

Inside: Brian Van Bower on Teamwork

WATER SHAPES

Design • Engineering • Construction

Personality on Parade

Color, water, whimsy —
and don't miss the hippo!

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Exotic Finesse

Modern watershaping
in a subtropical paradise

Plus:

Digging deep into the
numbers behind hydraulics



Floating on Sunshine

By Juan Roca

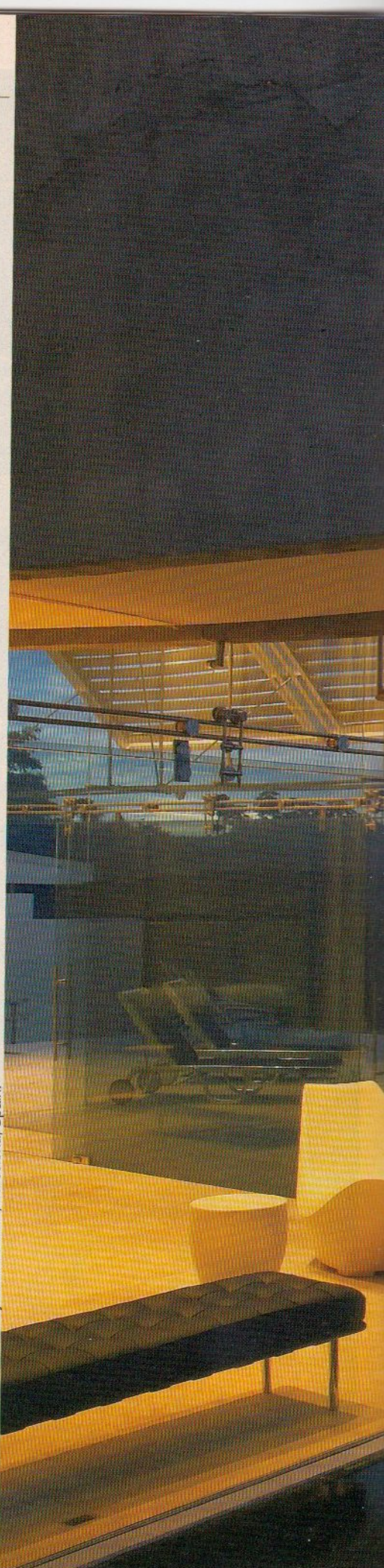
"I want the house to look as though it is floating on water."

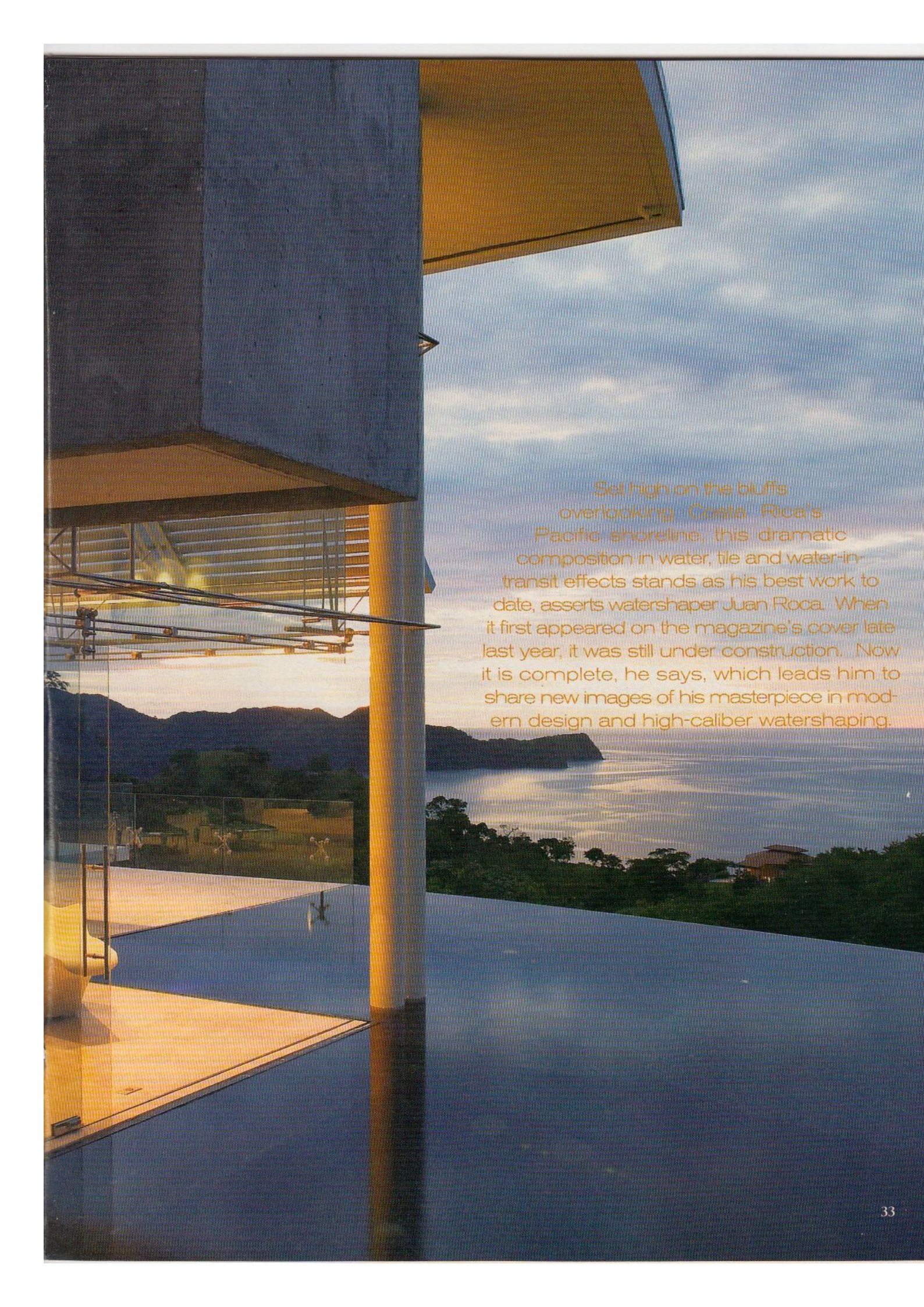
That was what architect Victor Canas told me when I was called out to visit this site on the northwestern coast of Costa Rica. It was a brilliant idea, certainly one that befitted the spectacular mountaintop setting and its breathtaking 360-degree views of rugged coastline, forest greenery and assorted perspectives to horizons in all directions.

I had the advantage in this case of already having built a much more ordinary swimming pool for the homeowner some 20 years ago – and the further edge of being the only watershaper in the country in the business of designing and building such ambitious projects. When the architect showed me an overhead view of the home's footprint and the space for the pool, I was inspired: I knew right away that this was going to be something special.

For his part, the client simply said that he wanted something wonderful and was willing to trust my judgment. I knew he was serious, given the soaring architecture of the home and its spare-no-expense approach to every detail. More than a year in the making, this pool is the most ambitious and beautiful I've tackled to date.

Photos by Jordi Miralles, Barcelona, Spain.





Set high on the bluffs overlooking Costa Rica's Pacific shoreline, this dramatic composition in water, tile and water-in-transit effects stands as his best work to date, asserts watershaper Juan Roca. When it first appeared on the magazine's cover late last year, it was still under construction. Now it is complete, he says, which leads him to share new images of his masterpiece in modern design and high-caliber watershaping.

The setting is ideal for a vanishing-edge application, with water-on-water and water-on-greenery views in every direction across the water-shape's broad reflective surface. And the fact that the water is shallow over much of that surface brings the glass tile into play in ways that lend a wonderful texture to the overall setting.



The High Life

As I explained in the December 2005 issue of *WaterShapes* ("Pure Vision," page 48), Costa Rica has experienced an upsurge in affluence in recent years. Within that sweeping trend, however, this particular home project sets a new standard for grandeur and opulence amid the Central American landscape.

As is true of many of the high-end projects I'm doing these days – especially those with similarly glorious ocean views – the vanishing edge is a prominent feature here. In this case, the approach has been taken

to something of an extreme: On the view side, the pool has a sweeping, 100-foot-long edge that stretches from one end of the house to the other.

The majority of the wet area is actually just six inches deep – a reflecting pool covered in more than 3,300 square feet of a rich, dark-colored tile mosaic in the Moroccan Desert pattern from Ocean-side Glasstile (Carlsbad, Calif.). A small, deep section is tucked up alongside a portion of the home's angled glass walls – an unusual configuration with a depth that is nearly indistinguishable from

most viewing angles.

The entire broad surface reflects both home and sky, providing an extraordinary intermingling of reflected light, gently rippling water and mirrored views of the home's architecture from a variety of exterior and interior spaces. I'm proud of the fact that I brought several ideas of my own to the design process, including the key decision of setting the elevation of the water at the same point as the interior floors of the home.

The water is separated from the home's glass panels by a narrow slot-overflow



feature that runs the entire length of the pool. This almost-invisible border was inspired by similar treatments I've seen in the work of the late, great architect John Lautner and his equally amazing protégé, Helena Arahúete.

This knife-edge effect, coupled with the sameness of levels between the interior and exterior spaces, allows for easy visual connections between the spaces and creates a fantastic intimacy between the living spaces and the shifting reflections outdoors. Now that it's finished, the effect is sublime and seems effortless,

but it required substantial support in hydraulic design and construction planning from Skip Phillips, co-founder of Genesis 3 and owner of Questar Pools & Spas of Escondido, Calif.

To ease passage to and from the "floating" home and provide clear access to great viewpoints, we installed wooden bridges and cantilevered decks over the water's surface at several points. All of these features are set off by glass panels and stainless steel mountings that integrate them as dynamic extensions of the home's interior.

Precise Simplicity

With hundreds of linear feet of water-in-transit edges – every inch crucial to the overall visual effect – our crews worked extraordinarily hard to establish all weirs with near-zero tolerances. It paid off: When we started the circulation system up for the first time, we made only a few minor adjustments to achieve uniformly wetted edges at extremely low flow rates.

To move the water over the vanishing edge and into the overflow slots, we installed three two-horsepower WhisperFlo pumps from Pentair Water Pool & Spa



The long views across the water are always spectacular no matter the vantage point or the time of day, especially when taken in from a point at which you can clearly see that the water level is the same as that of the floors inside the home. But if you get up close with a more vertical perspective and the right light, you can also see the access point to the pool-depth section of the watershape alongside the home.

(Sanford, N.C.). The water is filtered by three Pentair cartridge filters and is sanitized by a saltwater sanitizing system from AutoPilot (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.) combined with an ozone-generating system from DEL Ozone (San Luis Obispo, Calif.). At night, three PG 2000 fiber-optic illuminators from Pentair enhance the ambience.

The striking simplicity of the pool works with the geometric minimalism of the home's architecture to amplify the near-intoxicating natural beauty of the

on site to know that it can be difficult to keep your mind on what you're doing because the views are so compelling. The verdant coastline stretches literally as far the eye can see, all the way to Nicaragua in the northwest.

So spectacular were the results that I came to view photographing our work as part of the project itself, not as an afterthought. I took scores of pictures as the work unfolded, and things were far enough along last fall that I was able to include a representative shot in my December article. But the impression





The sense that the home is afloat is enhanced by wooden structures that reach out over the water in the form of a bridge that does actually span the water and by a section of deck that punctuates the vanishing edge to provide a uniquely inspiring viewpoint over watershape, forest, coastline and ocean.

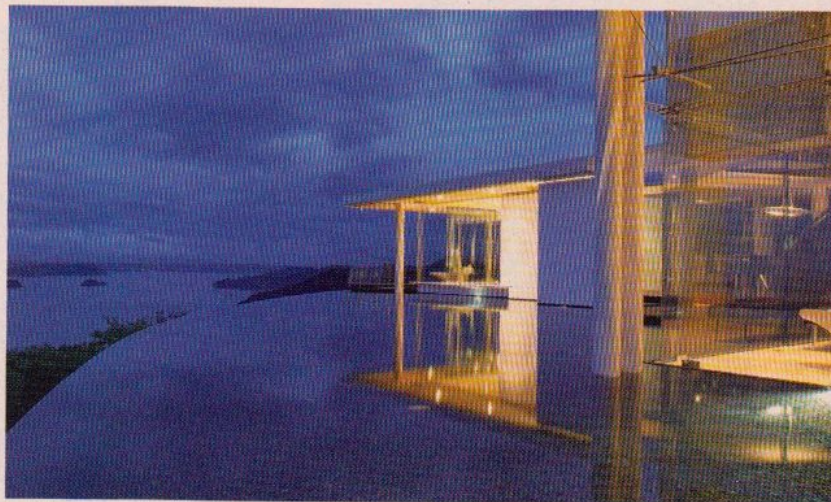




here aren't mine: They were taken by a professional – a remarkable artist who did a particularly wonderful job of capturing the subtle dance of light on the water that takes place as the sky changes during the day.

As you'll see in these images, as special as the pool may be, our success here is all about the way the water reflects the setting. In that sense, this project was never about the pool, but about what it could lend to its exquisite surroundings by serving as a mirror to that environment.

The way I see it, the pool is a giant looking-glass from which the home will rise forever, floating on an ever-changing canvas of light, color and bewitching beauty.





As day fades into evening, the setting undergoes a remarkable transition that truly brings out the best of the watershape's reflective qualities. This is when the flow across the interior and exterior surfaces and the knife-edge slots make their boldest contribution – but at the same time serve as little more than sidelights to the up-close reflections and the spectacular distant views.

