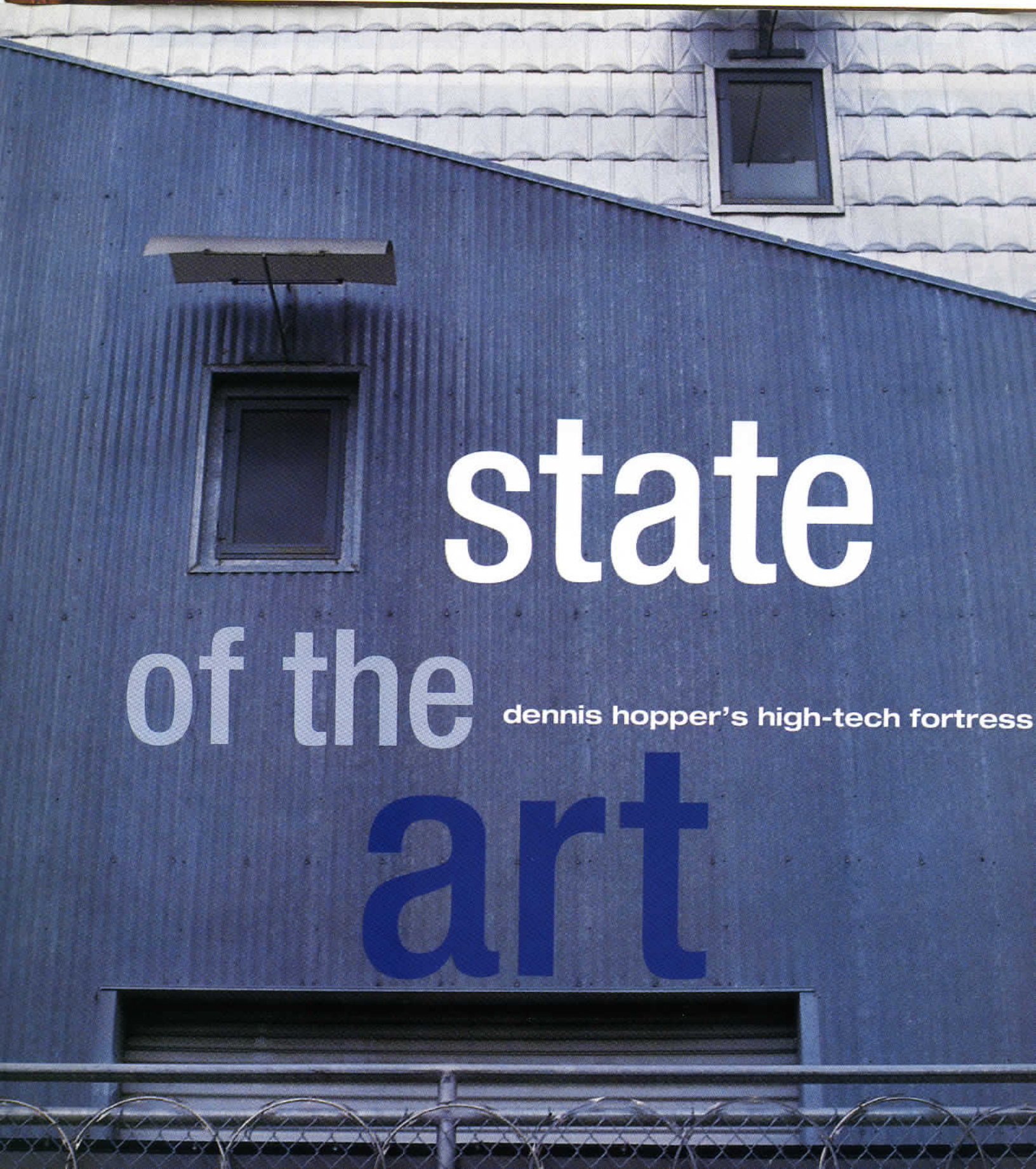


A LOOK AT MEL GIBSON'S WESTERN HIDEAWAY

# InStyle

a new magazine from **People**

A photograph of a blue corrugated metal building with several windows and a chain-link fence in the foreground. The building has a gabled roof with grey shingles. The text 'state of the art' is overlaid on the image.

# state of the art

dennis hopper's high-tech fortress

A man with short, graying hair and a serious expression is looking through a jagged, irregular hole in a blue corrugated metal wall. The wall has a textured, metallic appearance with visible rivets and sharp edges. The man is wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the man's face and the texture of the metal.

**venice beach houses a life—and its treasures** by michael walker

“It’s in there,” says Dennis Hopper’s housekeeper, directing a visitor to the loo. “Just hold down the handle a little.” Somehow, it’s reassuring that even in this dramatically stark and faux-industrial loft, one has to jiggle the handle.

But temperamental plumbing is the only thing typical about Hopper’s house in Venice, California. Sheathed in corrugated steel with an incongruous white picket fence, the house is on one of this beach community’s scuzziest blocks. Even more intriguing is the fact that Hopper’s skylit compound is essentially a gallery for the actor’s world-class collection of contemporary art. Built in 1986, the house is connected by a second-story gangway to a Frank Gehry–designed studio on the next lot, which Hopper once lived in and now uses as an office.

photographed by george holz



A downstairs performance space (inspired by Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio, where Hopper studied) leads to a sepulchral gallery hung with enormous canvases, including one by David Salle, who directed Hopper in the artist's feature film directorial debut, *Search and Destroy*. A roll-up industrial door, large enough so that trucks bearing more art can be backed directly into the space, separates the gallery from the drive-in garage where Hopper's black Mercedes sedan looms like a piece of machine-age sculpture.

"It's like a big art bar," says the 59-year-old Hopper, sinking into a black leather sofa in the upstairs living area. To his left is a Julian Schnabel, along with Warhols of Marilyn and Mao, and in the background the furious scream of a blow-dryer belonging to girlfriend Victoria Duffy. Very *Blue Velvet*. (Duffy now lives with Hopper and his 4-year-old son, Henry, from his fourth marriage, to dancer Katherine LaNasa.) To Hopper's right, next to the fireplace with its hearth made from shattered automobile glass, is a brooding Jean-Michel Basquiat. Looking around—more Schnabels. A Kenny Scharf. A Keith Haring. Even the bric-a-brac is invested with art history: By the fireplace, on a piece of signage, is the signature "Marcel Duchamp, Pasadena 1963." Hopper explains, "Duchamp had this retrospective in Pasadena, and he stayed at the Hotel Green. I saw this sign out front and got the wire cutters out of my car and stole it. And he signed it."

Since resurfacing from near oblivion in 1986 in *Blue Velvet*, Hopper has been frenetically



"I always thought this place looked like a factory, but in point of fact everyone out there knows I live here," says iconoclast Hopper. (Who else, for example, could drive their car directly off the street and into their home?) "I once heard a woman say, 'You don't want to go in there! A crazy man lives in there—that Frank Booth, the *Blue Velvet* guy!' " Hopper's Venice beach pad—described by its architect Brian Murphy as "paramilitary suburban"—houses a staggering collection of modern art, including Keith Haring's 1985 canvas *Moses and the Burning Bush* (opposite). A Bertoia chair is just big enough for the actor and his girlfriend





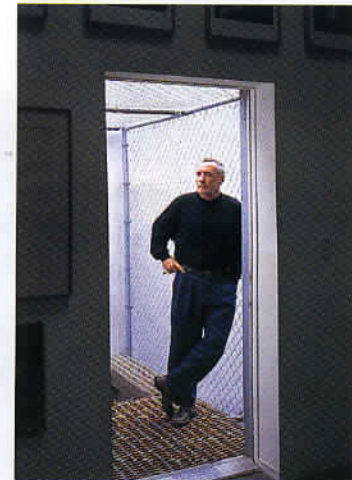


In the upstairs living area (left), Hopper reviews his own photographs amid a Basquiat portrait and a Scharf silk screen. His black-and-white work from the sixties, including shots of Dylan, Paul Newman, and Jane Fonda's wedding to Roger Vadim, shares an office with a teddy bear made by Hopper's mother.



disproving Fitzgerald's dictum that there are no second acts in American lives. He received an Oscar nomination that same year for *Hoosiers*, and subsequently directed *Colors* (1988) and *The Hot Spot* (1990). More recently were acclaimed performances in *True Romance* and in last summer's bomb-on-a-bus thriller *Speed*. This month he plays a grandiose evangelist on a mission to find land on a planet inundated with water in *Waterworld*, Kevin Costner's \$175 million epic shot in Hawaii. Tomorrow, Hopper leaves for New York to appear in a movie, directed by Schnabel and featuring David Bowie (as Andy Warhol), about the tumultuous life of artist and addict Jean-Michel Basquiat. "I don't know why I live here, really. Last year I think I was here a month and a half—I've just been on location the whole time," says Hopper.

A respected painter and photographer himself, Hopper has been collecting since the early sixties. Twice before, he assembled formidable collections but lost them: once to the IRS, the other in his 1969 divorce from Brooke Hayward. "I had Warhol, Rauschenberg, Johns, Oldenburg, most of the pop artists. She sold them and made about half a million dollars. That collection today would be worth about \$30 to \$40 million, maybe." These days, with his neatly trimmed hair, black turtleneck and gray-rimmed glasses, he looks more a Soho gallery owner than an actor-director with four divorces, a dope-and-booze-addled past (he's been sober for eight years), and a reputation for playing edge-dwelling eccentrics like *Blue Velvet*'s Frank Booth. In fact, Hopper's personal style may be a work in progress. Neighbor artist Laddie Dill, who has known Hopper for 25 years, says that "when Dennis first came to Venice he used to wear suits all the time—real suits, like tweed suits that made



When Brian Murphy built the house in 1986, Hopper instructed the architect to think in unconventional terms. “I wanted a place that had no doors except for the bathrooms,” says Hopper. But for those times when the actor needed escape or to make a private phone call, he turned the downstairs garage (top left and opposite) into something of a club room, complete with its own wet bar. Hopper’s kitchen (bottom left) is all cool surfaces and brushed aluminum. “Whether I’m right, wrong, good or bad,” he says, surveying the austere modern surroundings, “this is an aesthetic that I like and understand.”

you want to scratch—and he was driving a Cadillac Seville. He’s loosened up a little bit since.”

Hopper’s home is also a study in contradictions: a space filled with the work of some of the late 20th century’s most celebrated artists located in one of the most dangerous and gang-infested neighborhoods in Los Angeles. “This is the only place during the L.A. riots where they burned down houses,” Hopper says. “But I enjoy living here. I have a lot of artist friends who live here: Chuck Arnoldi lives right down at the corner. Ed Ruscha has a studio next to Laddie.”

“We all know Dennis as an actor,” says Dill, “but down here he’s just one of the Venice artists. He’s a great neighbor. He could probably live wherever he wants, but he chooses here. We’re glad.”

“When I came back to Los Angeles from New Mexico [in the seventies], I’d always had fond memories of Venice,” Hopper explains. “There were coffeehouses and poetry readings and weird stuff going









With the exception of Los Angeles artist John Valadez's commanding triptych, less is more in Hopper's bedroom (left). "Dennis doesn't leave a lot of stuff just *sitting* around," says Robin Berg, who supervises Hopper's film and video projects, many of which are shown in his downstairs screening room.



on. The rest of L.A. was very dreary to me. Also, I didn't have the money to move into Beverly Hills or Bel Air. I must say I enjoy going to a normal house and seeing a swimming pool and beautiful gardens and tennis courts and thinking, Gee, they really live well—I don't see any gangs here."

Hopper's home is basically two large, open floors connected by steel-tread stairs and ramps. "I wanted a place with no doors," he says. Los Angeles architect Brian Murphy, at Hopper's urging, used unadorned industrial materials throughout. Smashed glass is a recurring theme. A sliver of window next to the fireplace is deliberately fractured. Hopper offers a refreshingly mundane explanation: "People can see in." The menacing jagged textures are softened by toast-colored Berber carpets and the honey tones of the exposed wood ceiling, which rolls like the waves of the Pacific just a few blocks west. Evidence of everyday life—such as son Henry's kelly-green John Deere toy tractor and wagon, rakishly parked next to a million-dollar canvas—also humanizes the space.

Thanks no doubt to the home's fortresslike design, it has survived the riots as well as the Northridge earthquake, which devastated parts of Santa Monica. Hopper and Duffy were in bed when the shaking started. "I thought, If it goes on a little longer or up another gear, the whole place is going down. Stuff broke," he says, pointing to some glasses, "but the rest of the place just did this big sway.

"It rode well, man," Hopper declares, sounding, for just a moment, like Billy rhapsodizing about an especially boss chopper in *Easy Rider*. Then, Hopper, the putative curator and all-around nineties Renaissance guy, adds: "It was real scary. But not one painting fell off the wall." ©