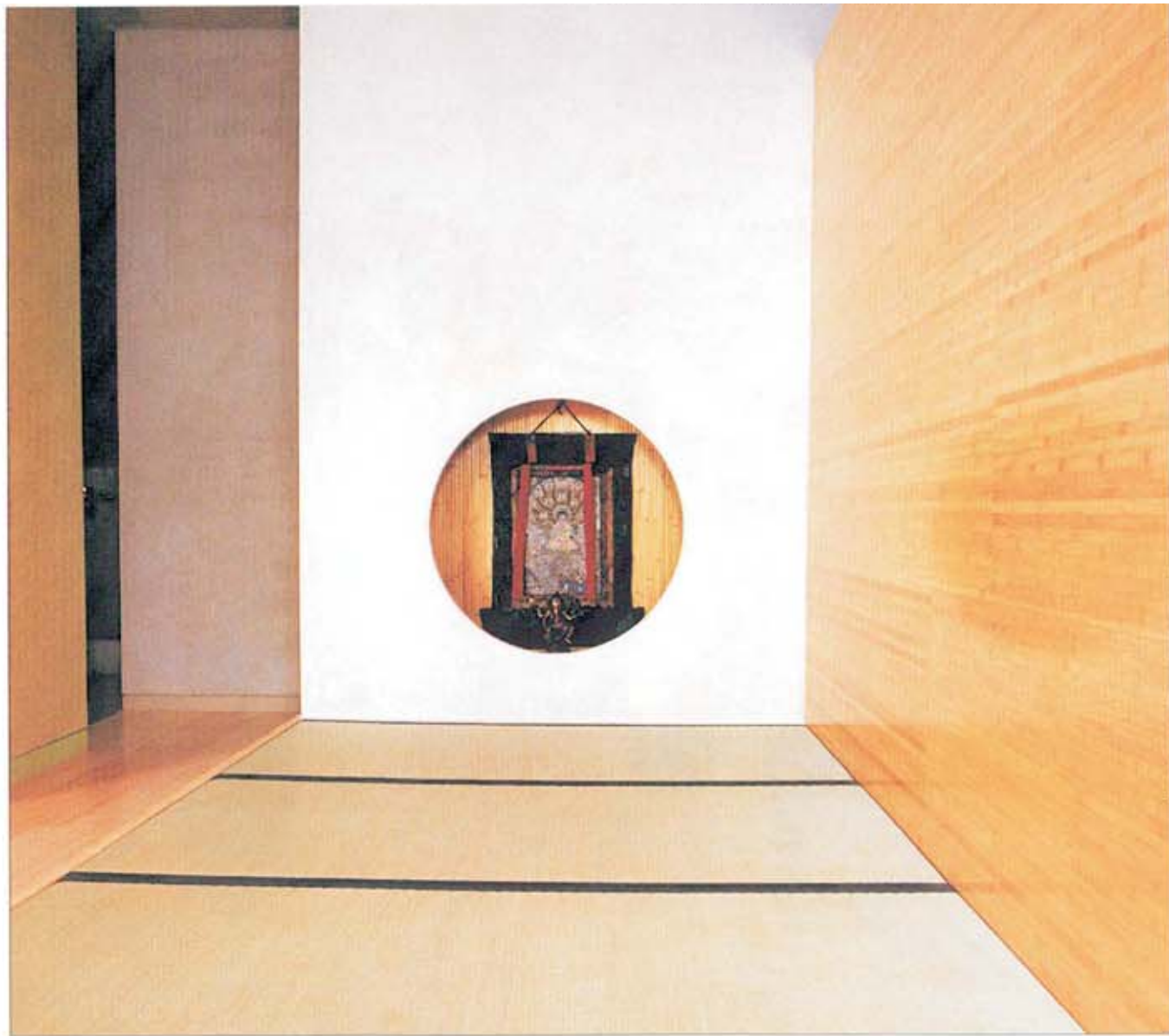


Award-winning designer  
Fu Tung Cheng imbues  
a San Francisco loft  
with minimalist chic

# MODERN Approach

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Once guests step into this South-of-Market penthouse in San Francisco, they know that they have left behind the cliché territory of typical home design and entered another realm. The incredible amount of light streaming in from wall-length windows and skylights alone tells visitors they are in another space altogether, with a landscape and state of mind all its own. And it is refreshing.

Fu Tung Cheng, principal of Berkeley-based Cheng Design, is the genius behind this home and all its delights. Known for his much-lauded and original applications of industrial materials in contemporary environments, Cheng was approached by the penthouse's homeowner to create a complete design application for her new home. After the publication and success of his book *Concrete Countertops*, Cheng has found that people increasingly think of him only as a kitchen or bath designer, when in reality, his designs work much better and make more sense in a complete home environment.

The penthouse owner is a student of architecture and was committed to a lucid theme throughout her home. "There were

*Preceding Overleaf:* Cheng had the living room raised six inches above the rest of house, with the floor sloping up like a ramp. Two fireplaces face each other on either side of the main seating area, one sunken below the ground level in a cozy alcove, and the other raised up on a concrete monolith. Floor-to-ceiling windows lead out to the balcony and the cityscape beyond. The living room floor is two-and-a-half inches of thick troweled concrete with copper strips inlaid to hide the crack control lines in the concrete. All of the floors in the house are heated via hydro-thermal heating systems.

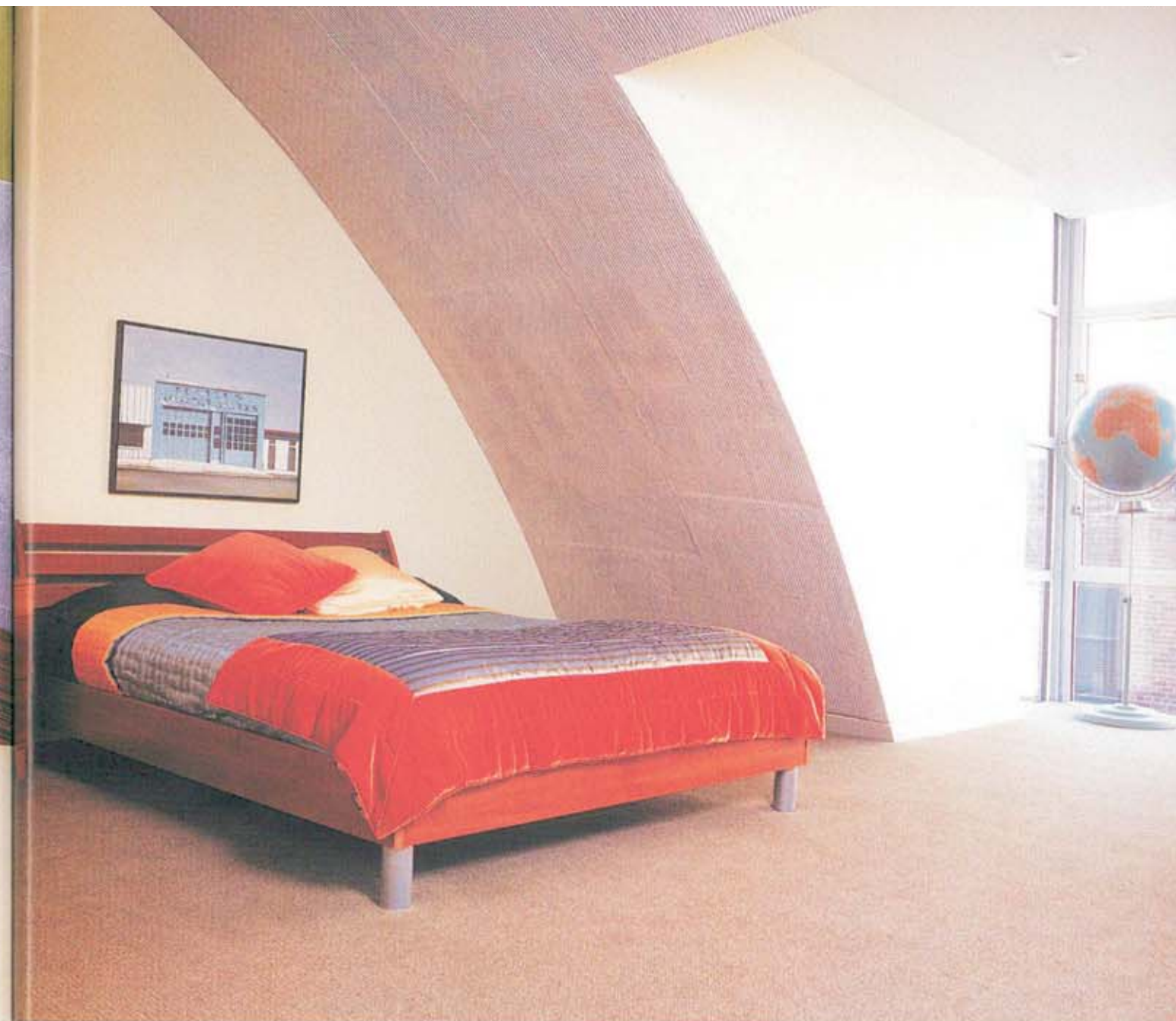
*Above:* Cheng created an alcove within the master bedroom specifically for the homeowner's yoga practice. He cut a Chinese moon door into the far wall and lined the inside in bamboo. Tatami mats line the floor, which is raised a few inches from the rest of the room.



*Left:* The table in the kitchen is an actual surfboard by Stretch of Stretch Boards in Santa Cruz, lending a whimsical, Californian feel to the sun-filled space. "It's important to me to work with local artisans to apply their work to practical solutions," says Cheng. He sunk the board directly into the concrete walls, which were created to look like an extension of the exterior walls of the house.

*Below:* The kitchen is a professional cook's dream, complete with what Cheng calls "the Lamborghini of hoods" over the stove. The hand-made hood, called Taidan, is part of a line of products manufactured by Cheng design. Crackle-glaze tile makes up the wall behind the sink, while the cabinets, far wall, and pantry door are made from Ply-Boo, bamboo plywood made in South San Francisco. Cheng purposely chose bamboo for its subtle color, smooth grain, and environmental benefit as a renewable resource for many surfaces throughout the house. The floors in the kitchen are made from hand-ground concrete.





*Above:* Cheng worked with Klein Plasterers to coat the curved ceilings, designed by building architect Jim Jennings, in integral color plaster and then hand-comb it to give a consistent, corduroy-like textured look throughout the house. "I love working with craftsmen to get an original look," he says.

*Above Left:* The master bathroom is a large open space, so Cheng sought to give it a spa-like feel to keep it relaxing without being overwhelming. The piece de resistance (not shown) is the vanity, made of a monolithic piece of concrete. Crackle-glaze tile is on the walls and goes right on into the tub, so, says Cheng, "You can steep like tea in a crackle-glaze teapot/tub." Duckboards made from sustainable hardwoods line the bath.

*Below Left:* The master bedroom is plastered in a soft celadon green formulated by Cheng specifically for this room. The floors are bamboo plywood.

no compromises," says Cheng. "She was as close to a perfect client as you can get. Aesthetically, our tastes and proclivities were very much the same and she allowed me to do pretty much what I wanted with each space." The journey through this serene and happy home begins not straight from the elevator, as with many top-floor apartments, but through a thick polyurethane threshold, complete with toy divers frozen in their liquid wall like fossils in amber, bringing an instant smile to all who enter, an important part of Cheng's design philosophy. "I like to think what I do is the fruit of modern architecture, the detailing, the little whimsical things that I do are not decoration, but the flowering that results from minimalist designs." ■