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PROJECT
F-5 Residence
ARCHITECT
Sean Lockyer, AR+D
LOCATION
Indian Wells, California

Indian Summer

A Canadian family's getaway in the California desert.

Architect Sean Lockyer designed a 5,760-square-foot concrete, stucco, and ipe home for a couple and their three children in the Southern California desert town of Indian Wells. The residents selected the home's furnishings, including the Royal Botania chaise longues.



An ipe walkway leads past a steel gate to the guesthouse (above). Lockyer added native desert plants to a courtyard near the garage (below). Custom walnut and stainless steel sheathes the kitchen, which is open to the living-dining area and the patio (opposite top). The Twiggy

lamp is by Foscarini; the sliding doors are from Fleetwood. Ipe paneling and concrete floors continue into the living area, where a photograph by Scott McFarland hangs above the fireplace (opposite bottom). Surrounding the dining table, by Riva 1920, are walnut chairs the couple found locally.



Renowned for its iconic midcentury architecture and legendary celebrity habitués—Frank Sinatra, Ava Gardner, Bob Hope, and Elizabeth Taylor among them—the Southern California desert, with its dry air and dramatic landscape, has long been a draw for Hollywood. It’s also a time-honored getaway for Canadians in need of a break from winter’s rain and snow. But when a young couple from Vancouver, both of whom have been coming to the Palm Springs area since childhood, toyed with the idea of building a vacation home there, the wife was resistant. “I thought, No way,” she says. “It used to be a spot for older people—everyone on the plane had blue hair. I’m in my late 30s, my husband’s in his late 40s; I thought, Why build a house now? It’s a place to retire.”

Then they came upon a double lot on a cul-de-sac in Indian Wells with a commanding view of Eisenhower Mountain, a small but majestic peak between the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa chains. A house and pool were on one of the properties; the adjacent parcel was vacant. “It was a unique opportunity,” says the husband, who works in commercial real estate, “and by having the second lot, we could keep the view unobstructed.”

The couple engaged local architect Sean Lockyer to draw up the plans—and cited Richard Neutra’s celebrated Kaufmann House, in Palm Springs, just 30 minutes away, as a point of inspiration. But it was the family’s three young children—now ages ten, seven, and four—and their outdoor lifestyle that ultimately dictated the design of the modern, single-story, four-bedroom, four-bath home and adjacent guesthouse. “Our idea,” says Lockyer, “was to maximize the view and capture as much of the outdoor space, from property line to property line, as possible.”

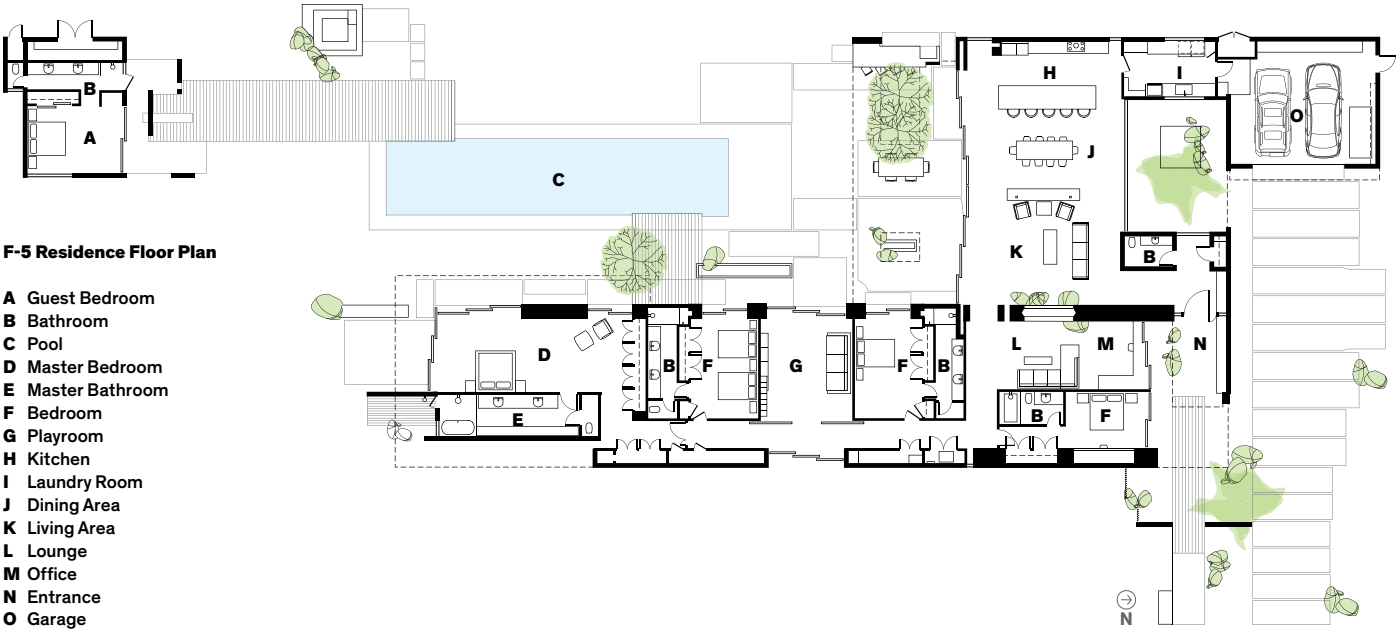
He chose cast-in-place concrete and masonry along with steel, glass, and ipe (Brazilian walnut), an especially durable wood that can withstand the triple-digit heat of an Indian Wells summer, as his core materials. Walk in the front door, and the first thing you see is Eisenhower Mountain, dramatically framed by a wall of ten-foot-high sliding glass doors that mark the end of an open kitchen, dining, and living area. Beyond is a covered patio, with a fire pit and bar, next to a 60-foot swimming pool. The deck—ipe again—slices through a yard planted with palms, fruit trees, acacias, desert grasses, yucca, and other drought-hardy species and visually connects to the 460-square-foot guesthouse and its outdoor shower.

The inside of the L-shaped main house feels as spacious as the yard, thanks to the plan as well as >





“The materials reflect the need for ruggedness, strength, and durability required by our harsh desert environment.” —Sean Lockyer, architect



an organic palette. A neutral travertine wall in the kitchen complements the cream sofa and natural walnut dining set. An open fireplace in the great room also serves a lounge on the other side. The bedrooms and the children’s playroom run off a long corridor just beyond, with more sliding glass walls looking onto the pool and yard. The ease of the layout (and upkeep) is emphasized by uninterrupted, terrazzo-style polished flooring, made by broadcasting an aggregate of glass, marble, and black river rock into the structural cement slab. “The choice to use the concrete floors in a terrazzo finish was both for durability and to bring the costs of the project into budget,” explains the architect. “The flooring costs remained minimal and it provides a durable, maintenance-free finish.”

Lockyer was not only responsible for designing the house; he did double-duty as the general contractor. The owner-contractor-architect relationship, he opines, “is doomed from the start. Alternatively, when architects are the builders, there is far greater motivation to add to the level of detail and finish while attempting to bring the project in on budget. This rarely exists when the architect is not responsible for construction.”

“I had massive hesitation,” admits the husband, since Lockyer had never run the construction for a ground-up building project. “What convinced me was that Sean was super keen and dedicated to making it successful. What he lacked in experience he made up for in diligence and dedication,” he says. “I don’t >

A Glo-Ball pendant from Flos and a Saarinen chair brighten a guest bedroom (above). The teak headboard is from Central Station. The children’s bedroom, which is located next to the playroom, has beds from Bensen and artworks by Aaron Eskridge from Just Modern (below). In the lounge, a sofa from Flexform joins a rug and





“When the house is all opened up, you don’t know where the inside and outside begin and end.” —Resident



The master bedroom opens on two sides to the outdoors (above), where Lockyer placed a custom black-chrome wall clock. In the master bath, a Dornbracht tub filler is paired with a tub by Philippe Starck for Duravit (left). A floor-to-ceiling window frames the dining area (opposite).

even want to think of how many hours he put into the house that he wasn’t really compensated for.”

Not to say that there weren’t hiccups: The board-formed concrete walls were temperamental—one was poured three times before succeeding. (Now a striking feature, the panel looks onto an enclosed sculpture garden with boulders from a local quarry.) The city decided—midconstruction—that one of the eaves was two inches too long, despite having approved it initially. The adjustment required relocating a kitchen wall by 18 inches and cost the owners \$10,000.

In the end, the result was worth the occasional headache. The home won a local architecture award, and the couple spent a year buying art and furniture from Canada, Europe, and Palm Springs. “We still need the odd piece,” the wife says, “but we’ve got enough for now, and we like simplicity.” She and her husband are especially pleased with the family-friendliness of the house. “Because of the L-shape, I can see what’s going on in the house all the time,” she says. “That’s kind of neat. We put a hardcover on the pool because one of our children is still too young to swim. If I’m busy prepping food, I can cover it and an elephant could walk across and be fine. When the house is all opened up, you don’t know where the inside and outside begin and end. It flows so nicely.”

As for the area being too old? Not so much. Each year, the couple brings a few friends down for the nearby Coachella festival in April. That’s a different blue-haired demographic altogether. □

