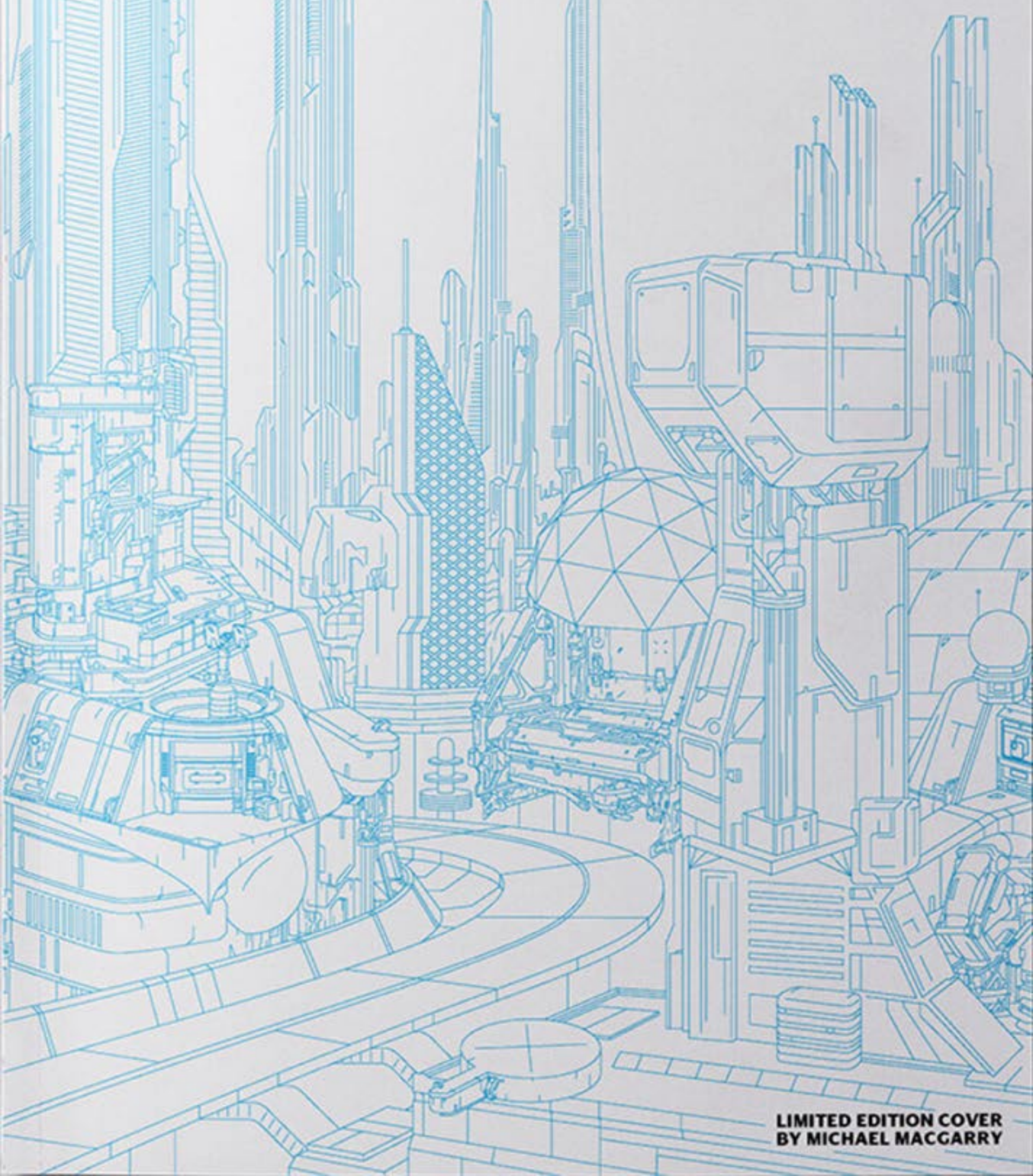


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LIMITED EDITION COVER
BY MICHAEL MACGARRY



Bibendum's multiple levels take advantage of the sloped site. Punctuated by monolithic pillars, the living room pavilion features uninterrupted red elm-clad ceilings that overhang to provide shade.



HIGH LEVEL

Stone, wood and glass combine in a house at one with its natural setting in California's Napa Valley

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOE FLETCHER WRITER: SHONQUIS MORENO



Floating staircases and glazed hallways lead to the bedrooms and courtyard gardens. The landscaping, by Ground Studio, features granite slabs separated by thick pom-pom tufts of indigenous grass and carefully arranged Chinese pistache trees

The road to private house Bibendum narrows and winds uphill through California's Napa wine country, past ancient oaks and green shoots coaxed to the surface by recent rains. Almost invisible during the approach, the house emerges suddenly, a study in counterpoint: its intersecting planes of low-slung stone contrast with the surroundings while, at the same time, appearing cradled by the slope and woven into its foliage.

Designed by San Francisco-based architect Daniel Piechota during his partnership in Sagan Piechota (he has since founded Piechota Architecture), Bibendum is the home of two veterans of Silicon Valley venture capitalism. Piechota had previously renovated the couple's copper-clad house in Big Sur, which is now their second home.

Their new residence is a 12,000 sq ft five-bedroom house, with three linked pavilions – living, guest and private quarters – that step back diagonally to share their views of the wooded hills and valleys snaking into the distance. Inside, nature asserts itself through long, glazed corridors and treehouse-like offices, while an underground wine cave/entertaining space is accessed through a 265ft-long concrete tunnel. The architecture alternates between monolithic

and featherweight, opaque and transparent, intimate and expansive. 'It creates many moments,' Piechota says. 'The house is not a one-liner.'

The architect favoured a limited palette, its tonal harmony making the richness of the house's layered levels and views easier to absorb. Dramatic dark bronze panels clad a two-storey wall that supports a staircase and lift well, but the house otherwise employs a subdued range of stone, steel, glass and light woods, such as elm, teak, anigre hardwood and walnut. Wood artisan Evan Shively, of timber firm Arborica, salvaged diseased red elm trees for use in uninterrupted expanses across the ceilings; provided the claro walnut for a suspended walkway above the foyer; and created furniture from rescued wood, including a 5,000-year-old swamp tree.

Inside, the warm tones of Peruvian travertine are cross-cut on the floors and vein-cut on the walls. Stonemason Edwin Hamilton used the same travertine for the interior and the exterior in a pattern designed by project architect Jason Greer, who perfectly aligned the seams on the outside with those on the inside, so that what are actually two-inch thick cladding tiles appear to be solid blocks of stone. >>

Architecture



Above, in the main bedroom, Peruvian travertine floors and walls and a bed by Gregory Hay Designs

Below, the plunge pool (the house also boasts a lap pool and a spa basin) offers views of the rolling hills and vineyards



The impression is that windows were built around the stone, rather than vice versa, giving the house some of its visual gravity. 'I wanted the house to look like it was part of the land, like rock outcrops, and as if it had been there for a very long time,' explains Piechota.

The weight of the stone, however, is balanced by fields of glass that combine views with tightly framed detail shots. The brief evolved over the six years of design and construction, but the goal was always to capture the landscape: the clients said they wanted 'to be in Napa and not let the house get in the way'.

The studied integration of topography and architecture is a reminder that Piechota once worked for organic architect Mickey Muennig. Early in Piechota's career, he lived in a converted school bus and worked in a glass teepee on Muennig's land in Big Sur, before helping create the Post Ranch Inn's cliffside boltholes. Most recently, he completed the rigorously sustainable Silver Oak winery near Healdsburg.

Today, his work mimics the landscape somewhat less than Muennig's and contrasts with it more. 'Bibendum was about using the building as a foil against the landscape,' he says. Where a typical person sees structure and nature, Piechota tends to see the seams where the two meet, the hard lines of the house against the soft filigrees of the site. Architecture and nature should 'interlock,' he says, dovetailing the fingers of both hands as if they together could become a single seamless join. ✪

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