

URUGUAY

ARGENTINA

CHINA

MEXICO

TAIWAN

USA

COLOMBIA

ITALY

Photographer Mirjam Bleeker and stylist and designer Frank Visser have travelled around the world together many times, often without a fixed plan, seeking adventure and discovering beautiful houses. Like their previous book *At the Ocean*, which was published two years ago, *Close to Nature* is an ode to homes with a personal touch, which have been designed with profound respect for the nature that surrounds them, and to the inspiring people who have opened their doors to them. Homes that are off the road, in every sense of the word. Whether off the beaten path, in remote destinations or in the city.

CLOSE TO NATURE

LUSTER

CLOSE TO

INSPIRING HOUSES OFF THE ROAD

NATURE

LUSTER

MIRJAM BLEEKER & FRANK VISSER

THE STORY

MIRJAM BLEEKER & FRANK VISSER

Mirjam and Frank's story started about twenty years ago. Their first trip together was to Latin America, where they spent three months exploring the continent. They soon discovered that they shared the same sense of style and adventure. They both were inspired by beautiful chance finds and things that were a bit rough around the edges.

Since then, they have travelled together many times, to destinations around the world. Not much has changed since that first trip. Every couple of months they feel the urge to pick up and go, choosing a place that interests or intrigues them, without making any specific plans.

Like their previous book *At the Ocean*, which was published two years ago, *Close to Nature* is an ode to homes with a personal touch, which have been designed with profound respect for the nature that surrounds them, and to the inspiring people who have opened their doors to them. It is a record of Mirjam and Frank's travels together, recently and longer ago: from a stark, concrete refuge for artists on the Mexican coastline, to a lived-in butcher's shop in Argentina. An artist's summer home on a remote island in the Mediterranean, and a horse ranch in the United States. A laboratory of the senses in the forests above Taipei and a lifestyle shop in Uruguay. What all these houses have in common is that nature and the surrounding environment strongly influence the way in which the residents experience and enjoy their homes.

During their journey, Frank and Mirjam discovered houses that were entirely made out of bamboo, from the rural Chinese countryside all the way around the world to one of the oldest boroughs of the Colombian capital of Bogotá. Other houses were completely exposed to the elements, without windows and doors, with nature literally invading the house in some cases. Modern, architectural spaces as well as old houses, which prospered again as a result of their new occupants, and their respect for the history and tradition of these dwellings. Homes that are off the road, in every sense of the world. Whether off the beaten path, in remote destinations or in the city.

Above all, *Close to Nature* is an ode to the unique collaboration and friendship of two people who enjoy each other's company and that of the people they meet on their travels.





WHERE?

Their weekend home in Santa Catarina is an hour's drive to the south of Mexico City. This mid-century modernist bungalow would not look out of place in Palm Springs, California.

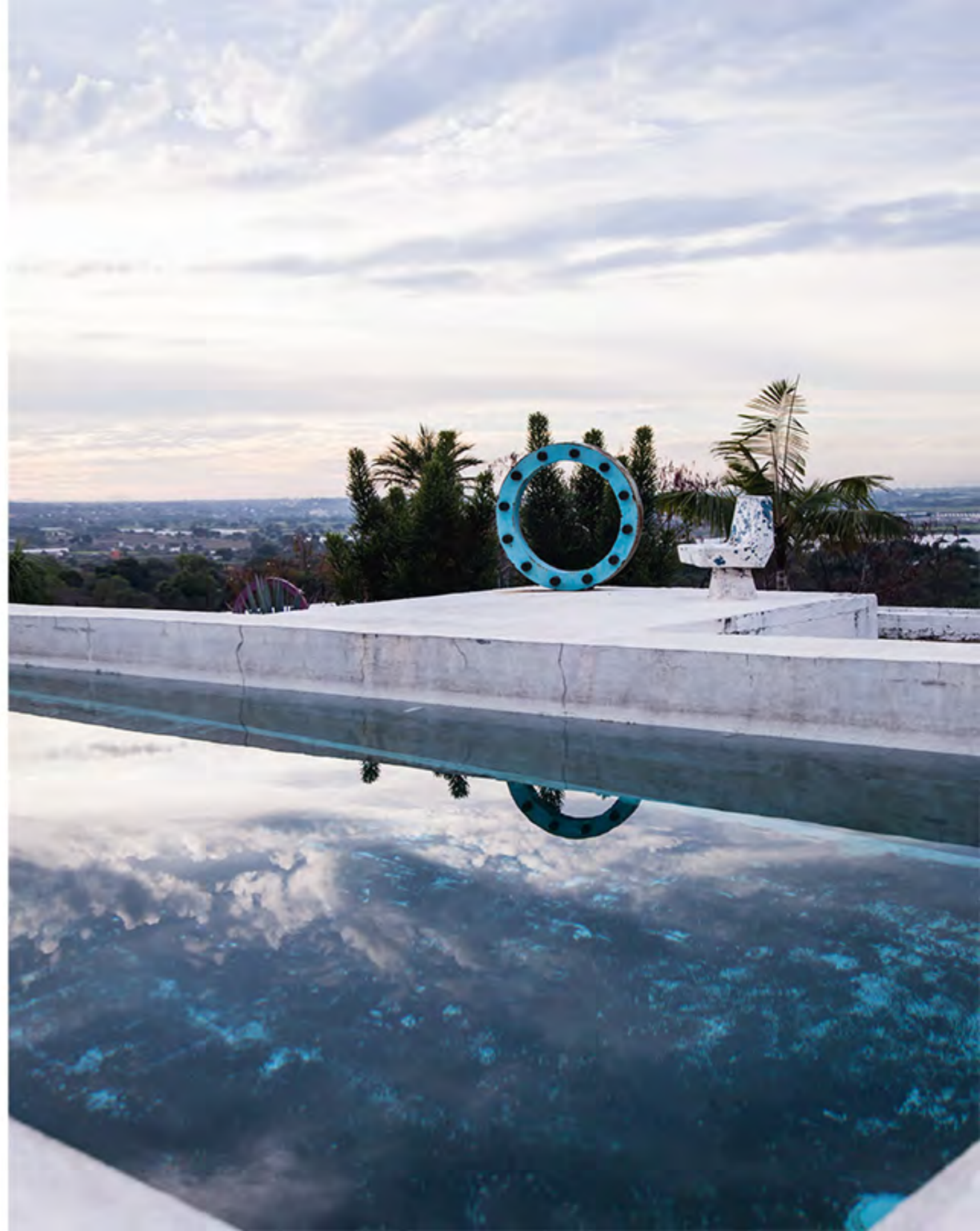
They built the house six years ago, using the modernist style as a starting point but also drawing on other sources such as Le Corbusier, the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Petra and the Aztec temples of ancient Mexico. Here they felt that they could build their dream project without compromising.

The house is completely open to the elements. It only has one door that can be locked, the main entrance from the street. There are no other doors or windows. Several individual thick walls are covered with a flat concrete roof. The open areas of varying sizes, in between the walls, resemble gates through which you enter and leave and draw the light into the rooms. The indoors blends in marvellously with the outdoors, compelling you to take in the majestic scenery all around the house.

WHO?

Emmanuel Picault and Ludwig Godefroy are French but met in Mexico. Emmanuel is an interior designer and decorator who moved there many years ago. After studying architecture and doing an internship at OMA in Rotterdam, Ludwig felt he was ready for something different. He decided to study Spanish in Mexico, where he ran into Emmanuel. One thing came from another and now they run a business together, called 'Chic by Accident'. They both like bold, clean architecture with a dramatic twist.

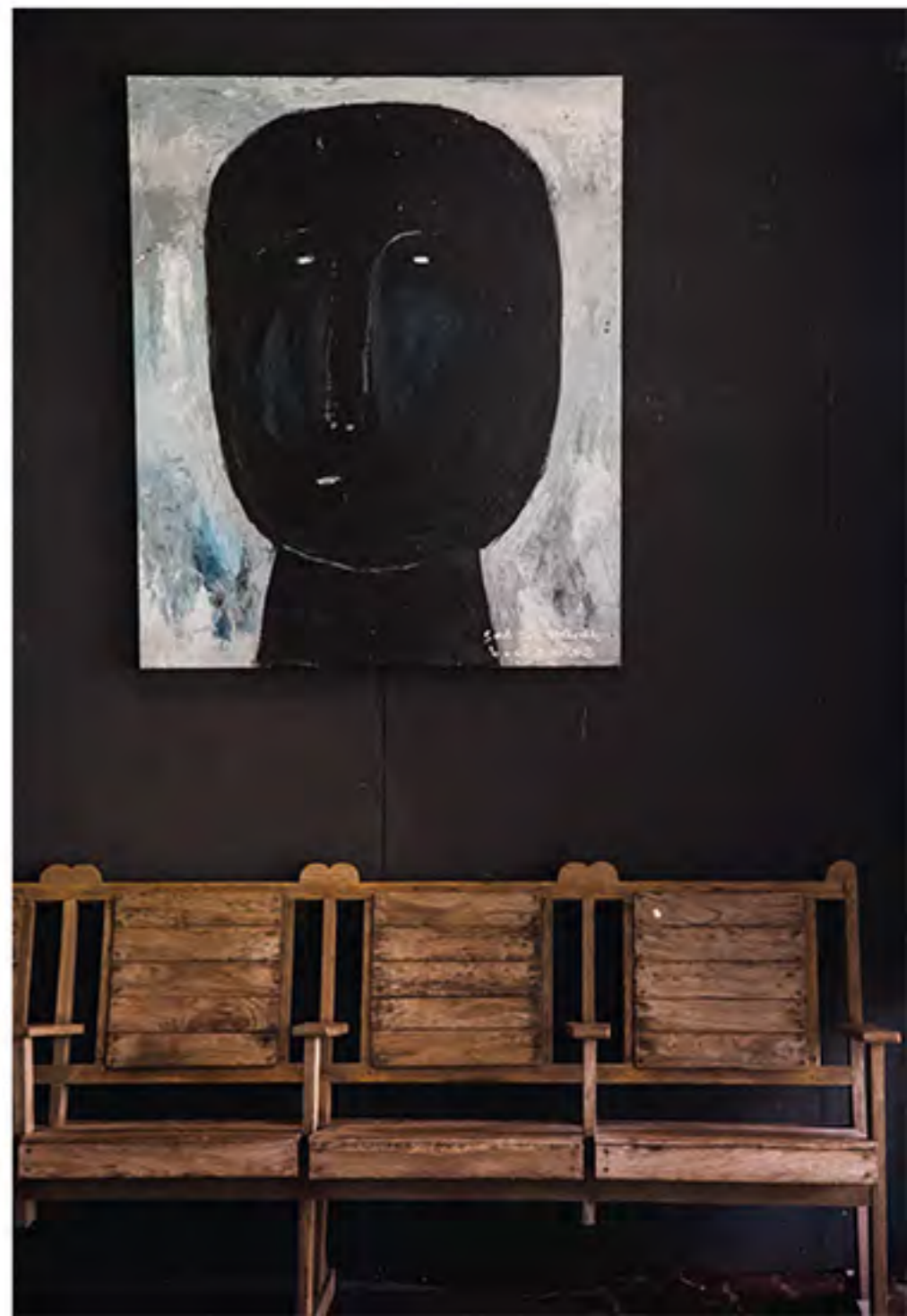


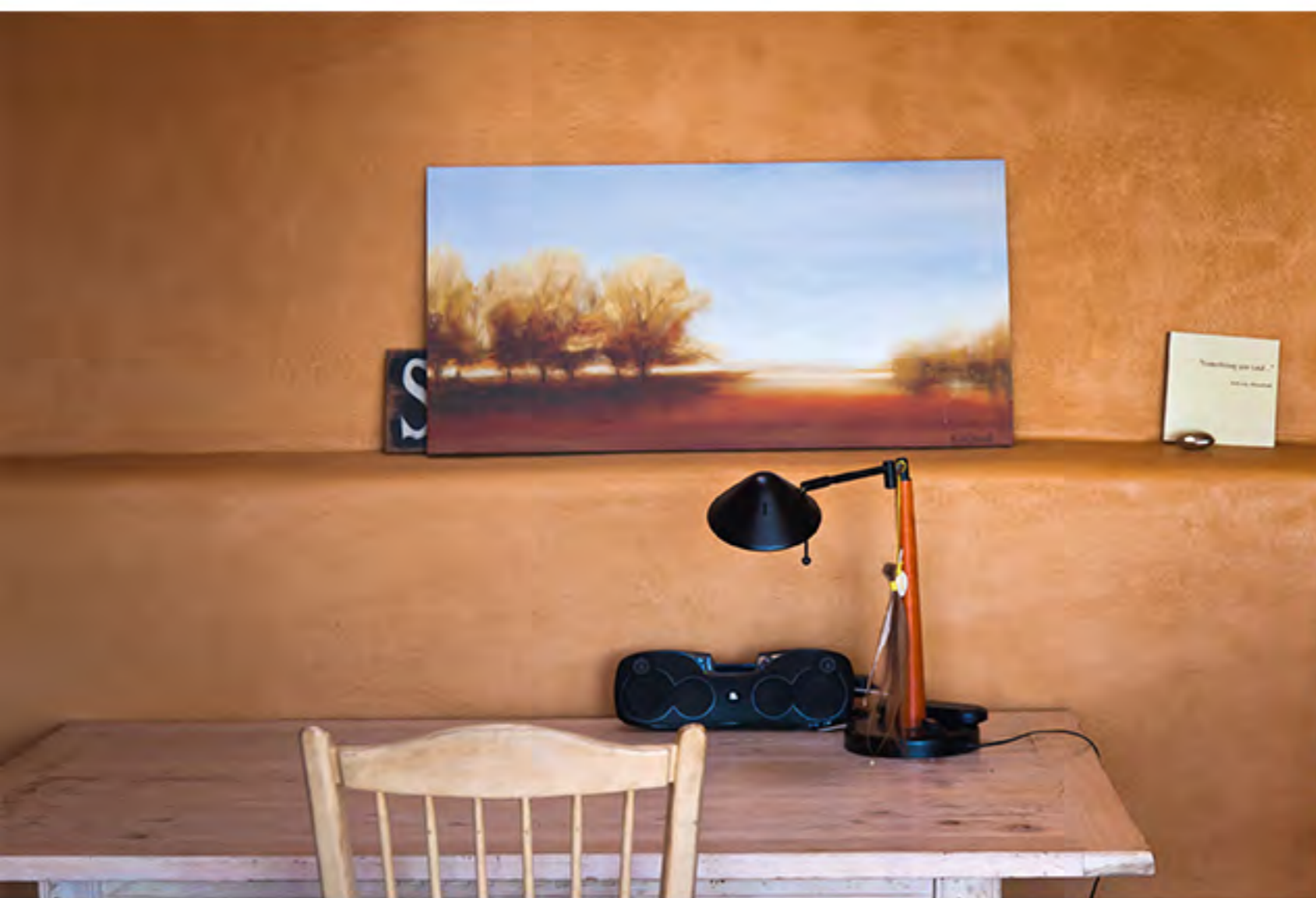


CHINA









But Joost and Erica have no choice given the lack of utilities in the remote area where they live. As a result, their house is off the grid and must be as self-sufficient as possible. That is why their architect, Michael Reynolds, designed a simple structure, next to the stables and paddock. The house has been dug into a hill, and is surrounded on three sides by a thick wall of earth to protect it from the elements. The south-facing side is all windows and doors to maximise the light.

The inner walls are clad with adobe, a mixture of loam, sand, water and straw. Sunlight warms the house during the day, and the heat is released throughout the night. There are no sharp angles or corners here. Instead, the shapes are organic and round and the walls have warm, natural colours, such as terra cotta, a soft orange and the odd, bright dash of blue.







