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WITH ITS MOUNTAINS, BEACHES, and wide-open spaces, Malibu attracts residents who want to be close to the city of Los Angeles, but not in it. However, even Eden had its serpent, and Malibu's drawbacks are mud slides and wildfires. "There is a lot of water on the property, and the structures are all made out of concrete," says Douglas Busch, an architect/photographer who, when he built his dream house on a 21-acre Malibu hilltop, took into account not only the topography but also the likelihood of an occasional natural disaster.

Each of the home's three structures has its own protective reservoir. A 110,000-gallon saltwater solar swimming pool is nestled next to the main house, and a 40,000-gallon, two-part koi pond with a waterfall surrounds the photography studio. "The look of the water is great," says Busch, "but it is also a shield."

Busch, who worked with Ansel Adams in the early 1970s, travels the world photographing castles and gardens for his own exhibits and books. He has a current exhibit in Germany and another in September featuring

photos of castles. "I actually prefer a mountain view to an ocean view," says Busch, explaining why he decided to face the saltwater pool toward the adjacent national park rather than toward the sea. "However," he adds, "we also didn't want to waste the view of the Pacific." A rooftop waterfall therefore flows from the home's second story to a lower-level rooftop infinity pool with a central concrete stone platform and stepping stones. Visible from the living room, the space serves as a bridge between the home's modern facade and the coastline below.

The property's other outdoor space is intended for entertaining. "After visiting Lotusland in Santa Barbara, I wanted to build a small amphitheater for guests," says Busch. "I forced the perspective toward the stage based on something I had seen at Rome's Borghese Gardens, where the space is subtly drawn inward." With structures occupying only three acres of their land, Busch and his wife still have 18 acres to enjoy as their private hiking trail and gardens.

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