

ANGELES

Malibu Tile Treasure

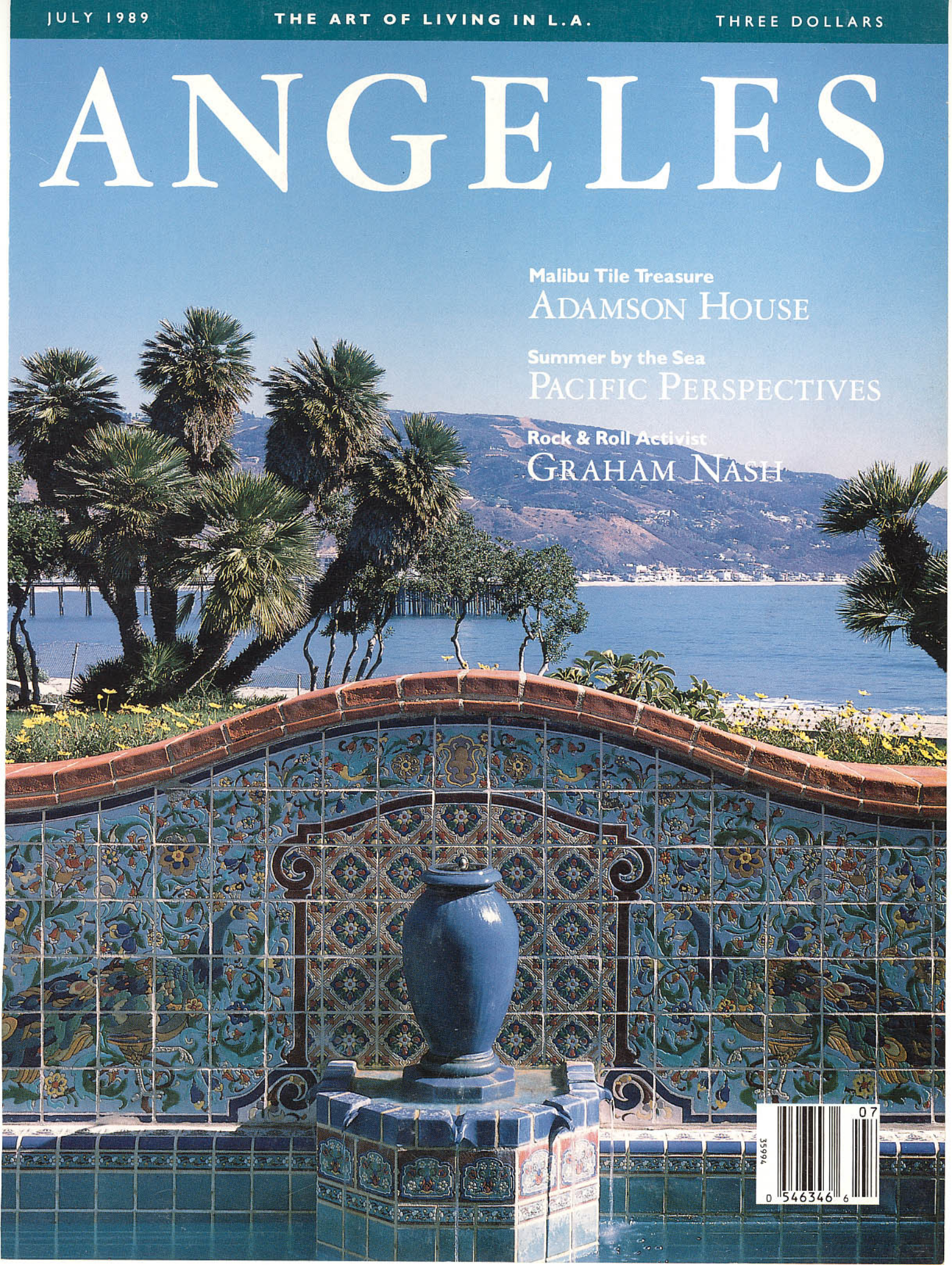
ADAMSON HOUSE

Summer by the Sea

PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES

Rock & Roll Activist

GRAHAM NASH

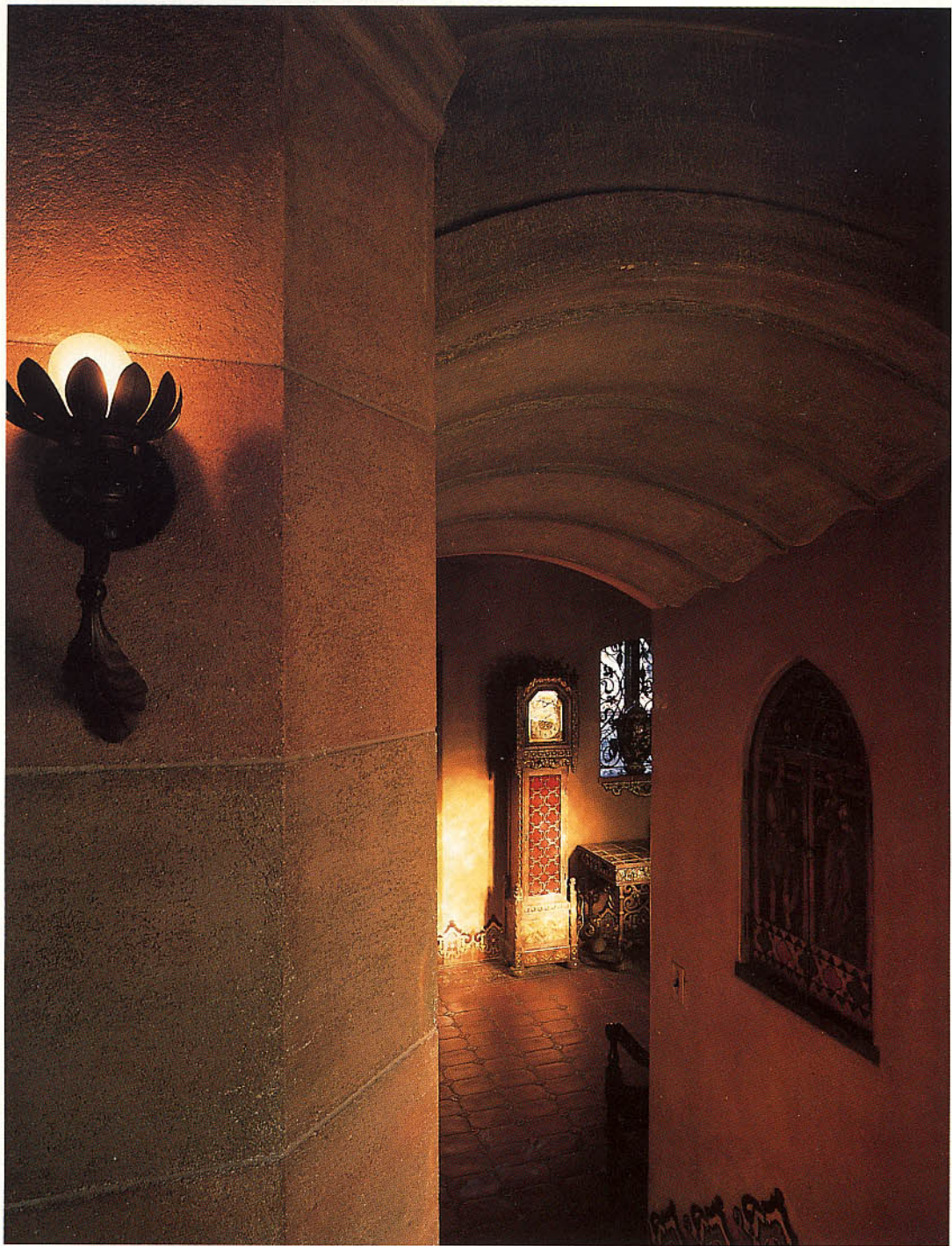


ADAMSON HOUSE

MALIBU'S COLORFUL LINK WITH HISTORY

text by Sarah Lifton photography by Alex Vertikoff






Like the scrub that blankets Southern California's coastal slopes, the Adamson House clings tenaciously to its site. Tucked away in a secluded section of the Malibu shore, it is rooted to the waterfront by history, nature, design, and law. Its Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, an allusion to the region's early history, recalls a succession of inhabitants dating back to the Chumash Indians. Across the Pacific Coast Highway from the Adamson House are the hills

that yielded the clay baked into the kaleidoscope of tiles that ornament it. A few hundred yards away, the small inlet known as the Malibu Lagoon plays host to more than one hundred fifty species of birds whose images are captured in the tile work throughout the historic structure. It is a majestic house, the last surviving link in

Above: Evoking a fairy tale castle, the stone stairwell opens into the entryway. Opposite: One of the house's highlights is a "Persian carpet" of Malibu tile. It was designed for the loggia by William E. Handley.



 a chain binding a present-day Malibu to four and a half centuries of its past. As recently as twenty years ago, however, that chain almost snapped. In 1968, six years after the death of its owner, Rhoda Rindge Adamson, the state acquired the property and made plans to raze the house in favor of a parking lot for adjacent Surfriders Beach. Outraged, a group of Malibu residents formed the Malibu Historical Society and launched a fierce legal battle on its behalf. Nine years later, its future finally assured, the house was added to the National Register of Historic Places, and in 1983 it opened to the public.

Such struggles, however, are part of the house's history. During the early years of the century, Rhoda Adamson's father, Frederick Hastings Rindge, patriarch of the last family to own the 17,000-acre rancho that spawned today's Malibu, took on the Southern Pacific Railroad, which planned to link Long Wharf in Santa Monica with its line in Santa Barbara. In order to prevent the company from laying tracks through his land, Rindge began building his own railroad from Oxnard to what is now Malibu Pier, forcing Southern Pacific to direct

its line inland. After his death in 1905, his widow, May Knight Rindge, continued to operate the railroad and also became embroiled in a series of legal skirmishes with the federal government, the state, and the county, all of which sought to build a public road through Malibu, then private land. For twenty-two years she fought the government interests, but while her efforts stalled their plans, she wasn't able to block them permanently. The county road opened in 1921, and the state highway followed in 1929, the same year the Adamson House was completed.

Designed by Stiles O. Clements of the architecture firm of Morgan, Walls and Clements (responsible for the Wiltern and Mayan theaters and the former Firestone Tire Plant), the Adamson House was originally a beach home for the Rindges' only daughter, Rhoda, and her husband, Merritt Huntley Adamson, founders of the Adohr Farms (Adohr is Rhoda spelled backward).

Opposite: The dining room table—one of the house's few antiques—is French. Both the Belgian linen draperies and the chandelier from B.B. Bell are original to the house. **Above:** Spices and glassware line the shelves in the butler's pantry, and the original dishwasher rests beneath the kitchen sink, at right.



In 1936 the family made it their permanent home, and after Merritt's death in 1949, Rhoda Adamson continued to live there until she died in 1962. The house is a typically Californian evocation of the Mediterranean. Spanish-style elements permeate the design, but except for the French dining room table and a Farsi prayer rug—the only true antiques—everything is no older than the house itself. An abundance of lighthearted decoration, however, immediately distinguishes it from its more common Spanish Revival cousins. John Holtzclaw, the house's interior designer, commissioned Danish artists Ejnar Hansen and Peter Nielsen to do extensive decorative painting. The pair, who also worked on the Biltmore Hotel, left their distinctive mark throughout the residence, embellishing the beams in the living room with fanciful beasts, and covering the undulating ceiling in the loggia with an imaginative twining of animals and flowers. The ornamental elements, while decidedly European, are a potpourri of artistic references. Folk art motifs from the painters' native Scandinavia surface in delicate organic forms on the doors, and many of

the upstairs hallway ceilings are painted over gold leaf, which creates a medieval Spanish effect. Surrounding a central skylight in the stairwell is a neoclassical stenciled frieze and a geometric ceiling design intended to evoke the Mediterranean.

As striking as the painted decoration is, however, inevitably it is eclipsed by the house's most prominent feature: its tile work. As the largest surviving repository of Malibu Potteries tile, which was manufactured half a mile away at the factory founded in 1926 by May Knight Rindge, the building is virtually encrusted with color. The first hints of the riches within appear on the front door surround; tile also ornaments the chimney, several fountains, and some of the exterior walls and windows. Inside, the tile takes on unique characteristics in each room. The primary kitchen, with a blue, orange, and black scheme, has a Native American flavor. The five bathrooms—no two alike—are tiled from floor to

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Opposite: Each of the five bathrooms is decorated with different tile motifs. Shown here is the Adamson daughters' bath, which adjoins their bedroom. Decorative painting is by Ejnar Hansen and Peter Nielsen. **Above:** The Adamson family crest adorns the headboards in the downstairs guest bedroom.

ceiling, some with murals and others with unusual and startlingly beautiful color combinations. Most impressive, however, are the Persian rugs rendered in tile on the floor of the loggia. The rugs, designed by potter William E. Handley, are as intricate as any textile—even sporting tiled fringe in natural disarray at the edges.

Today, although the house belongs to the state of California, the volunteers responsible for its day-to-day operations make sure that it remains imprinted with the Adamson identity. Rhoda Adamson's clothes still hang in her closet, towels remain neatly stacked in the linen closets, ci-



A fanciful grillwork spiderweb at the Adamson House.

gars rest in the humidior, and cosmetics fill the master bedroom dressing table. "Once Rhoda had something a certain way, she kept it that way," says Martha Nielsen, house archivist. "She didn't move things around."

And within the annals of Los Angeles, the Adamson House also has its place. Fortunately, it's a permanent one now, a place of honor, perched on a small rise between the volatile Pacific and the still waters of Malibu Lagoon, a crossroads where the past stands ready to embrace the present. □

The Adamson House and adjoining Malibu Lagoon Museum, located at 23200 Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu, are open for tours Wednesday through Saturday from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. Call 213-456-8432 for information.