

## EDGARDO CONTINI HOUSE

*Skewered to a California hillside, is Contini's New World villa for his family of five*

Edgardo Contini is a man of great energy, imagination, given to incisive gestures, tweeds and small slender cigars. As one secretary described him, "When Mr. Contini walks into a room, you know something exciting has happened."

It is just this quality of excitement which Contini has been able to inject into many of the architectural and engineering projects he has undertaken in his 23 years as a structural engineer. His list of accomplishments is impressive: in 1938 he was graduated summa cum laude from the University of Rome's department of engineering. Ten years later the 34 year-old won the Olympic Committee Award for his Sports Center plans, which foreshadowed a life-time exploration of the architectural possibilities of reinforced concrete and steel structures.

As a consulting engineer in this country during the war years, the Italian-born Contini designed and detailed the concrete and steel structures for naval bases, power plants, industrial installations (including Willow Run in Detroit and the Dodge plant in Chicago.) Since 1951, he has been a partner in Victor Gruen Associates.

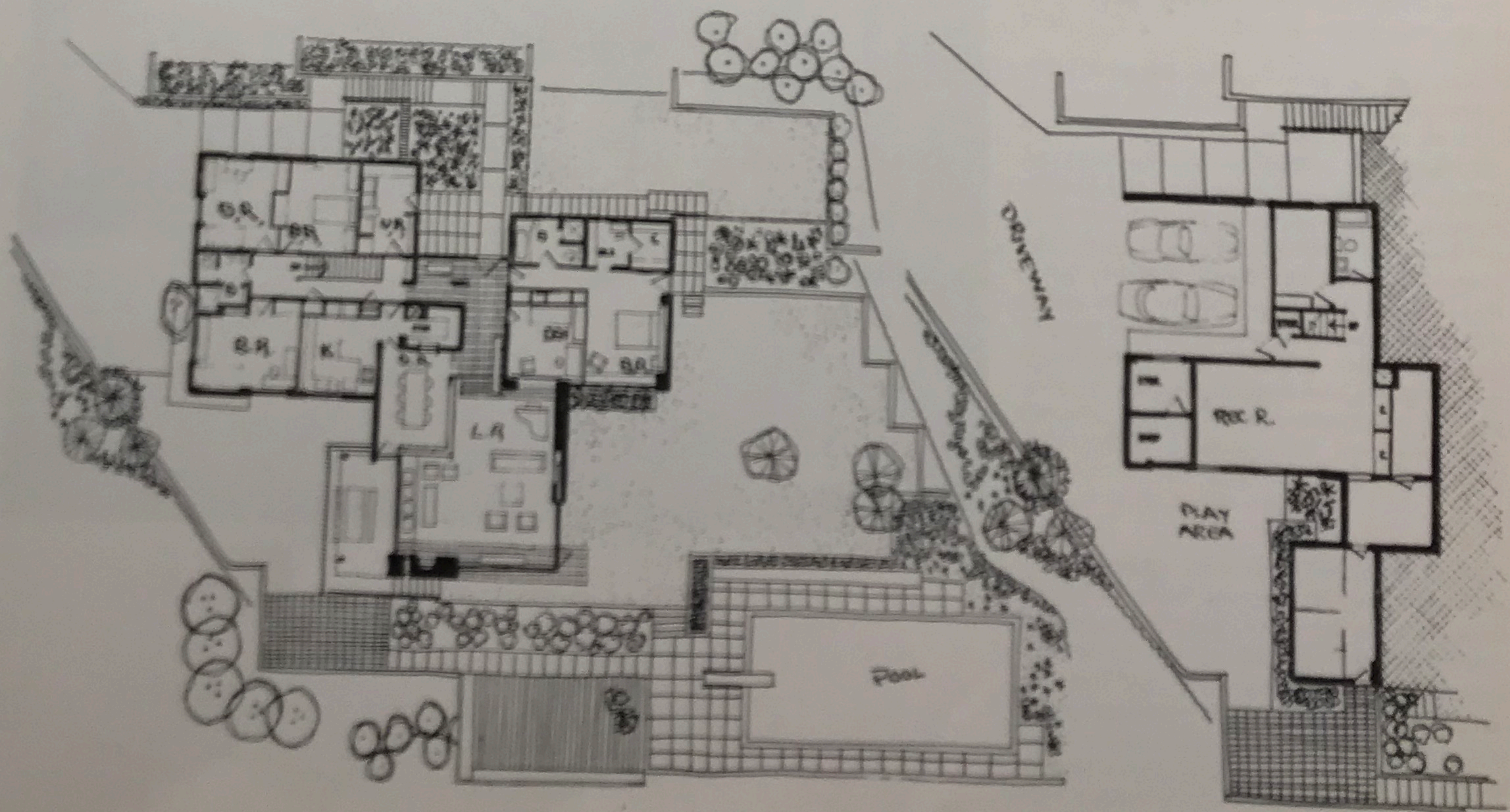
Some of the original designs developed by Contini are the "arch rib" thin shell of reinforced concrete roof, de-

veloped during the war to minimize the use of critical materials; the flow of multi-deck parking structure (1946); a prototype for the Airport of Tomorrow (1958) and the precast, prestressed "tierpark" parking structure.

Many of the Contini trademarks, found in his commercial projects, recur in his own home, which he built two years ago on a rugged hillside overlooking Beverly Hills. His Italian heritage is in sharp evidence; his use of plaster and concrete, his severe functionalism, his utter practicality.

In one sense, the house has no exteriors or interiors: they are one and the same. And if considered apart, they fall apart. The interiors become listless, sparse to the point of barrenness. But when considered as a whole, the house acquires that refreshing, somnolent feeling of a Mediterranean villa, whose common denominations recur in southern Spain and Italy, in North Africa and the Greek Islands: the soft transition between light and shadow; the plain wall-and-beam construction.

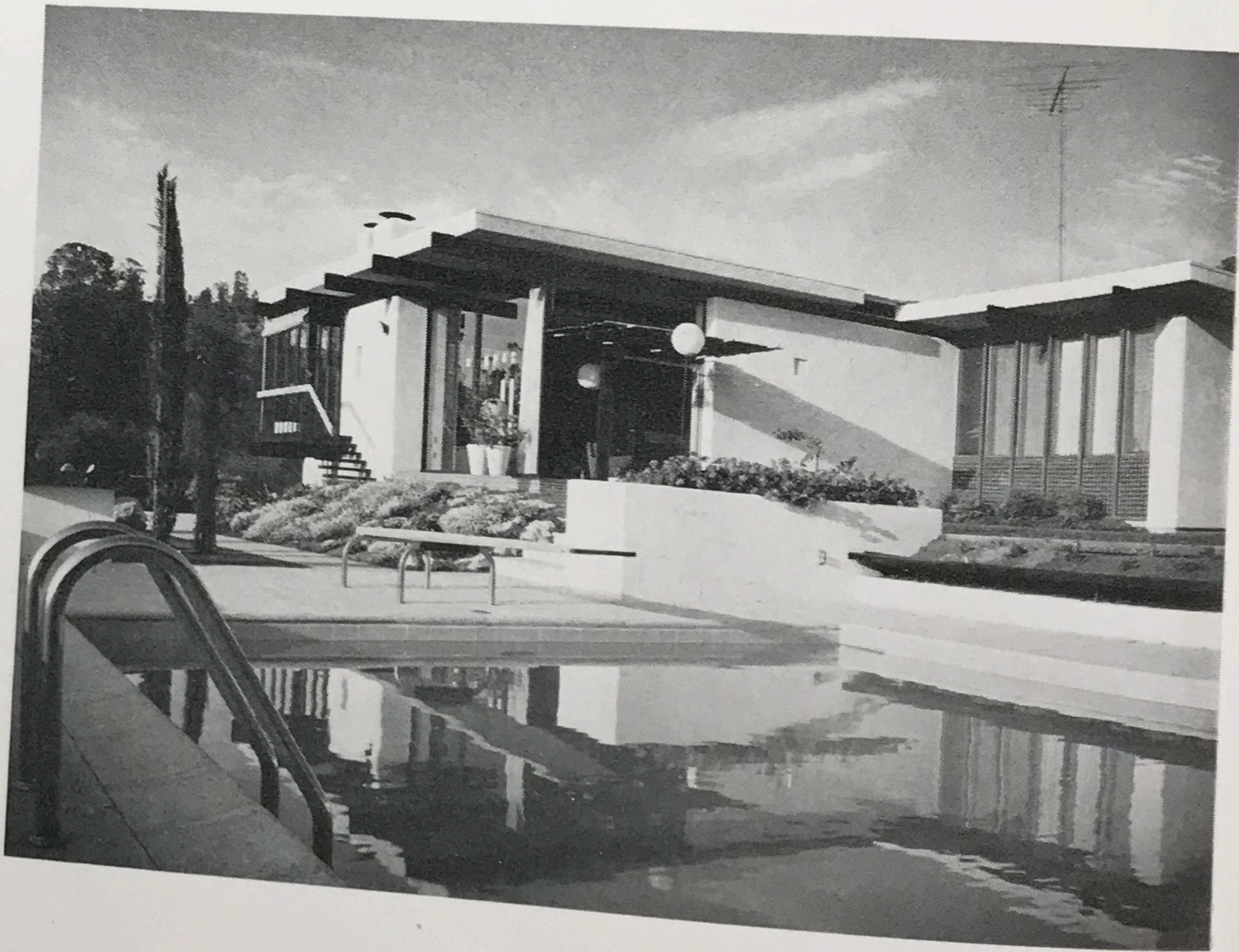
On the following pages, are photographs of one area only, the living-patio-pool area. Taken from four different views, they best illustrate the unity of indoors and outdoors — certainly the most notable aspect of Mr. Contini's New World villa.—P.G.





The door in the sunny, open, free entrance way, is solid core with oak veneer which has been varnished in natural. The mosaic wall lamp, by Gruen Lighting, is normally made in a cylinder, which was cut in half to be produced into two half-cylindrical units. They cast a shimmering mixture of beige and green at night.

The ultimate intent of the landscaping was to restore native brush to the graded terraces around the pool, with flower beds at the entrance court and on the open level ground between the house and the pool. Rabbits and deer have decreed differently. "They have found excellent fodder (there) . . . have been very disinclined, especially during the recent very dry season, to give up the idea," comments Contini.



The pool for the Contini children (15 year-old John, 12 year-old Nora, and Barbara, 10) is the focal point for much of their life. The sentinel by the swimming pool, a lone Italian cypress, said Contini, "is a dead-giveaway of the national origin of the owner." The paved area adjacent to the pool extends into a wood-framed terrace, cantilevering over the hillside.



The living room proper is set two feet below the dining area. This arrangement opens the view from the dining room into the garden and the valley to the west. It also results in an increased clear height for the living room, since the ceiling is one continuous level throughout the upper area.

The dominant color throughout the house is white, with a few strong color accents, such as the enclosure walls for the pantry (pictured above), adjacent to the dining area. The carpet is beige and olive green (Casablanca), from Angelus Floor Coverings, L. A. The dining table by Scan, Inc., and accompanying chairs by Hans Wegner.

Both photos on this page illustrate the fact that walls and ceiling surfaces never meet. They are separated by either the carrying beams or woodblocking in between. Beams throughout the house are rough-hewn Douglas fir which has been stained with black creosote.

The painting over the piano is by Robert Chouy of Los Angeles. Commented Mr. Contini, "I bought the painting before building the house. I liked the subject matter—a view of a distant valley framed by eucalyptus trees. Only when it was hung, did I realize that the view was remarkably similar to the one I could enjoy from my living room window."

EDGARDO CONTINI

*The overhangs perform two major functions: to provide protection from the sun, which, especially on the western exposure, presents serious problems of control. But perhaps more important, as can be seen from the photo on the upper half of the opposite page, the overhangs visually extend the interior spaces, and frame the views into controlled proportion.*

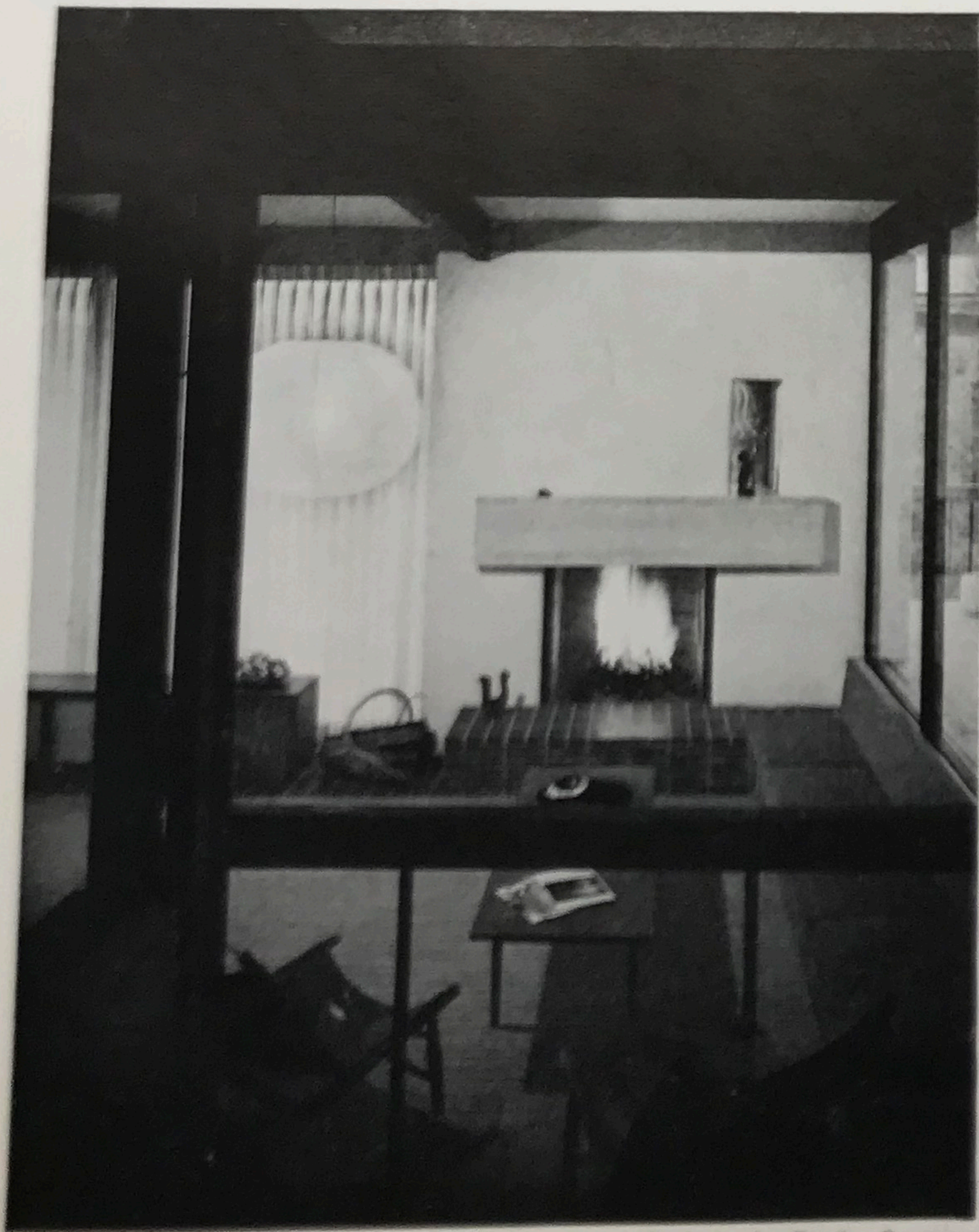
*Contini has used plaster throughout the house because "I feel that plain plaster in Southern California is a most satisfactory building material and that it has most often been misused in imitation of a style for which it is poorly suited or to create a condition of perfection that is soon betrayed by its inherent irregularity and susceptibility to damage."*

*For this reason he selected plaster with different textures for all walls of the house. Wherever exterior elements carry through to the interior, a coarse sand finish with integral white color was applied to both. Where color was used on a wall, a smooth-trowel finish was applied. All corners are rounded and no corner beads are used.*





*As one enters the hallway (opposite page) the view downward into the living area, is channeled to the vista of Franklin Canyon Valley beyond, "which changes with the hour and the day and with the seasons."*



*The Continis, because of their hill location, are able to eat outdoors in the evening as well as the daytime, a pleasure denied Beverly Hills and West Hollywood residents, who get ocean-cooled breezes in the evening. Because of the cooling afternoon breezes, and the generally warm and dry climate, Mr. Contini did not install air conditioning. Deck chairs (in the upper right portion of the photograph) are stock captain's chairs with teal blue canvas.*

all photos by Gordon Sommers