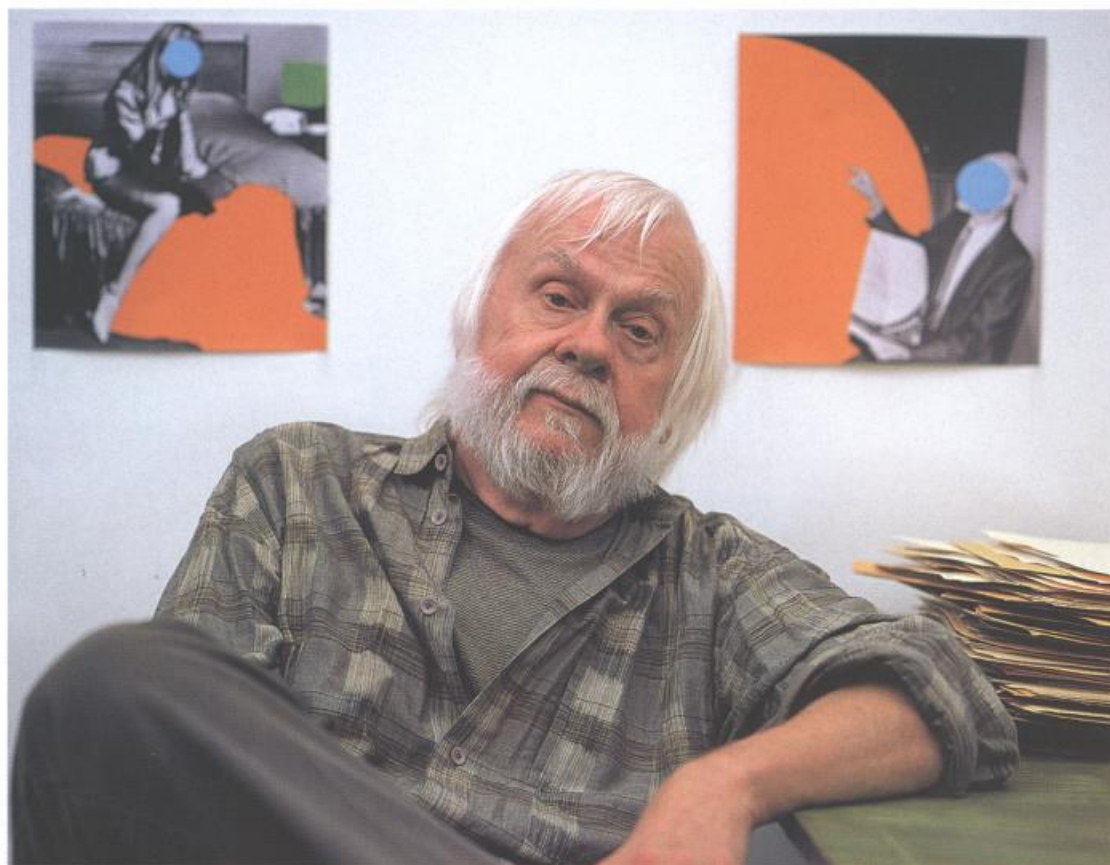
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text by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Bungalow Baldessari

The Conceptual artist's
Santa Monica house
is rethought in modern terms



JOHNN BALDESSARI DOESN'T LIVE IN A WHITE ROOM LINED WITH FILING CABINETS. One of the originators of the 1960s Conceptual art movement, Baldessari combines photographs in ways that confound and complicate their meaning. He lives, rather, in a quiet Santa Monica bungalow fronted by clusters of chartreuse euphorbias, blue hydrangeas, orange roses and yellow canna lilies. It turns out that even Conceptual artists need color, light and the moist air of the Pacific Ocean.

But the saga of Baldessari's bungalow is equal to any of the winding tales that contribute to his reputation as a raconteur. Baldessari's work has been the subject of a half dozen museum retrospectives in America and Europe, including one to be held next year at the Kunsthaus Graz in Graz, Austria, and at the Museum Moderner Kunst in Vienna, also taking place in 2005. A solo show of his work will open in October at Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin.

"For years I wouldn't own a house," recalls the artist. "I felt it would hold me down and then I wouldn't be able to leave." During the 1980s Baldessari's art was selling for heady sums, so he purchased a pair of run-down 1907 bungalows in Ocean Park, a hilltop neighborhood not far from the beach. Baldessari had the idea of converting one of the structures into a studio. He asked the then ascendant architect Frank Gehry to connect the houses and renovate them. Baldessari was told that the bid to build was \$500,000. "It was more than I had, but I was embarrassed to tell Frank for over two years," he admits.

By the early 1990s, the art bubble had burst, and Baldessari had to sell one of his bungalows. He left the remaining 2,800-square-foot house as it was until the upstairs bathroom sprang a leak. "It was the beginning of the end, because that bathroom led to the lower bathroom and then to the kitchen," Baldessari says. By that time Gehry was busy designing the Bilbao Museum in Spain, among other big projects, so Baldessari called Ron Godfredsen, who had worked with Gehry. Godfredsen had since opened his own firm in Venice with his wife, Danna Sigal. The Yale-trained architects formulated a plan to retain the house's historic parameters while updating details and enlarging rooms.

Faced with injecting modernity into a traditional Craftsman house, Godfredsen and Sigal approached the issue philosophically. "It was a matter of marrying function and sculpture," explains Godfredsen. "We were trying to bring strength to the original design by linking it to another element that was not foreign but would enhance the experience of both."

Immediately inside the house is a vision of domestic contentment. Henri Matisse famously remarked that art should be like an easy chair, so beneath a print by the artist, Baldessari placed a classic



Los Angeles architects Ron Godfredsen and Danna Sigal renovated a 1907 Craftsman bungalow in Santa Monica (opposite) for artist John Baldessari. "We decided to inject color into the project because it ties so much into John's work," says Godfredsen. "In some of his earlier pieces, for example, he'd take these colorful dots and put them onto black-and-white photographs. We imagined the house like that—as a muted palette with intense orange or cobalt-blue in places." **above:** The artist in his studio, which is also in Santa Monica.



Architect, artist and furniture designer Roy McMakin designed much of the house's furniture, including the dining table and white-enamel chairs. "The dining room is such an important transitional element in the house," says Sigal. "It's where you really start to see these modern aspects creeping in, like the raised ceiling, the open doorway and the contemporary light fixtures. At the same time, we kept the spirit of the house with the wainscoting and the molding around the doorway." Works by Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Hanne Darboven and Lawrence Weiner line the walls.





opposite, top: The kitchen's huge pocket door opens to afford uninterrupted circulation out to the garden, which was landscaped by Pamela Burton.

opposite, bottom left: Another pocket door of the same size was installed in the dining room. "The house feels larger than it is because of the height and volume of each room," explains Sigal. "Every space opens onto another in such a gracious way."

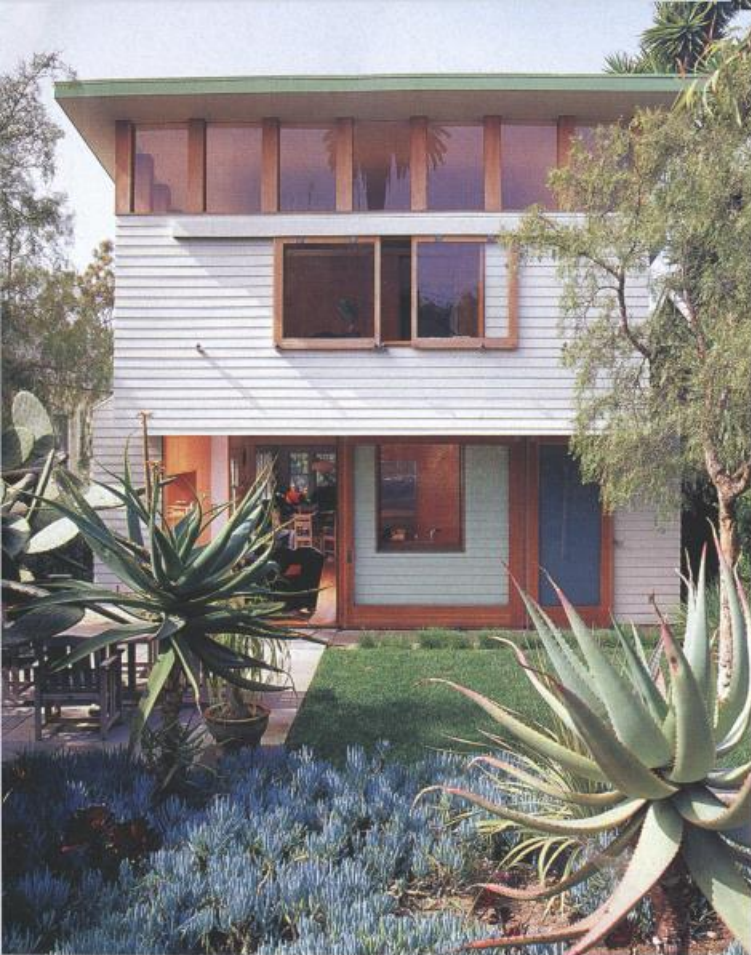
opposite, bottom right: The downstairs bath was done in vibrant tangerine tiles. **this page:** In the kitchen, the architects played with the idea of mass. "The island is like a sculpture that builds itself in the room, and the cabinetry is the two-dimensional version of it," says Godfredsen. A Wolf cooktop and wall oven were paired to create a sleek range. The dishwasher is from Bosch, and the barstools are by McMakin.



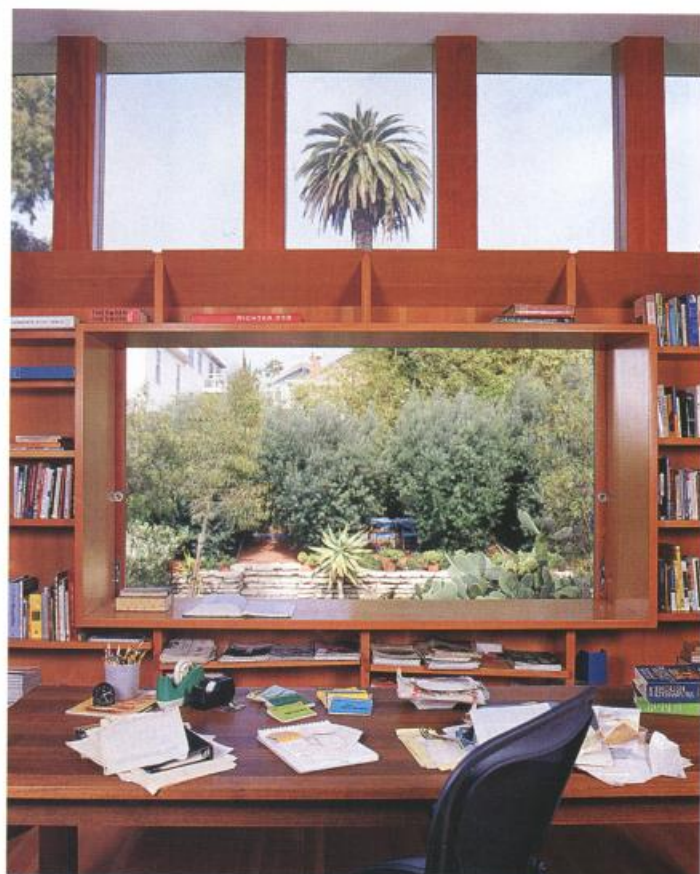
top: The master bedroom has views of the front garden. **above:** Turquoise tiles were used for the master bath. **right:** "The guest room is the most ethereal space in the house," says Sigal. Because the residence is a historic property, the narrow window had to stay where it was. To make a graphic statement, a trapezoidal surround was added on the inside. Beside the McMakin chair is a test panel of glass from Baldessari's installation at the University of California at San Diego's Geisel Library, titled *Read/Write/Think/Dream* and commissioned by the Stuart Collection. **opposite:** A skylight was also added to the guest room.







above: Clerestory windows mark the rear of the house. **above right:** A library was added during renovation. "John is a serious book collector, so we built this nest for him," says Godfredsen. "When you're there, the outside completely surrounds you." **opposite:** In the rear garden, Burton created a courtyard of crushed red brick in the midst of an olive grove. "I think it's good for me to get away from the studio," says Baldessari. "Not that I stop obsessing about work, but I can't get my hands on anything at the house, so that prevents me from being a twenty-four-hours-a-day art machine."



armchair in ivory wool with a black-checked ottoman. These pieces are by artist, architect and furniture designer Roy McMakin, who ultimately made most of the furniture in the house. To streamline the architecture, cornices were removed from both a narrow front room and the dining area.

The upper walls in the large, square dining room, which had its wainscoting replaced, are lined with works by Baldessari's peers: Bruce Nauman, Lawrence Weiner, Sol LeWitt and others. McMakin designed the giant circular table as well as the white-enamel chairs surrounding it. Like almost everything in the house, the dining area was built overscale to accommodate Baldessari's six-foot seven-inch frame. Godfredsen and Sigal raised the ceilings to nine feet and brought the door frames right to the top. The architects used barn-door hardware to create glass pocket doors in the dining room and kitchen that open to an unobstructed view of the back yard. "When the doors are open, there's no separation between indoors and out, so the rooms seem bigger," Sigal says. "And with no header and no threshold, the effect is completely modern."

Injections of color are found throughout the house—the vibrant tangerine tiles in the downstairs bath, the cobalt-blue kitchen, the bright orange front door—tying it beautifully to the garden, which was landscaped into sections by Pamela Burton. Baldessari regularly entertains the who's who of international artists and curators visiting Los Angeles, and this often takes place in the back yard. Burton raised the rear of the lot and planted grass and pepper trees outside the kitchen. Beyond the lawn, an old retaining wall and an ancient prickly pear mark the boundary of an elevated, Mexican-style garden with succulents and cactus, aloe and flax, sculptural shapes and otherworldly hues. A colorful 1920s-style garden at the front of the house has twisted Hollywood junipers that echo the shapes of trees in van Gogh paintings.

Imaginative landscaping was critical since nearly every room has a connection to the garden. In the master bedroom, McMakin designed a large bed facing windows that look onto the front of the house and let in ocean-reflected light. The original ceiling was demolished to add height to the room. The master bath, made with turquoise tiles, has an oversize stainless-steel tub, recessed shelves and a skylight.

After a decade the house was finally finished, yet Baldessari had trouble relinquishing the spare bed that he kept in his rented studio nearby—which is white and lined with filing cabinets. "I kept making changes to the house to delay closure," he admits. "I finally came to the point where it was done but I wouldn't leave my studio. I was going out on dates with my house. I'd meet people here for drinks, but instead of going back to the studio, I'd spend the night. It seemed too good for me."

Sitting on his porch, smoking a cigar and watching the sun glaze the currents of the Pacific Ocean, Baldessari adds, "I still have a lot of guilt I'm trying to get over." +



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