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## PROFILE

### BUILDING ON TRUST

*By prioritizing relationships, architect Farhad Ashofteh takes his clients in completely new lifestyle directions*

BY KATHRYN FREEMAN RATHBONE



For an architect's creative vision to come to fruition, it is vital that the builder understands the design down to its finest details. When it came to the Malcolm House, the design-build and construction company RG West worked closely with the architect to realize a harmonious finished product. "I'm involved from early on, which allows me to work through obstacles and help brainstorm alternatives if needed," says owner Kemal Ramezani, who is also a registered architect.

Trust—it's a somewhat odd characteristic to prioritize in the Los Angeles architecture scene, but it's one that architect Farhad Ashofteh staunchly supports. And to make sure he gets it right in each residential project that he designs, he starts by digging deeply into his clients' lives. "Architecture at its core is a service, and you have to really listen to your clients," he says. "Making them feel comfortable is key to expanding them to new design opportunities and ideas."

Ashofteh got his start in L.A. during the 1980s and early '90s while working for the Urban Innovations Group, the practicing office of UCLA's architecture school. UIG enabled Ashofteh to collaborate closely with famed architects like Charles Moore, Frank Gehry, and Frank Israel, and to engage Los Angeles through large public projects. His work for the SRO Housing Corporation stands out as his most satisfying UIG commission. "Through SRO, UIG became very involved in housing the homeless in Skid Row in downtown L.A.," Ashofteh says. "We renovated hundreds of units in single-occupancy hotels."

To make sure that the converted hotels would stand up to the needs of their occupants, the UIG team held town meetings to talk extensively with future residents. "It was really incredible," Ashofteh says. "Shelter is a basic human right, and working closely with the homeless teaches you how to find out what people truly need." After sussing out these details, UIG renovated the hotels to have basic private rooms and shared communal bathrooms, kitchens, rec rooms, and rooftop gardens so that residents would feel comfortable at home. Ashofteh counts the project as a solid success, and when UIG disbanded in 1993, he founded his private practice on the principle that "space is the container of life."

This principle is clearly visible in two of his most recent residential projects. Known as the Malcolm House and the Wilshire Penthouse, both homes sit in Westwood, an L.A. neighborhood that mixes 1920s ranches with modern high-rises. Each home uses the diverse conditions as a design advantage; they also represent completely new lifestyles for both of their owners. Ashofteh attributes his clients' willingness to live in modern homes to the close relationships he has built with both homeowners. "The homes are very modern and completely different from the styles of both owners' previous homes," he says. "But because I really came to know them and showed them the design opportunities, they were excited to expand their design knowledge and try a different lifestyle."

The streamlined Malcolm House looks out over blocks of both single-family homes and a high-rise landscape, so Ashofteh raised its first floor to prioritize views from the upper floor bedrooms. The home's owners wanted a house built for entertainment, and its completely open plan—topped off with a 600-square-foot roof deck—certainly fulfills that need. Look up from the spacious backyard toward the high-rises two blocks away, and the Wilshire Penthouse is visible. "Before we renovated it, it was a nice unit but it didn't have any style," Ashofteh says of the project. "It was a unit that had various beams without rhyme or reason. We took out everything we could—beams, ducts, etc.—to maximize the space and gain ceiling height. It really opened up the plan." As a finishing touch, the architect even chose the furnishings for both the Malcolm House and Wilshire Penthouse himself.

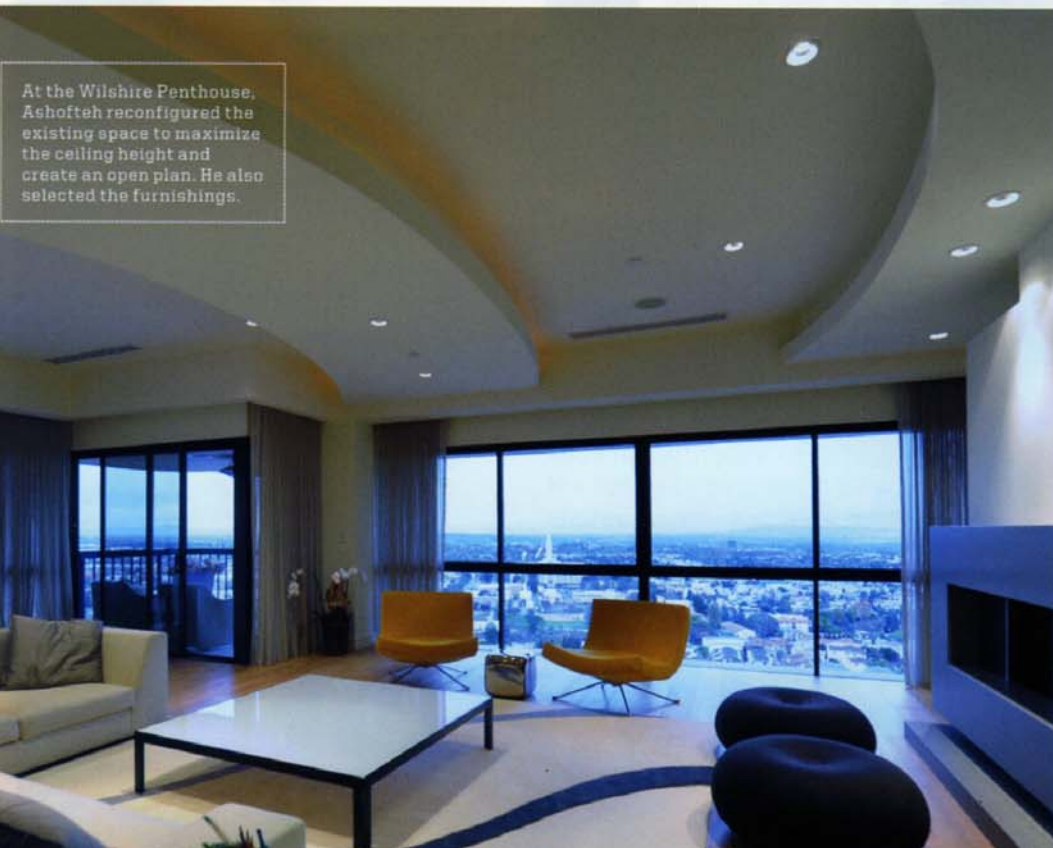
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Seen here at his Los Angeles studio, architect Farhad Ashofteh builds modern residences and strong relationships with his clients.







At the Wilshire Penthouse, Ashofteh reconfigured the existing space to maximize the ceiling height and create an open plan. He also selected the furnishings.

“Architecture at its core is a service, and you have to really listen to your clients.”

- FARHAD ASHOFTTEH



The exterior of the Malcolm House reflects its diverse architectural surroundings. Inside, the house is built for entertainment with an open floor plan and large roof deck.



"Farhad first called me in 2008 with some questions about using metal on some upcoming projects," says Michael Sanford, president of Pan Pacific Metals, the

company in charge of the metal roofing and siding for the Malcolm House project. "This led to four separate projects where we worked out the details unique to each design."

(CONTINUED) His clients' willingness to expand their understanding of what looks and feels like "home" stems from the bonds that Ashofteh builds with them. "We become parts of each other's lives; we become friends," he says. And to him, it's this kind of deep relationship building

that's one of architecture's best perks. "Architecture is about building things. It's personal, and each situation is different. I get to get into peoples' lives and stay with them. I love what I do." ❧