

When architect Olle Lundberg bought a cabin in Sonoma, two hours north of San Francisco, he wanted to create a "warehouse in the woods". He achieved his dream by designing an open-plan space made from salvaged materials, such as the double-story windows recovered from a building site. →

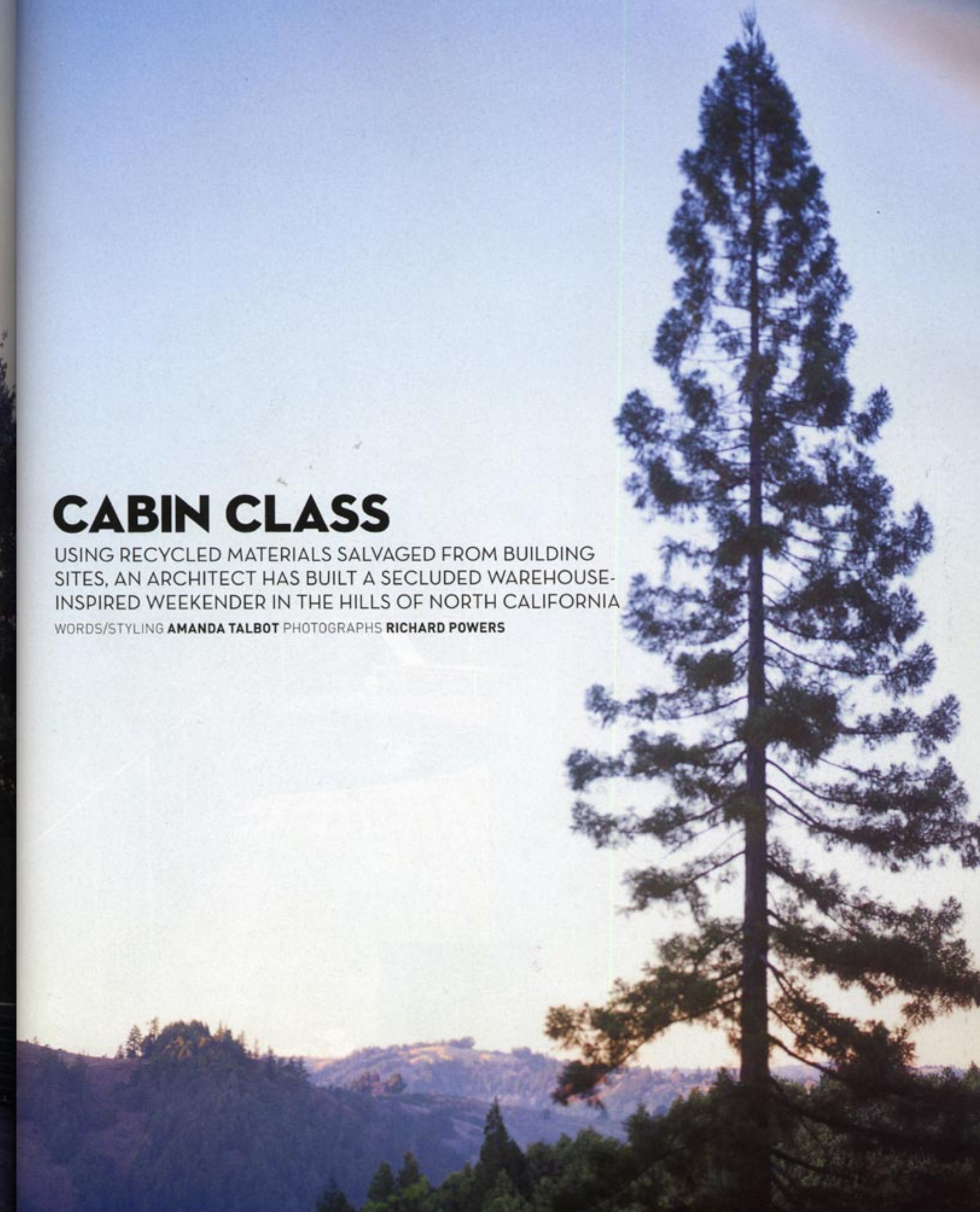


CABIN CLASS

USING RECYCLED MATERIALS SALVAGED FROM BUILDING SITES, AN ARCHITECT HAS BUILT A SECLUDED WAREHOUSE-INSPIRED WEEKENDER IN THE HILLS OF NORTH CALIFORNIA

WORDS/STYLING AMANDA TALBOT PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD POWERS

overseas inspiration



The dramatic slope of the property allowed for a swimming pool, made from a salvaged water tank, to be built flush with the decking. "It's chilly in the pool till July, but if you get into the hot tub first then jump in it's quite nice," says Olle.



overseas inspiration



It was during a leisurely breakfast that San Francisco-based architect Olle Lundberg and his wife Mary Breuer were flicking through the classifieds and were drawn to a particular property for sale. "We always wanted a weekend for ourselves and our dogs. We were looking for a private place in a forest," says Olle. "The cabin was previously owned by a retired school teacher who realised he'd taken on a project bigger than he could deal with. I phoned him, we came up, and did a handshake deal on the spot."

The cabin is in Sonoma County, about a two-hour drive from the hustle and bustle of San Francisco. Access is via a precarious unsealed track that leads to a secluded, dense forest of redwood, tan oaks and fir trees. As you arrive, the rustic-looking cabin made from recycled local redwood is almost lost amongst the vegetation.

It isn't until you walk inside or follow the deck around to the side of the building that the awe-inspiring view and breathtaking swimming pool reveal just how impressive this place is. "It surprises a lot of people who come up for the first time," says Olle. "They think we have this little cabin, but are stunned when they realise how big it feels. I think it shows how you can make a very small architectural 'footprint' feel quiet grand in scale."

The previous owner had already laid the foundation and erected the frame when Olle and Mary bought the property. "It was a dump-looking cabin, but we really wanted a large, open-plan room that included the kitchen, office, dining and living room. We tore half the roof off so we could put in the loft bedroom, plus we added the deck, which is larger than the inside floor space," explains Olle. →

The deck (above right) takes up more area than the house, and is where the view of the forest and hills beyond can best be appreciated. Cooking and entertaining are very important to Olle and Mary, so they invested in a stainless-steel kitchen (above) with a commercial-style stove. "The island bench was designed so a lot of people can be involved or stand around drinking wine. It's very much a centre of activity."



overseas inspiration



What makes this home unique is the inventive materials Olle has chosen, such as the sculptural firewood holder suspended on the living room wall. Outside, a massive water tank once used on a client's farm sits flush to the decking, making a bold and confident visual statement. "The circle of water works as a mirror, reflecting the trees during the day and the moonlight at night."

On the cabin itself, floor-to-ceiling sash windows salvaged from a warehouse stretch over two storeys, helping to frame the forest outside. "The windows are all recycled from various projects that my firm has worked on," Olle reveals. "Being a city boy but having a love for nature, I always had this image of owning a small warehouse in the woods."

One of the benefits of open-plan spaces is they lend themselves to entertaining, which happens to be one of the couple's great passions. Fortunately, their commercial-style kitchen is well-equipped for large affairs. "We often have friends stay over in the luxurious guest tent we have set up by the front of the cabin," Olle says cheekily. "My office staff also come up and we have big parties where they set up tents, or sleep on the deck or in their cars."

Mostly, the couple's joy comes from lazing about in the loft bedroom with their dogs, Chili and Carney, and looking out through the wall of glass on to the valley and mountains beyond.

"The view always changes. It's a wonderful place to watch the weather – whether it's sunny or raining – because you always feel you are part of the outdoors. I think that's what we are looking for," Olle admits. "It's such a magical place that you never like to leave and you always look forward to coming back." ✦

The materials used in the living room (above left) were chosen with function in mind. The multicoloured Chinese slate flooring disguises the dirt the dogs bring in and the leather couch can be easily wiped clean. The metal firewood holder (above) is favourite piece of Olle and Mary's.



The bed in the loft features a cantilevered headboard, which "gives the sense of floating over the space and looking at the view," says Olle. The side table was made in the workshop of Olle's architectural firm, Lundberg Design.