

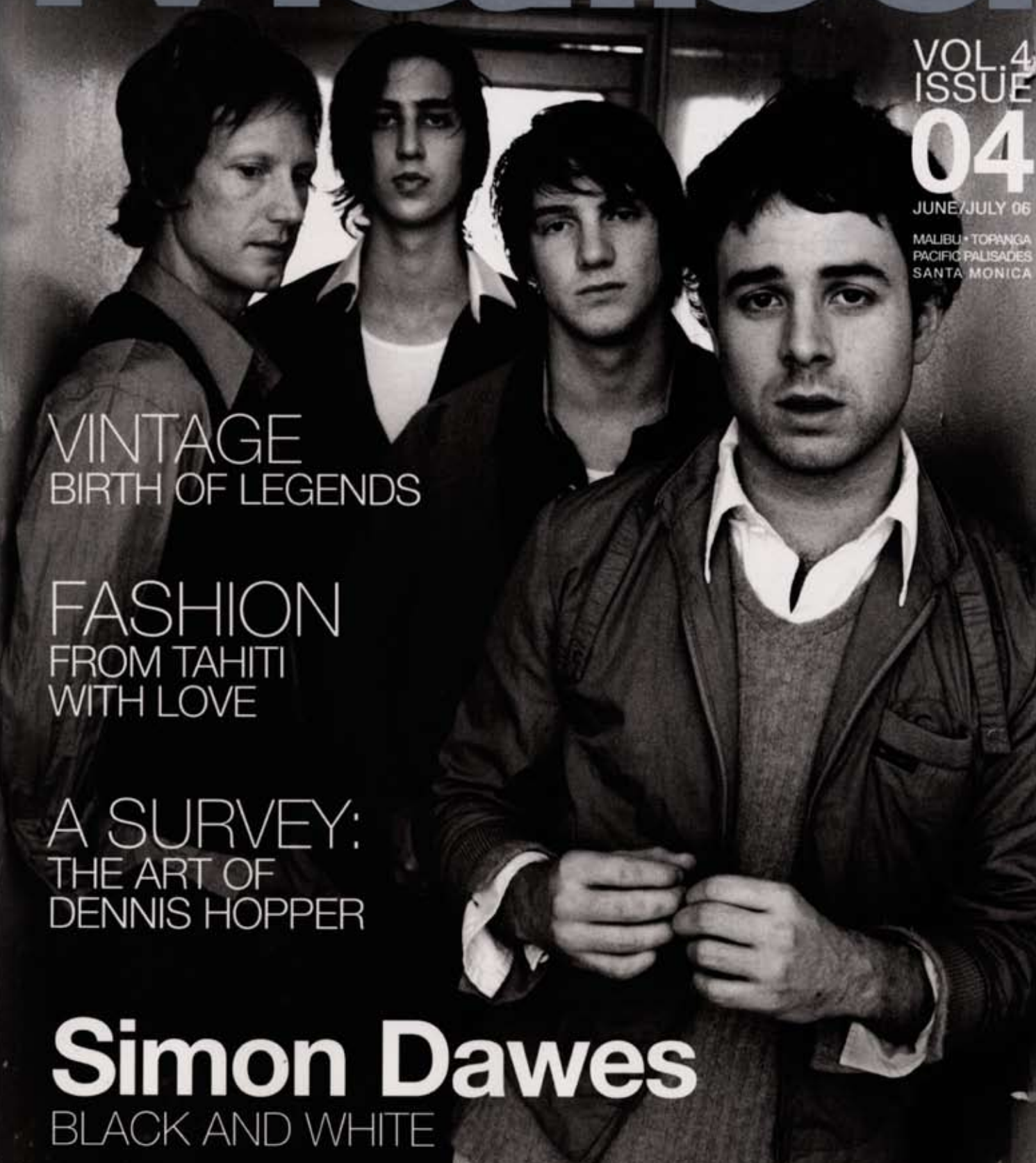
# Malibu

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MALIBU • TOPANGA  
PACIFIC PALISADES  
SANTA MONICA



VINTAGE  
BIRTH OF LEGENDS

FASHION  
FROM TAHITI  
WITH LOVE

A SURVEY:  
THE ART OF  
DENNIS HOPPER

**Simon Dawes**  
BLACK AND WHITE



Photos by: Busch Design Build Inc.

home and style **M**

# WALK ON WATER

With **Douglas I. Busch**

By Carole Dixon

Perched high atop a hill at the end of Trancas Canyon Road is a modern masterpiece of architectural design. Jutting out over the landscape, the structure is like nothing that has ever been built in the Malibu mountains or graced the Santa Monica Federal Park that abuts the grounds. It's no mystery when you discover that this house was designed and built by one of the greatest artists, inventors and architects in the country.

Well known for his large format black-and-white photographs (and creating the world's largest portable camera to snap them), Douglas I. Busch's technical ability is widely respected in art circles. His work hangs in some of the most impressive museums and galleries in the world including the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Smithsonian Institution, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Mannheim City Gallery in Germany. He is on the board of the "No Strings Organization," which funds annual grants to photographers and artists.

"God's been good to me. I've done really well and I thought it was time to give back," he said. Recent projects include digital images of the ocean called *Waves*, and a book on Italian gardens recently published by Braus Editions in Germany — where he is wildly popular. With all the international fanfare, one wonders why he is still living on the California coast. "I don't speak German, and at my age, it's too hard to learn," he says with a laugh. "But I love Germany. I don't know why." At that precise moment, he lights up one of the French-Turkish tobacco cigarettes that he favors, and as the smoke swirls around his dark curly hair and wire-rimmed glasses, it's easy to picture Busch as part of the Berlin café society.

On this overcast day in Malibu, the sun is starting to peer through the clouds illuminating the almost 8,000-square-foot compound constructed of steel, concrete, glass and lots of water, as well as the 40,000-gallon koi pond on the 21-acre property. "I have too many projects going right now." A self-described "crossover artist," Busch has his hand in just about every creative pie on the planet. Next up is a joint venture with filmmaker Antoine Fuqua to photograph Los Angeles gang rivals The Bloods and The Crips. This project will take the artist and his camera into their homes, funeral parlors, as well as visiting their mothers. The profits will go toward a youth center that will help kids leave the gang life and give them jobs. Quite a segue for a down-to-earth, affable guy from the Midwest who started out working for Ansel Adams and then made a major splash in the art world with his controversial series *Street Nudes*. But that is only the tip of Busch's diversely talented iceberg.

Sitting in the ample two-building home studio on the grounds, complete with work space for three teams and upstairs guest house, Busch looks relaxed yet focused when showing his grids of multiple waves and single shots over the smooth black soap stone desks, "I love the smell of fresh ink in the morning," he quips as he opens a retracting

office wall that leads the way to concrete stepping stones, more than 200,000 gallons of water and tinkling rock fountains. "I just love water and that is why there is so much around the property — plus it's good for fire," he says matter-of-factly.

The Busch compound was originally built two years ago as a weekend getaway for Busch and his wife, Lori Bruce. The plan was to spend three days during the week at their Santa Monica place. "My wife said, 'Are you out of your mind? I'm not moving the dogs back and forth, having two cleaning crews and shopping for two houses. Forget it!' Now they are considering downsizing, buying a little beach house and moving back into town."

It would be hard to leave the 360-degree panoramic ocean views of Palos Verdes to Santa Barbara and the more than 100,000-gallon solar generated swimming pool with outdoor custom barbeque and bar for entertaining. "All summer long this place is packed. Sometimes I come home and there are 20 people at the pool. My kids bring their friends up here." Must be an interesting mix; his daughter's boyfriend is a lion tamer and a pipeline surfer.

Yucca groves and more than 70 olive and hybrid trees from Australia dot the gated grounds leading up the steep concrete driveway to the main house. Designed as three rectangular volumes connected by two towers with an elevator, Busch laments, "My whole concept when I designed this place was not to use concrete. The house was designed to float and the grounds were not to be touched, but the fire department wouldn't accept it, and they made me put all this concrete in."

As you climb the outdoor staircase with a breathtaking view of the green Trancas Mountains, it's hard to imagine a more perfect fortress to call home. The front door is a thick, 10-foot-



tall, pivoting slab of black wood that leads the way to a stunning airy living and dining area with streaming light hitting the flagstone floors. The 12-foot-tall, freestanding fireplace is made with 20 yards of concrete that separates the ample dual-island kitchen from the main room and can be viewed from all four sides. Solid steel picture-window seats flank both sides of the space where you can sit and gaze out at the mountains or ocean. The terrace leads the way to a rooftop waterway reached by more steppingstones. Two wicker lounge chairs seemingly float in the middle of the infinity-shaped illusion pool that gives the impression of stretching out toward the blue sky and over the crashing shoreline. On closer inspection, one can see rocks strewn at the bottom of the shallow water-rimmed roof like in a riverbed.

"I'd like to build a chapel...I'd like to build it in Santa Monica or Malibu in a public place that people could go."

The entire house is decorated with an eclectic mix of modern, pale-wood furniture (designed by Busch), Asian artifacts, European antiques and paintings by Stephen Douglas, who also is a client. "I redid his whole studio. It looks bitchin' now." A few of Busch's *Waves* series hang in the living room, including a giant black canvas, "This was one of the tougher waves," he points out.

As you ascend the glass tower staircase inside, off the main floor, more of Busch's work from the *Vestiges* series (black-and-white photos of medieval castles) grace the stark walls. This leads to the media room — which is kitted out with a 7.1 Dolby digital system — Lori Bruce's office, a steam shower and one of six libraries filled with art books and an impressive photo collection from contemporaries like Diane Arbus, Henry Holmes Smith, Lee Friedlander, Paul Strand, Edward Weston and of course, Ansel Adams.

The entire estate is computer managed. Blackout blinds can be drawn, a waterfall turned off or a Jacuzzi switched on from any room in the house. The security system is a top-notch Creston with multiple views of the grounds displayed on a giant screen in the media room, and on smaller touch screens all over the compound.

The most impressive feature is the giant retractable moon roof in the master bedroom where one can lie at night and gaze at the stars — all with the simple press of a button. Busch explains: "At

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night, the cool air falls in and you can light a fire." The massive bed holds their two giant bull terriers that sleep with the couple at night.

A striking picture, taken by his son at the age of 10, hangs in the master bathroom, but that is not to say he followed in his father's footsteps. "I told my son, if you want to starve be an artist — I never encourage him to stay in it." Now in his '20s, he is a certified Microsoft engineer.

Unique bathroom features include an onyx-slab shower floor with side drainage. This ensures one avoids standing in dirty water. And why should you when you're in a dual glass shower with canyon views? The smooth white limestone tub fills from the bottom so as not to distract the bather from the plasma screen TV — or view. In the custom cedar closet and adjacent dressing room, a built-in powder table faces a view of Point Dume, which is the perfect way to get dressed in the morning.

Busch's attention to detail is astounding, right down to the three little shelves on the side of the kitchen entry that are asymmetrically lined with various sizes of gem stones and rocks. It may seem eccentric, but Busch is also a gemologist and a third-generation jeweler. According to Busch, "The house is just elegance and simplicity. It's very functional. It was not set up to impress anybody, and it's everything that I wanted in a house — from the retractable roof to the pond running through the middle of the studios."

So what's next for this multi-tasking, talented Renaissance man who describes himself as a goofball? "I'd like to build a chapel. Like the (Mark) Rothko's Chapel in Houston. I will donate all my time setting it up and doing the blueprints. My concept is that it would be really cool and intimate with concrete and the wave images in metal on the walls. You would come in over floating water ponds and go out into sunken gardens. I'd like to build it in Santa Monica or Malibu in a public place that people could go." If Busch's other ventures are any indication of the success and public support — build it and they will come. □



## THE ART OF Douglas I. Busch

Recent projects include digital images of the ocean called *Waves*, and a book on Italian gardens.

