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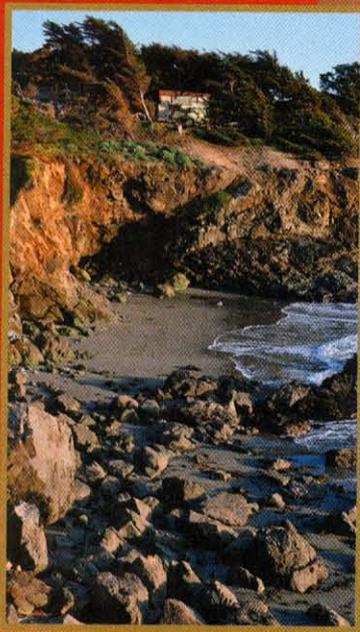
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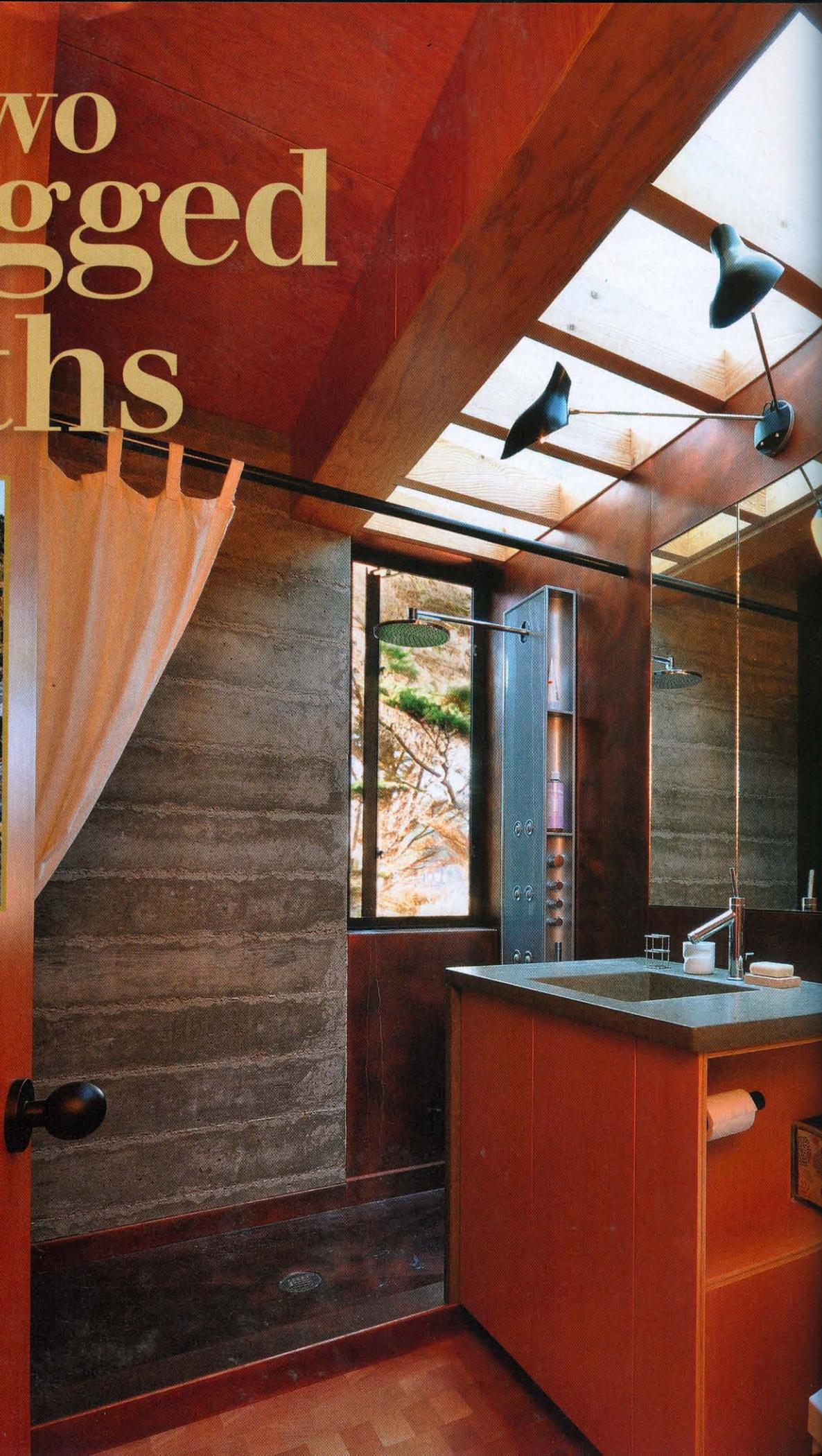
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Two Rugged Baths



All earth tones. Tucked into a tangle of Monterey cypress trees, the Ramirez house overlooks a restless landscape.



Inspired by a modern master, these baths with natural, exposed materials embody the spirit of the California coast

BY CHARLES MILLER



As rugged as the landscape. With rafter tails breaking it into illuminated squares, a room-length skylight casts a soft light across the east wall. Just beyond the showerhead, a tall casement window admits the prevailing breeze and the sound of the surf. The board-formed cast-concrete walls are both structural and stylish.

Pounded by surf and raked by prevailing winds and relentless tides, the geological chopping block known as the Northern California coast is merciless. At the place called The Sea Ranch, the cliffs are scoured clean, and the cypress trees grow at an angle, espaliered by the wind. Geologists point out that a 30,000-ft.-thick layer of stone has disappeared here over the past 10 million years, lost to erosion. The only way to make a building that holds up in this harsh environment is to assemble it with the toughest materials available. Concrete, stainless steel, stone, tempered glass, tight-grained redwood, and copper are all on that list.

Ninety years ago, an Austrian architect used a similar menu of materials in a house that changed the course of residential design in California. In West Hollywood, Rudolph Schindler designed and built the Kings Road House, a duplex that defied convention. With an open plan that included a courtyard with a fireplace, concrete walls on the inside, and unadorned materials used as finished surfaces, the Kings Road House became the quintessential indoor/outdoor California residence.

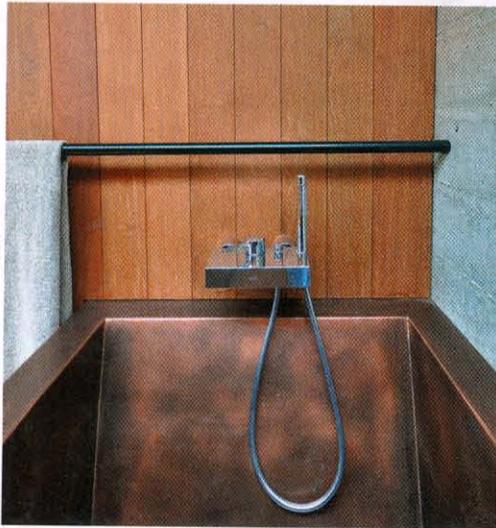
Back on the north coast in 2004, Gabriel Ramirez acquired one of the premier bluff-top lots at The Sea Ranch. Perched above a sheltered cove, the site was perfect for the kind of house pioneered by one of Ramirez's most-admired architects: Rudolph Schindler. Ramirez asked two Southern California architect/educators steeped in Schindler's work—Judith Sheine and Norman Millar—to collaborate on what Ramirez describes as “the only house I plan to build from scratch.”

Millar and Sheine updated Schindler's list of preferred building materials, adding corrugated Corten steel, ipé, and marine-grade Douglas-fir plywood. Then they devised a system of horizontal and vertical grids for orchestrating the intersections of the structural and finish materials, both inside and out.

Baths epitomize Schindler's style

The two upstairs bathrooms, modest in scale and low-key in their colors and their composition, demonstrate this seemingly effortless rigor. They adhere to the approach that Schindler described in his assessment of his Kings Road House: “The traditional building scheme, by which the structural members of the house are covered onionlike by layers of finishing materials: lathe, plaster, paint, paper, hangings, etc., is abandoned. The house is a simple weave of structural

Architects: Judith Sheine and Norman Millar **Builder:** Brian Dixon



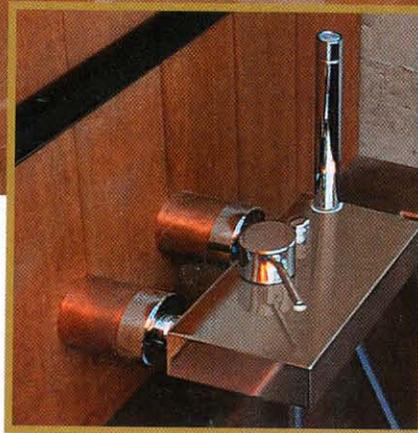
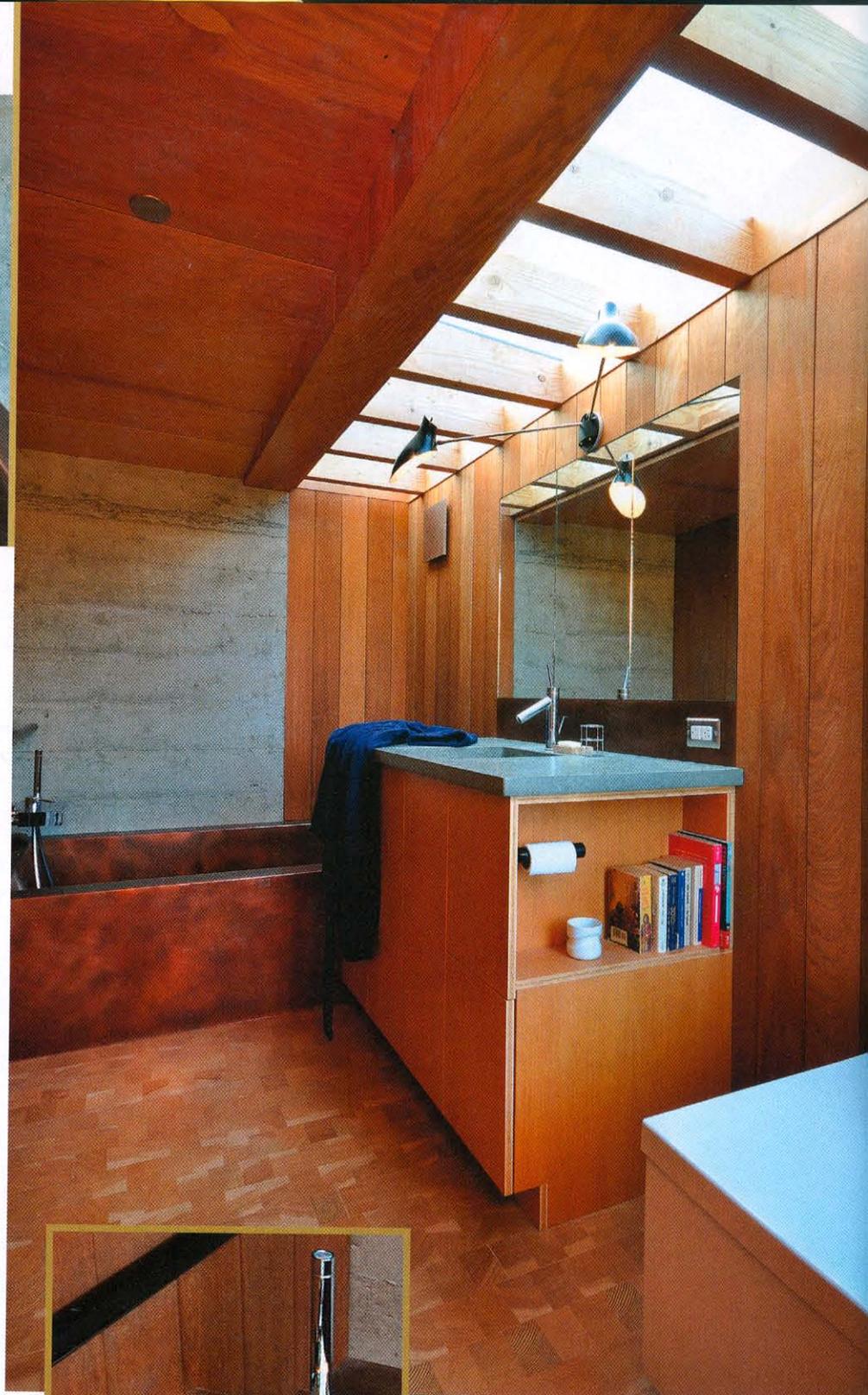
Precious metal. Prized on the coast for its longevity in a salty environment, copper steps inside as a faceted jewel of a tub framed by a wood and concrete backdrop.

materials which retain their natural color and texture throughout.”

The two upstairs baths are on the east side of the house, in separate bump-outs that stand proud of the house’s wedge-shaped footprint. The north bath (photo p. 76) has the taller ceiling, with a shower along the north wall. The south bath has a tub in the same location (photo right).

Initial plans were to use concrete for the shower pan and tub, but concrete’s weight in upstairs installations and its potential for cracking argued against it. In searching the web for fixtures and fittings, Ramirez discovered Diamond Spas, a Colorado-based fabricator of custom metal tubs, spas, and pools. He commissioned a copper hot tub from them and was so pleased with the results that he ordered a copper shower for one bath and a copper tub for the other.

A palette of materials in the spirit of Schindler and the site had emerged. The warm tones of the copper, the wood, and even the concrete echo the cliffs and buckskin meadow grasses that border the house. For consistency in the materials’ roles and relationships, the architects established guidelines: Ceilings are marine-grade Douglas-fir plywood; cabinets are also Douglas fir, but with a more refined vertical-grain pat-



Squared off. Rectilinear shapes at different scales abound in the baths, from the end-grain Douglas-fir flooring to the Duravit Starck X toilets. Practical issues included the need to create custom copper sleeves to extend the pipes for the tub mixer (inset).

Notable elements

Toilets Duravit Starck X; duravit.us • **Faucets and shower mixer:** Hansgrohe Axor Starck; hansgrohe-usa.com • **Sinks** Sonoma Stone; sonomastone.com
Tub and shower pan Diamond Spas; diamondspas.com • **Light fixtures** David Weeks; davidweeksstudio.com