

FALL / WINTER 2014

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at Madison Square Garden

WHAT'S NEW AT THE YARD
The Brooklyn Navy Yard Comes Alive

AMAZING EATS
The Best of Queens According to Tasting Table



Douglas **Elliman** EST. 1911
REAL ESTATE



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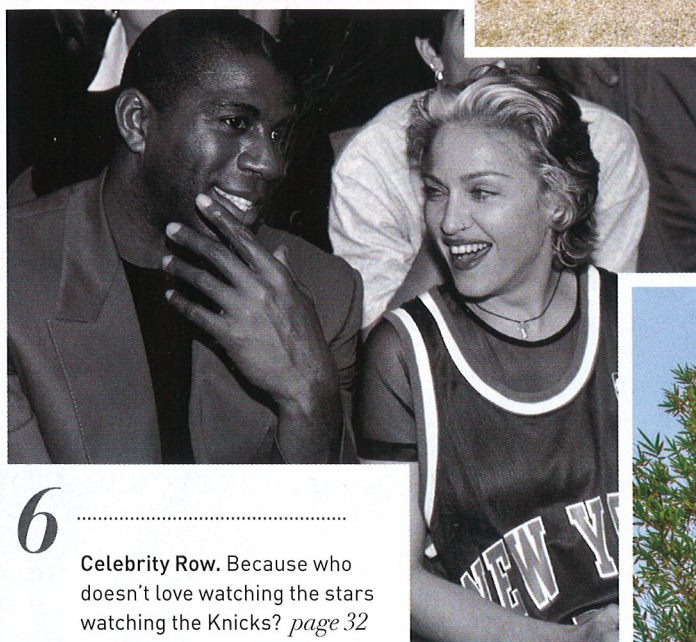
Weekending on Route 25A in Long Island. Peace and beauty just 45 minutes from the city. We're there. *page 158*

Photograph by Jeffery Salter



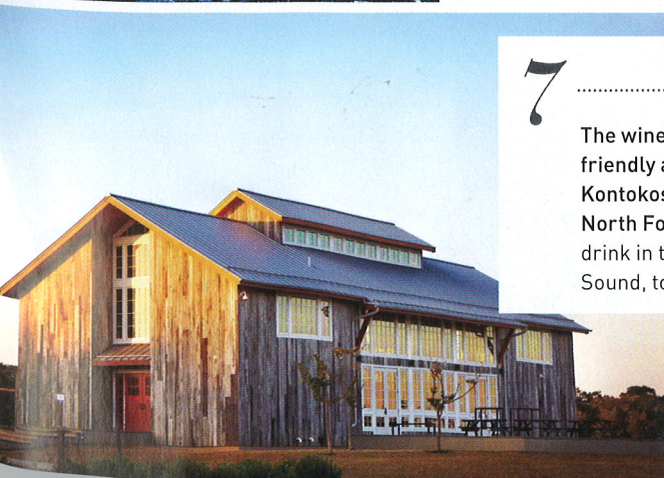
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Celebrity Row. Because who doesn't love watching the stars watching the Knicks? *page 32*



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Michael LaFetra's midcentury homes. While he may be adding modern touches, he's also preserving an important chapter in architectural history. *page 208*



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The wines (and the eco-friendly aesthetic) at the Kontokosta Winery on the North Fork. Make sure you drink in the views of the Sound, too. *page 150*

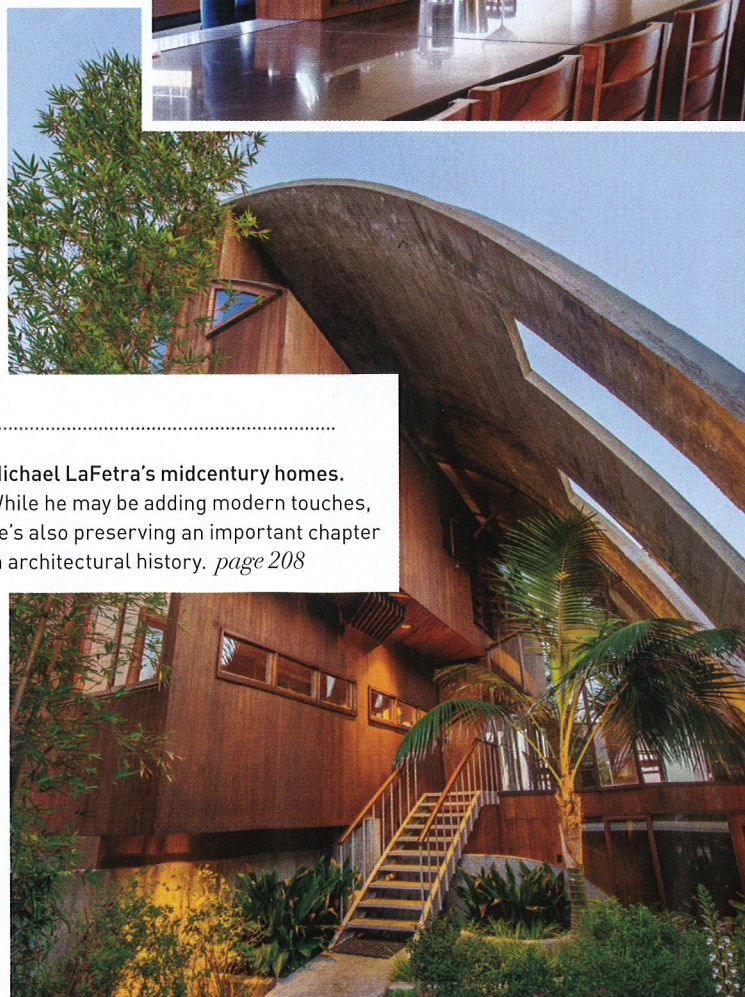


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La Limonaia in Florence Center, Tuscany. It's just one of five properties that can be had for about \$5 million, featured in our "Prix Fixe" story. *page 222*

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Dinner at Blue Hill, in Pocantico Hills, NY. A farm-to-table venue where the season, not a menu, dictates your order. *page 100*



The Schnabel House,
designed by Frank
Gehry in 1989.
The property is one
of several currently
owned by LaFetra, who
has purchased and
restored 18 modernist
homes to date.



Photographs by Michael McNamara; LaFetra by Ruth Anne



MODERNIST MAN

By ANDY WANG

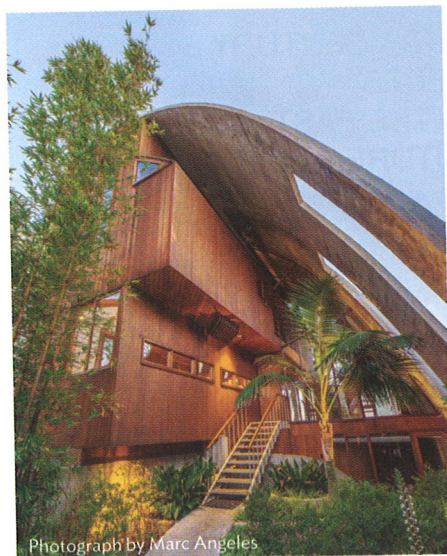
IN HIS WORK TO RESTORE 20TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECES, MICHAEL LAFETRA HONORS THE PAST TO PRESERVE IT FOR THE FUTURE



Great architecture can seduce and inspire. In some cases it can, perhaps, even change lives. Certainly it has done so for Michael LaFetra. He jokes that his passion for beautiful buildings has “ruined” him. In fact, it seems to have strengthened his commitment to improving the world around him—and provided the foundation for an abiding mission.



Right and below: The Stevens Residence, built in 1968 and designed by John Lautner.



Photograph by Marc Angeles

For the past 15 years, LaFetra, owner of the forensic architectural consulting firm Foundation, has demonstrated his discerning eye for architecture, particularly the mid-20th-century residential gems he most admires, by undertaking a series of impressive restorations. Since 1999, when he acquired architect Pierre Koenig's Case Study House #21, a glass-and-steel beauty in the Hollywood Hills, he has purchased and restored 18 modernist houses in California, rescuing them from the effects of time and ensuring that their clean lines and seamless transition between indoors and outdoors endure for future generations.

Architectural experts have acknowledged the importance of the efforts of private restorers such as LaFetra, who may have the funds to accomplish what public entities cannot. Before he sells a house, LaFetra tries to ensure the property's protection as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. "I think what Michael has done is shine a spotlight on modern residential architecture in Los Angeles in a way that maybe nobody else has," says Linda Dishman, executive director of the Los Angeles Conservancy. "He takes on

well-known architects like [R. M.] Schindler, but he also picks up people who aren't as prominent. He's not only taking care of famous works, but also making sure the tent gets enlarged in terms of what's preserved."

LaFetra is also a film producer and restaurant investor, whose portfolio includes the new Brilliantshine cocktail tavern in Santa Monica. He grew up in Claremont, California, where everything from his family's modern post-and-beam house to his Richard Neutra-designed preschool and the town's airy, light-filled university buildings made him consider the wonders of modern architecture. After a restaurant-focused stint in New York, he returned to Los Angeles in 1999 to put his money where his heart was.

His holdings now include three John Lautner masterpieces—the 1968 Stevens Residence in Malibu, the 1980 Rawlins House on Balboa Island and the 1961 Marco Wolff Residence in Los Angeles—as well as the Frank Gehry-designed 1989 Schnabel House in Brentwood. The 2002 LaFetra Beach House in Malibu, which LaFetra commissioned Koenig to



design, is particularly significant: It was the architect's last work before he died in 2004.

The homes LaFetra buys and restores (several of which are available for purchase) are the kind that attract discerning buyers—world travelers, students of history and people who seek out fine art and design. Those interested in acquiring them may be connoisseurs of modern architecture, or they may simply appreciate its aesthetics: the emphasis on simplicity and functionality; the embrace of line, light, space and openness. "One of the things that's lovely about modern architecture is that there's room for the house to really breathe," LaFetra says.

This appreciation for the homes' beauty and historical importance drives LaFetra's restoration process. He dedicates untold hours to hunting down original blueprints, often in college libraries, and may spend a year or more assembling and overseeing a team of workers as they painstakingly update the infrastructure while ensuring a house's appearance remains unaltered. Although LaFetra's restoration work is true to the past, it is not stuck in it. Not only does he make sure systems work properly—that

motorized skylights and windows still operate as intended, for instance—but he's willing to make improvements, too. He'll happily add air-conditioning or even solar panels, provided it doesn't interfere with the original design.

Purists may object, and LaFetra acknowledges this. "If you have the option to help a house into the 21st century, why would you not do that? I was taught from a really early age that you're supposed to leave things in a nicer condition than when you got them." In the case of the Malibu Lautner house, LaFetra reversed "a lot of insensitive remodeling" and questionable furniture choices made by a previous owner.

He even fulfilled a part of Lautner's original vision that had never been implemented, taking the home "right back to the blueprint" by adding open loft areas that were in Lautner's plans but had never been built. A year later, LaFetra recalls, a former resident of the house stopped by to admire his work and was especially taken with the lofts. "It was great to see her eyes light up," LaFetra says, "getting her seal of approval."

The LaFetra Beach House in Malibu includes radiant heating, solar power and its own drawbridge.