

# OPEN HOUSE

TEXT: AMANDA HARLING

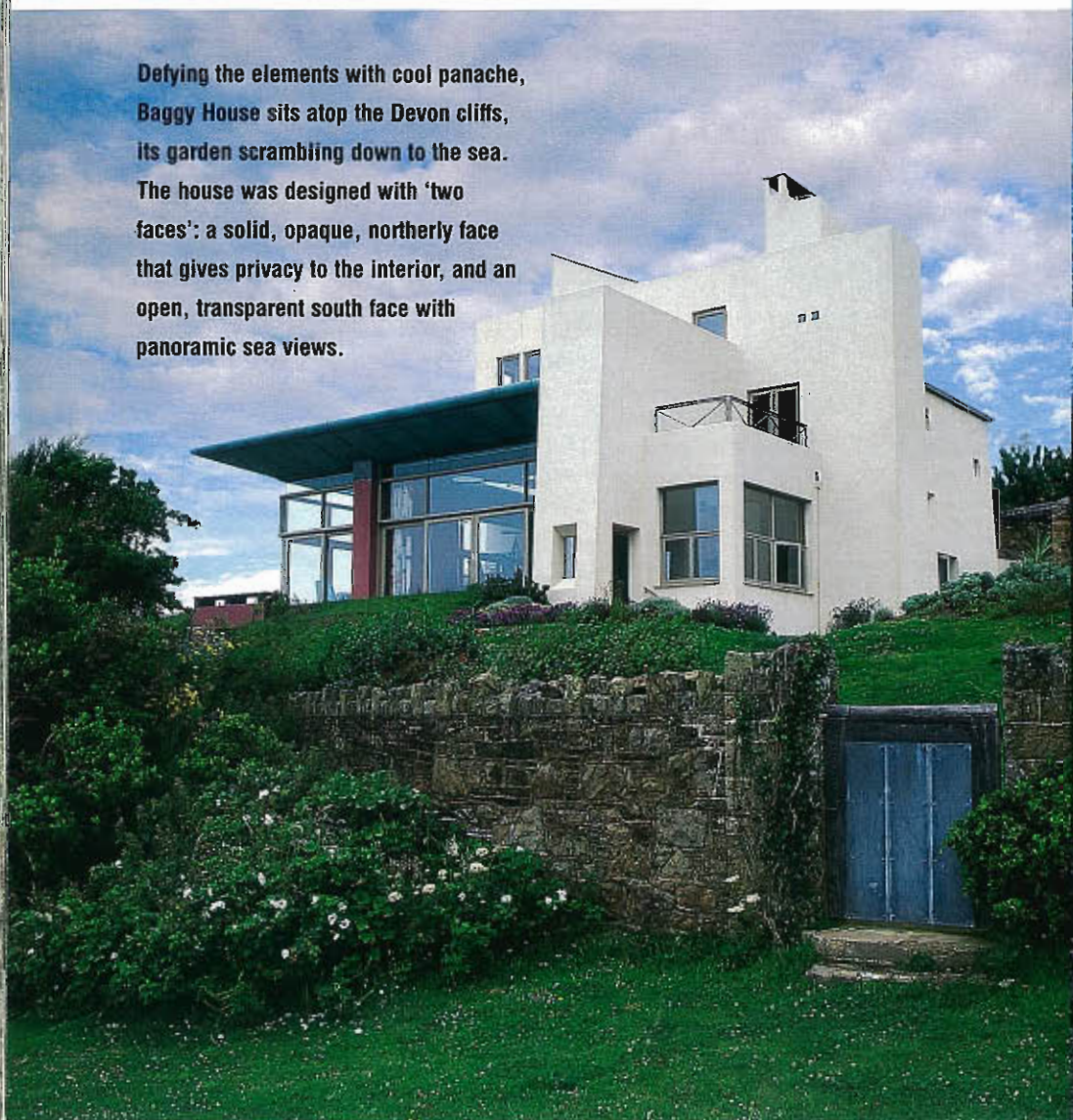
PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL

Wild weather is part of life on the rugged English coast. But Baggy House has a few tricks up its sleeve – so who cares about the weather?

On fine days the floor-to-ceiling wall of glass disappears below floor level at the touch of a button, bringing the outdoors in; in bad weather the sturdy glass provides ample protection from the elements. When the glass is lowered, the silk hangings framing the view are stowed away in concealed compartments built into the wall.



Defying the elements with cool panache, Baggie House sits atop the Devon cliffs, its garden scrambling down to the sea. The house was designed with 'two faces': a solid, opaque, northerly face that gives privacy to the interior, and an open, transparent south face with panoramic sea views.



In a country as densely populated as England, it is rare to come across a modern house that enjoys as expansive a site as Baggie House does. Situated at the end of a single-track road, the house is built on a rocky promontory overlooking the sea and miles of unspoilt north-Devon coastline.

When the owners, a family with three young children, bought the property in 1990, it was a much-extended Victorian house that had been used as a hotel for some years. At first they envisaged converting the building back into something along its original lines, but they soon realised that a new house designed for modern-day living would suit their informal lifestyle far better.

A London-based architectural partnership, Hudson Featherstone, was asked to design a six-bedroom house that would take advantage of the location's panoramic views. Despite the site's prominent position in a coastal preservation area, the local planning authority approved the proposal, which involved demolishing the

## coastal living

A pool garden was constructed in the existing rock garden at the lowest, most sheltered spot on the property. The pink wall allows only brief glimpses of the pool from an approaching path. Textured, precast concrete paving leads to the sunken pool, that has timber decks and a slate bridge stretching across the water.







The low hall, with its lead-clad ceiling, is dominated by a column of rough-hewn Dartmoor granite that supports the chimney above.



## coastal living

A copper-clad timber canopy unites the main living area, the dining area and the outside terraces with a convex sweep of ceiling. In the living room, a pair of huge Conran sofas and a shapely daybed, in bright blue, by Michael Young provide ample, comfortable seating.





**A deliciously inviting guest bathroom. The blond wood plays beautifully against the white glass of the basin, and the metal cladding on the bath and cabinet reflects the cloudy blue of the ceiling.**

old building – a significant local landmark – and replacing it with an unusual, contemporary structure.

The house is used as a retreat for weekends and school holidays, so it was essential that its design should provide warmth and shelter whatever the weather. 'This part of the coastline suffers horrendous gales, which can be quite an unnerving prospect for an architect,' says Anthony Hudson, who worked on the project with his partner, Sarah Featherstone.

'We had to find ways of manipulating the house so that it is protected from bad weather while remaining in direct contact with its surroundings.' The solution was simple: a floor-to-ceiling wall of glass that allows uninterrupted views of the sea. Nothing very radical about that, until one realises that this window can be made, at the press of a button, to disappear into a void below floor level. On fine days the living area fuses with the outside terrace and the spectacular vista beyond. During less clement weather, the glass wall acts as a protective screen without obscuring the view. Finding a manufacturer able to make a vast, vanishing window wasn't easy, but perseverance paid off. 'It was my idea, so I had to find a way of doing it,' Anthony says, 'because opening the interior of the house to the elements is what the site is about.'

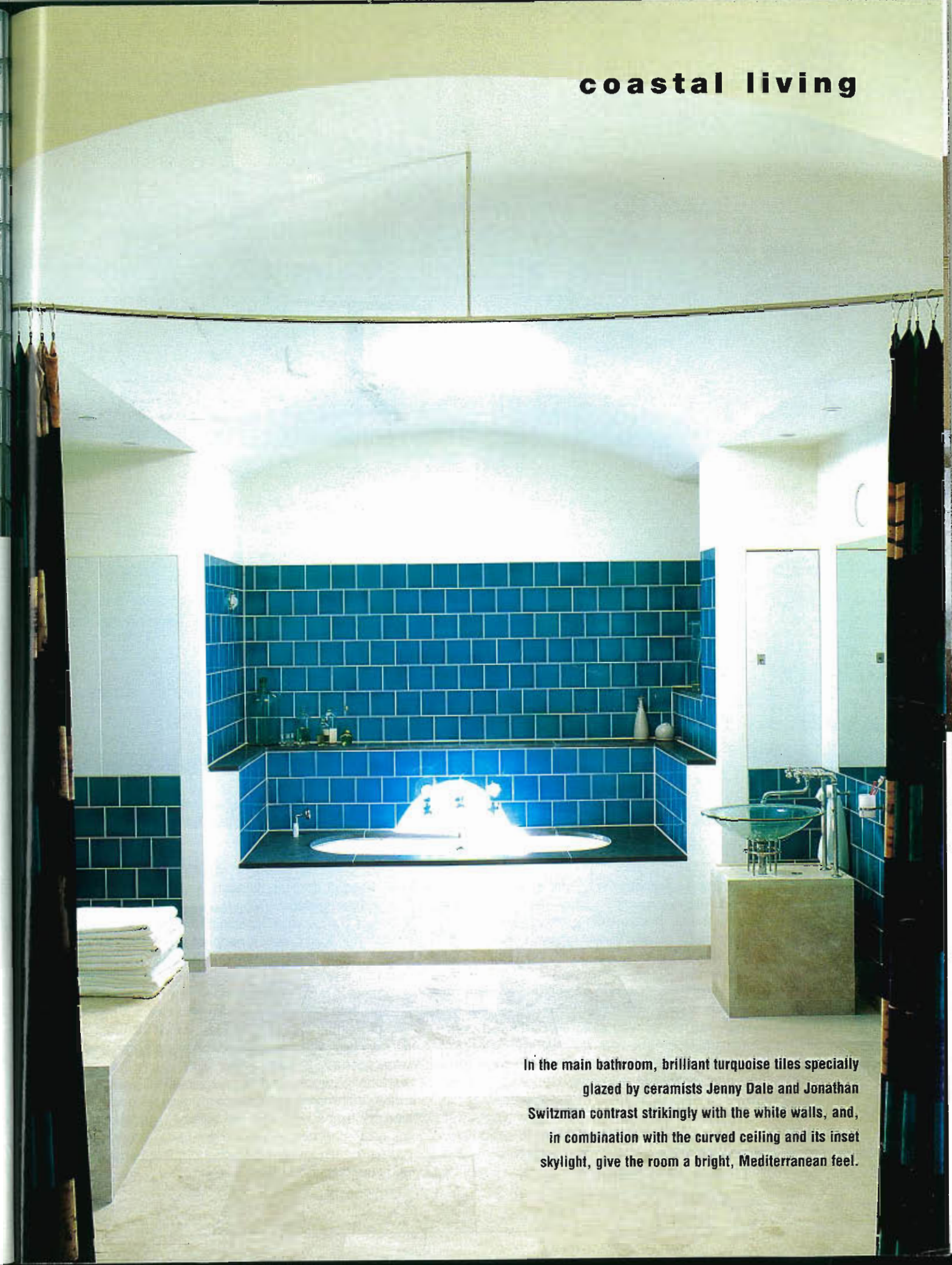
The slope of the site means that the house covers a number of different levels. There are two distinct areas – the open living, dining and kitchen space which

**A cloakroom near the front of the house is bathed in filtered light from a glass-brick wall. The sleek glass basin in yet another blue tone – this time a rich, deep shade – is brilliantly highlighted by the off-white walls.**

faces south towards the sea, and the enclosed private section which houses the family bedrooms and faces north into the hillside. Form and texture were used to emphasise different areas; rougher, darker materials in the more enclosed parts on the lower floors give way to smoother, lighter surfaces, such as glass and pale wood, in the living space.

The low hallway, with its slate-tiled floor, is dominated by a rough-hewn piece of Dartmoor granite. The monolith is based on the forms found in prehistoric burial chambers in this part of south-west England. 'It has a structural role supporting the chimney stack, but we used it to accentuate the feeling of gravity and solidity in the enclosed hall area, from which a flight of steps curves upwards towards the light, open-plan living area with its breathtaking views of the Atlantic Ocean,' says Anthony.

The raised living room, with its polished oak floor and unusual copper-clad canopy, shows how an uncompromisingly modern interior can be given a very traditional sense of comfort. 'We decided to make the living room the heart of the house,' says Anthony. Apart from the view, the focal point of the room is the fireplace. 'We felt it was integral to the idea of a country retreat,' Anthony explains. It is flanked by a pair of huge, cream-coloured Conran sofas. Oak planks fixed to the wall in horizontal layers are visual references to the rock strata in the cliffs to the north that shield the house.



**In the main bathroom, brilliant turquoise tiles specially glazed by ceramists Jenny Dale and Jonathan Switzman contrast strikingly with the white walls, and, in combination with the curved ceiling and its inset skylight, give the room a bright, Mediterranean feel.**





In the ultra-modern kitchen, the traditional Aga is used to heat the room in winter, and perfectly complements the clean lines of glass, wood and chrome. The hob and oven in the island unit are used in summer. An unexpected advantage of the glass worktop is that cookbooks can be slotted under the glass.

The dining area on the level below that is simply furnished. The dining table, specially designed for the house by the architects, has a thick, semi-opaque glass top made by Jeff Bell, supported on a curved wooden base. Handpainted silk hangings in blues and earthy reds by Louise Woodward frame the view from the wall-to-wall window, suspended from an unobtrusive wire. When the window is lowered, the hangings can be stowed away in concealed compartments built into the wall on either side of it.

The kitchen is next to the children's playroom, and is linked to the rest of the house by a short flight of steps. In it, a traditional Aga stove provides warmth on cold winter days, contrasting surprisingly well with the streamlined expanses of glass, wood and chrome. During the summer, the hob and oven in the island unit can be used instead.

The bedrooms are situated at the back of the house, facing inland, giving them protection from the worst of the weather. The main bedroom is serene and austere simple – a panel of pale wood serves as a backdrop for the bed, and the walls are painted a restful shade of deep blue. In the adjacent bathroom, the curved ceiling is inset with a single round skylight and the vivid turquoise wall tiles are evocative of warmer climes. The tiles, which contrast so successfully with the pristine whiteness of the walls, were specially glazed by ceramists Jenny Dale and Jonathan Switzman. The glass basin is mounted above a solid cube of limestone, giving the impression of being suspended. This clever juxtaposition of materials and textures is evident in the other bathrooms too, and, indeed, throughout this remarkable and superbly comfortable family home. □

# get the look

Open up your home and recreate the spectacular style of this coastal retreat



**1. Tiles** For glazed ceramic tiles in jewel colours, available in various sizes, contact Twine Tiles ☎ (021) 797-0006, Peter Kroll Designer Tiles ☎ (011) 455-4400, Union Tiles ☎ (011) 791-4924/5/6 or Italtile Centre ☎ (031) 337-8344. These tiles (10cm x 10cm) are R3,50 each from Twine Tiles.



**2. Copper cladding** Diamondek ☎ (021) 449-2250 will consider similar architectural projects.



**3. Wall colours** We matched the house colours to these Plascon colour samples (third row up, left to right), exterior pool wall: Ashley B3-4, wardrobe: Après-ski B38-4, curved kitchen counter: Lapis B28-4, curved wall: Tangerine A7-5. **4. Custom-made floor rugs** Husky Designer Carpets ☎ (021) 447-3940 and ☎ (011) 315-1510, Innovation ☎ (021) 423-2170; Floor Show ☎ (011) 402-3590, Kingdom Weavers ☎ (033) 234-4187 and Shuttle Weaving ☎ (033) 263-6818. **5. Chaise** Simon Curtis of Hot Box Design Collective ☎ (021) 423-9286 will undertake commissions for similar furniture. **6. Telescope** For the neighbourhood spy, keen stargazer, wildlife spotter or bird-watcher, the Yozora telescope on tripod base (30-90 x 60) is R899 from Cameraland ☎ (021) 423-4150, ☎ (011) 884-8036, or try Maritime Antiques ☎ (021) 786-1309 or 425-3041, Pretty Ancient Antiques ☎ (031) 304-9624 and The Colonial Trading Co ☎ (031) 312-5050.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SUZY LAKE, ANDREAS VON ENSIEDEL



The combination of pale wooden panelling behind the bed, deep blue walls and a minimum of detail gives the bedroom a restful, serene air.

• Architects: Hudson Featherstone ☎ (0944 171) 490-5656, fax (0944 171) 490-5757.

