

WAY OUT THERE

At a handcrafted compound in the high desert of California, sculptor *Dan John Anderson* happily merges life and work

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SCULPTOR DAN JOHN ANDERSON AND PHOTO PRODUCER GENEVIEVE DELLINGER AT HOME IN YUCCA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, WITH THEIR KIDS, USCHI (LEFT) AND MARS.

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THE FURNITURE AND CABINETS IN THE KITCHEN WERE DESIGNED BY ANDERSON, WHO WORKED WITH JOSEPH WILLIAMS ON THE CERAMIC BACKSPASH AND WITH STRAY CERAMICS ON THE DISHES. OPPOSITE A VINTAGE FIREPLACE IN THE SUNKEN LIVING ROOM SURROUNDED BY ANDERSON-DESIGNED SEATING AND DELLINGER-DESIGNED CUSHIONS AND UPHOLSTERY. THE RUGS ARE BY ANGELINA MARIA RODRIGUES-HODGE.



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azing out the window of Dan John Anderson and Genevieve Dellinger's house in Yucca Valley, California, you might think you're the only human being for miles. Out in the wash—those untouched swaths of public, desert land—coyotes and jackrabbits roam; creosote, a scraggly bush that perfumes the air after it rains, grows wild; and occasionally on weekends locals fly through sandy paths on four-wheelers and dirt bikes. "It's part of what drew me to the desert," says Anderson, a sculptor. "That openness, that psychological space. You feel more free."

He first visited the area in 2010, when his Portland-based art collective was invited by artist Andrea Zittel to do an installation at her nearby compound, A-Z West. He fell in love with the landscape. Zittel's experiments with living had become the crux of her practice, and that idea resonated with him. He moved to the high desert in 2012, landing a job with the sculptor Alma Allen soon after. Two years later and newly

coupled up with Dellinger, a photo producer, they snapped up a 900-square-foot Yucca Valley house built in 1959.

As their family grew (Mars was born in 2016, followed by Uschi in 2019) they transformed the home bit by bit. Working with a local framer, they doubled the square footage of the house, stretching out its original shape and opening it up with more windows to the east. They dug out and framed a groovy sunken living room, which wraps around a vintage fireplace. Out back they poured a concrete conversation pit and installed a pool.

At the edge of the wash, Anderson built an open-air studio, where piles of wood—pine, cedar, oak—lie in wait to become stools, tables, or sculptures. The process varies, but typically he roughs out a form using a chain saw, a lathe, and hand tools (grinders, chisels), making sure the wood is super dry before finishing and sealing with oil and wax. Sometimes a crack gets repaired with a butterfly joint. Sometimes a "patch" is purely aesthetic. "The raw material brings its own thing to the table, and you can see what that's doing and react to it," he explains of his intuitive process. The results, many of which are sold at Matter in New York City, are geometric yet organic, with smooth curves you want to touch. Beyond the walls of the studio, a few of them are installed like alien totems amid the landscape.

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ANDERSON AND DELLINGER WITH THEIR KIDS AND DOG, ROOKIE, IN THE STUDIO. OPPOSITE ANDERSON'S STUDIO LOOKS OUT ON THE EXPANSIVE WASH.



“SINCE BEING HERE I’VE REALLY GROWN,” says Anderson. “The quiet, the solitude, it’s more meditative and reflective.” This renovation was no small part of that. Raised in a log house his dad built in eastern Washington and deeply influenced by other handmade homes, he wanted to make something in that vernacular—an extension of himself and his family.

“We’ve been sitting on these slabs for a few years to let them season,” he says of the hunk of redwood that forms the family’s dining table. It came from a mill adjacent to Salmon Creek Farm, an artists’ residency in Northern California that he, Dellinger, and baby Mars visited a few years back. Anderson cut up redwood fence pickets to make the puzzle-piece backsplash that snakes through the kitchen. He poured the concrete island (on Uschi’s due date, he recalls) that anchors the space and clad cabinets in fir plywood from a local lumberyard. Pine, cedar, and oak—most of which Anderson sources from the nearby forests around Big Bear Lake—cover virtually every other surface. “I’m only interested in native woods,” he explains. “They’re not considered classic furniture wood. But there’s a warmth to them that I like having in this space.”

To add more warmth, he and Dellinger, who has a background in textile arts, collaborated on the softer elements of the home. Dye explorations yielded a rainbow of throw pillows, and standard sisal carpet tiles were hand-colored to form a graphic checkerboard. “We both really love this book *Woodstock Handmade Houses*,” explains Dellinger. “Houses where the interest is in the texture and the imperfection.”

As in many artists’ residences, collaborations abound—many of them with a tight-knit circle of creative people in the desert. Anderson worked with Tayler Straziuso of Stray Ceramics to make dishes, and Joseph Williams to bring his plans for a ceramic backsplash to life. Other pieces are the stuff of fruitful trades: An Andrea Zittel bowl sits on the kitchen island, and a painting by Block Shop cofounder Lily Stockman, who has a house nearby, hangs adjacent to the kitchen. A friend Anderson calls Uncle Steve, cofounder of The Station, a roadside depot in Joshua Tree, created the dazzling stained-glass window. (On Anderson’s first trip to Joshua Tree, Steve was installing a window at Zittel’s place.) It’s a community Anderson will tap into more with his latest project, the Way Way Space, a property he’s acquired nearby where he’ll expand his studio, open a shop (Way Way Goods), and build a venue for collaborative exhibitions and events (Way Way Presents).

The house is not quite finished—down the hallway things are still pretty raw. But Anderson and Dellinger like to take their time and observe what actually happens in the space: The fleeting 15 minutes when light reflects off the pool and dances on the ceiling. The way the sunrise looks when the kids are up at 4 a.m. How the place feels in the summer and the winter. The house, like everything else, will evolve.

“My practice is about adapting, being present,” Anderson explains. “I might have certain intentions, and the world or the material or the budget or the way the kids are feeling that day might have another idea.” ▀