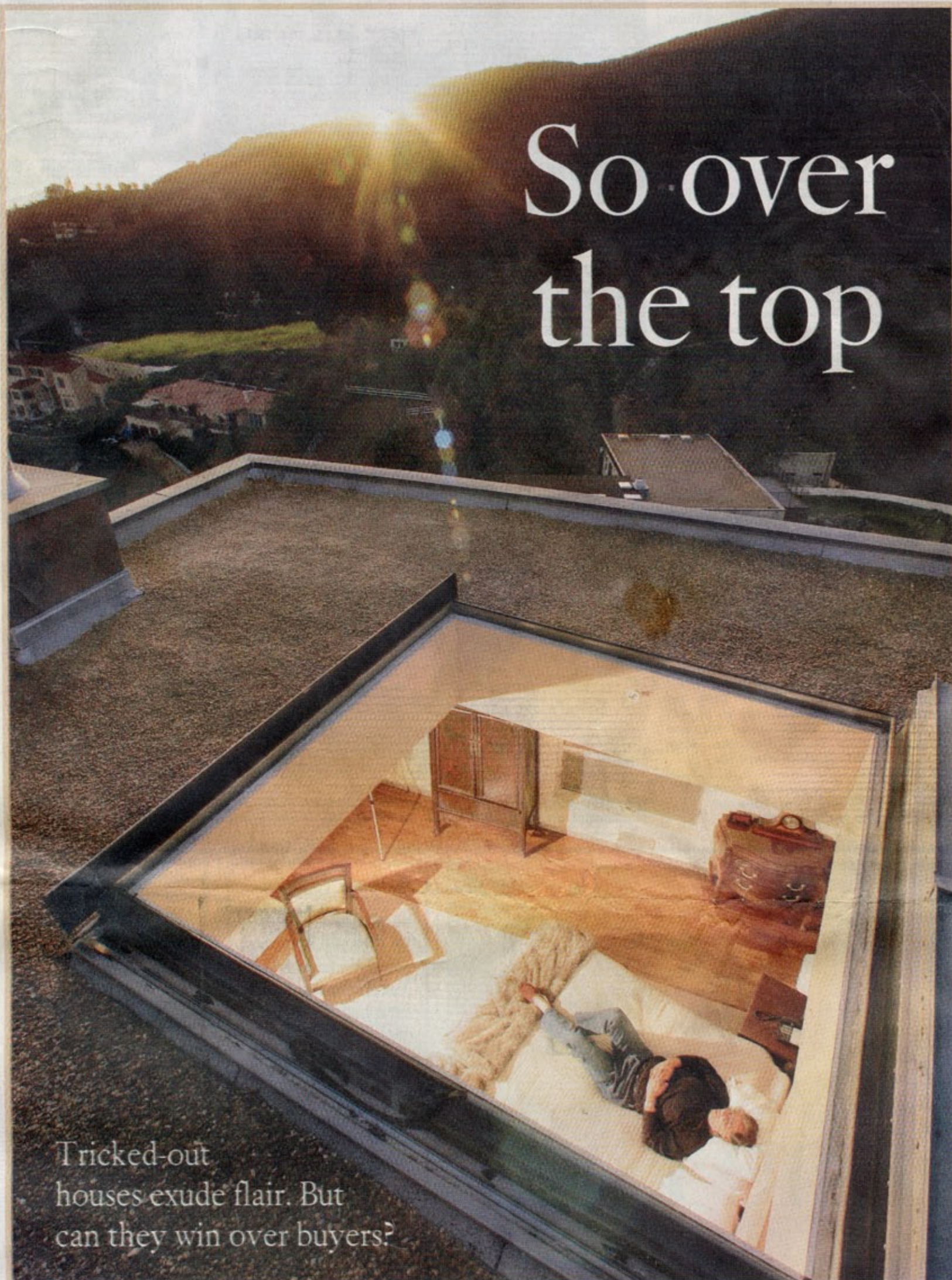


REAL ESTATE

Sunday, April 22, 2007

latimes.com/realestate



So over the top

Tricked-out houses exude flair. But can they win over buyers?

MEL MELCON Los Angeles Times

SKY GUY: Douglas Busch looks through the retractable, remote-controlled roof in the master bedroom of his Malibu home, listed for \$9.75 million.

By ANN BRENOFF
Times Staff Writer

TO some sentimentalists, the benchmark in the “can you top this?” category of outrageous amenities may always be Jayne Mansfield’s swimming pool: a heart-shaped affair with the words “I love Jaynie” spelled out in mosaic tiles on the bottom. Certainly, it was a talking point of its time.

But, with apologies to Ms. Mansfield’s heirs, heart-shaped pools have become a dime a dozen; think of all those cheesy honeymoon resorts in the Poconos. In fact, there was just a 4,360-square-foot house in Palos Verdes Estates listed at \$2.85 million with what is described as a heart-shaped pool — although from its photo, it appears more kidney-shaped than heart-like.

Listing a property with out-of-the-ordinary features is a double-edged sword, realty agents say. Unusual amenities that draw attention to a listing

also can narrow the field of potential buyers. A house built in the shape of a guitar may be a conversation piece, but who really wants to sleep in the frets?

More often than not, unusual amenities come about because someone created a home to suit his or her own living needs without necessarily giving thought to selling down the road — such as the two-story river-rock bathroom in the Topanga home of Rita George that she designed and had built by hand. It’s part of her all-rock-and-boulder house, constructed by local stone artisans. To enter the tub and shower, she climbs three rock steps. A cupola ceiling and arched etched-glass windows — made by another local craftsman — complete the stone-castle look.

“This house is part of me,” said George, who has no intention of selling. Not ever. “They’ll have to drag me out of here when I’m 105. I love this house.”

But there is a Malibu compound for sale now with multiple one-of-a-kind features. Its owner is Douglas Busch, [See Unusual, Page K14]

Hot Property

Prettying up N.Y.

By RUTH RYON
Times Staff Writer

Gisele Bündchen, one of the world’s most famous faces in modeling, has for the moment turned up her nose at living in Los Angeles.

The 26-year-old, who has appeared on the covers of just about every major international fashion magazine since — as the story goes — she was discovered in a Brazilian shopping mall at age 14, has sold her 4,000-square-foot Hollywood Hills home for \$4 million and is now living in New York. [See Hot Property, Page K4]



Associated Press
MODEL: Gisele Bündchen sold for \$4 million.

Buyers in for future shock

Stage is set for a legislative battle over builder fees that are passed on to the next guy.

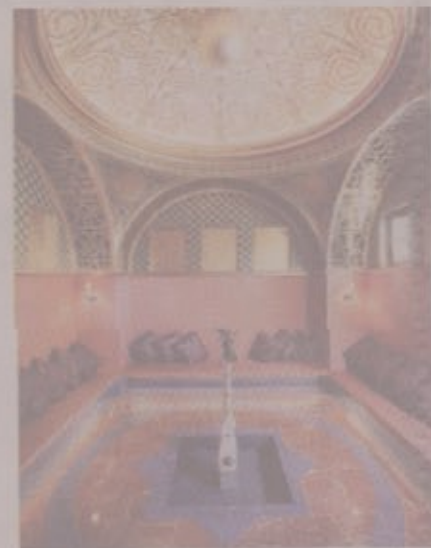
By DIANE WEDNER
Times Staff Writer

Builders of housing developments generally are required to pay for the construction of roads, sewers and schools for the new residents. It’s a given that those costs are passed along to the buyers of those homes.

What isn’t a given is that, for years, some builders in California and a handful of other states have been passing along other costs of doing business — appeasing environmentalists and local governments to get their projects approved — to subsequent buyers as well.

The builders attach private transfer fees, which range from about 0.05% to 1.75% of the purchase price, to the deed. [See Fees, Page K9]

In Real Estate



DON CAMP

HOME OF THE WEEK: A villa in Montecito listed at \$29.5 million has a conversation room with a domed ceiling decorated in gold leaf. Page 3

NEIGHBORLY ADVICE

Place to chill

Calabasas Park avoids that master-planned feeling: It’s the lake. Page 2

Prices.....	5	Q&A.....	8
Books.....	5	Rates.....	8



MEL MELCON Los Angeles Times

UP ON THE ROOF: Douglas Busch enjoys a deck surrounded by water.



MEL MELCON Los Angeles Times

WALK ON WATER: Busch's studio is built over a huge koi pond on the photographer's Malibu estate. A glass door rolls up, garage-style.

Homes with a singular appeal

[Unusual, from Page K1] a photographer who specializes in large-format black-and-whites. His portfolio was bought by the Getty and his work appears in numerous other museums. He designed and built the complex at the top of Trancas Canyon Road three years ago.

The 10-acre property, which has a 4,500-square-foot main house, provides plenty that's out of the ordinary. To start, in the master bedroom, the portion of the roof over the bed fully retracts by remote control, opening the room to the elements. Several inches of water cover another flat roof of the multilevel house, and a pump keeps things moving in a babbling-brook kind of way. Steppingstones lead to lounge chairs. There's a separate sitting-sleeping deck surrounded by water with an outdoor fireplace. "To take the chill off," Busch said.

And that's just the roof. Busch's detached studio — all 4,000 square feet of it — is completely surrounded by water. Water flows under it from the pond that it sits in and the front door is reached by steppingstones. The glass garage-style door that fronts it opens completely, exposing the studio to the elements.

"I keep it open most of the time," he said.

Busch said that some of the home's more unusual features reflect his own passions.

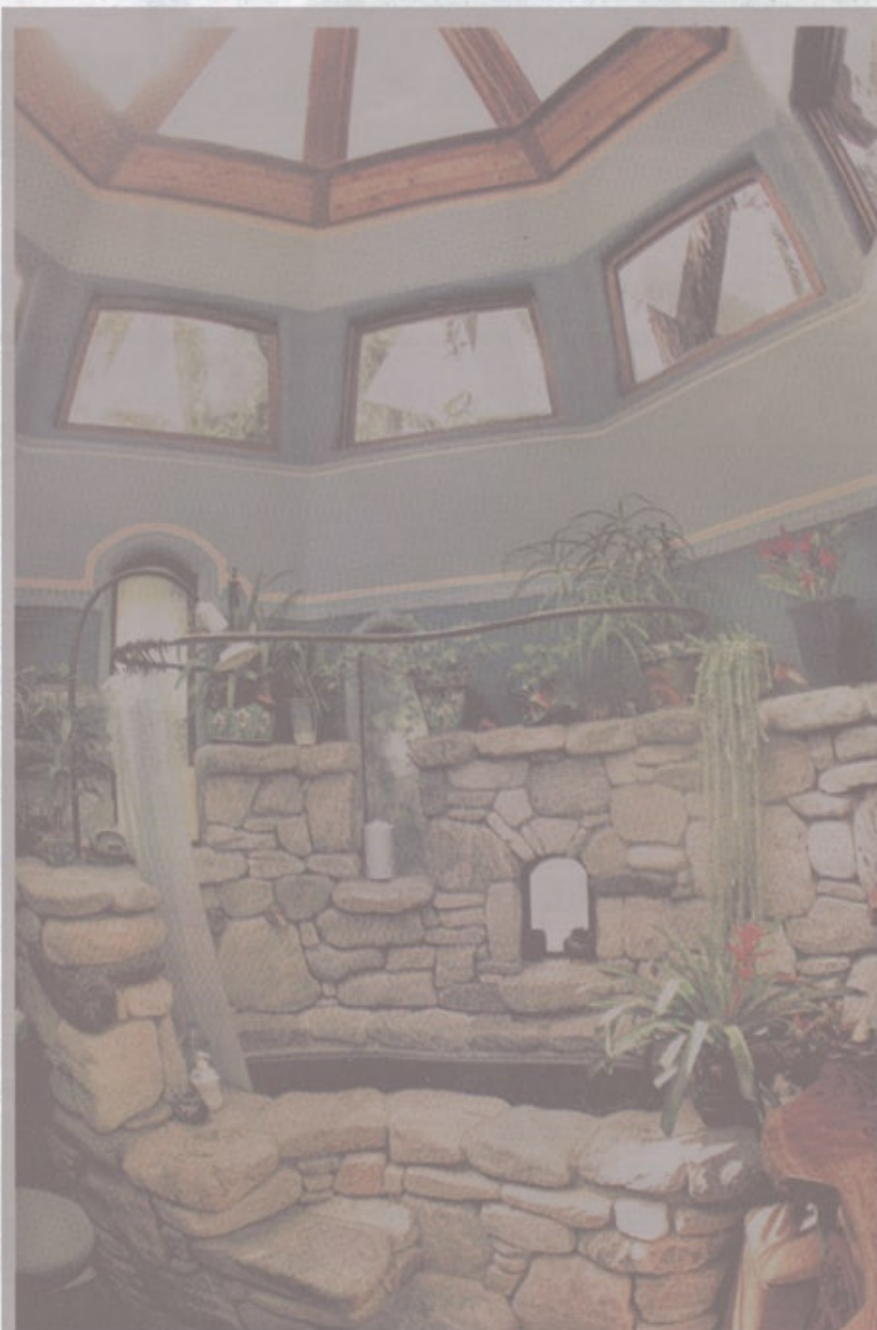
Take, for example, his feelings about running water. He likes it in the gentle Zen-waterfall way, soothing and quiet — hence the rooftop water elements and the studio-in-the-pond. But he finds water disturbing in the bathtub-roaring-and-splashes way.

"I don't like noisy water," he said, "and I don't like drains."

So his master tub fills and drains quietly from the bottom. Water runs in — and out — via jets and openings along the bottom perimeter.

His lack of affection for drains carries over into the other bathrooms. The shower in the studio's bathroom is the whole room. With planks of sauna wood for flooring, the drains are invisible beneath.

There is also a 110,000-gallon swim-



ANNE CUSACK Los Angeles Times

ONE OF A KIND: A two-story bathroom is part of Rita George's all-rock-and-boulder house, constructed in Topanga by local stone artisans.

ming pool — Busch claims it is the third-largest private pool in Los Angeles — plus what by comparison may now sound like fairly mundane amenities: a pool cabana with sauna and a complete outdoor kitchen.

The spectacular ocean-view property is listed for \$9.75 million.

Sotheby's International Realty agent Shirley Sherman, who co-listed the property with Amy Alcini of the same Malibu office, predicts the buyer will be an artist, just like Busch.

The market for properties such as this one is small, Sherman said. Busch's home will sell to someone who appreciates its "five-star workmanship," she said — and who probably doesn't have small children.

Malibu, she noted, has a lot of homes with unique features built to meet the desires of their current owners.

There's one for sale in the Serra Retreat area with a full recording studio and a dance and workout room. With 9,200 square feet, it is listed at about \$12 million and is just waiting for the right celebrity owner.

Originality, of course, is not unique to Malibu. There's the granddaddy of homes with outrageous amenities sitting in Bel-Air — the five-bedroom house that Wilt Chamberlain built in 1971 and lived in until his death in 1999. Chamberlain installed a gold-lined hot tub, retractable mirrored ceiling above the master bed and a wraparound swimming pool that extended into the living room. The subsequent owners have removed many of the original features and the house is back on the market now, listed at \$9,995,000.

Two Hollywood TV writers purchased it. [See Unusual, Page K15]

ann.brenoff@latimes.com