

# Playboy apartments

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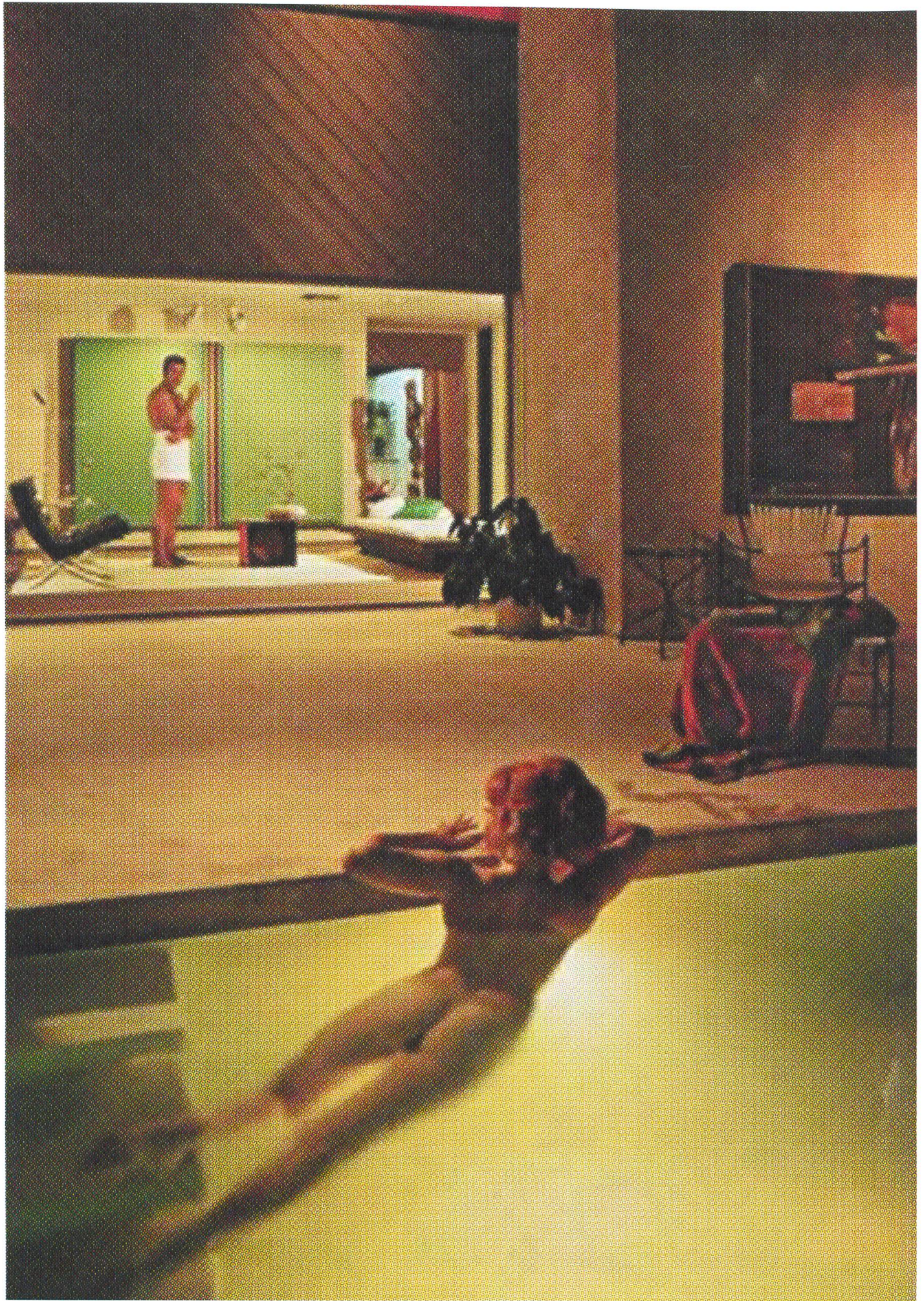
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A Playboy Pad-Walk-In Work of Art: March 1971. Architect: Sebastian Trovato



# Playboy Apartments

Francesco Colli, Felicia Narumi Liang

«We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an *hors d'oeuvre* or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph and inviting a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex.»<sup>2</sup>

*Shortly after midnight, the Playboy enters the open carport arm in arm with a friend after an evening out at the hottest parlor in town. He leads her down a dark teak-paneled hallway and shows her a view of the deepest part of the pool, the focal point of his home. Moving on, they enter an electronically controlled elevator that silently whisks them to the first floor. The Playboy has a master control board (the all-present electronic brain of the house) with which he puts on a tender Glenn Miller swing music number that vents from the living-room sound system. His friend wanders off towards the kitchen while he mixes cocktails with spiked olives. She is impressed by the subtle blend of the classic teak and fieldstone wall in combination with the contemporary product design of Noguchi and Saarinen.*

*The Playboy walks towards the kitchen and hands the drink to his friend, who is sitting on the green Saarinen chair by Knoll, looking out on the sky-reflecting pool. To set the mood he turns to the teak wall that hides a built-in control board and storage—a feature made to conceal anything that will disrupt or clutter the space. Playboy precisely and subtly regulates the lights and closes the linen drapes with a remote taken from the multifunctional wall to create an intimate space that fits the setting.*

*After the drink the Playboy offers his friend a continuation of the house tour, to find a place more comfortable to sit. The living room radiates a warm glow from the giant hooded-and-raised fireplace set against a fieldstone wall with teak cabinets and Willem de Kooning's 'Duck Pond'. The flames and the Howard Miller bubble lamp cast a glow to all corners and intensify the tangerine rug in the center of the room. Playboy invites his friend to sit on the sofa by Dunbar that faces the fireplace, while he takes a seat on the Laverne tulip chair. He offers her another drink and heads to the antique Spanish chest-cum-bar set against the teak wall panelling that offers Old War contrast to the contemporary furniture. While the Playboy prepares a martini filled pitcher, his friend enjoys Glenn Miller from the amplifier and the panoramic view from the house.*

*The Playboy and his friend linger awhile after the drinks until the tension in the room is at its highest. He takes his friend's hand and leads her up the circular staircase, to the tour's final stop. Entering the master bedroom, there is without question the Town House's most sensational piece of furniture—the Playboy Rotating Bed. The intense flames from the fireplace by Uni-bilt sets the tone further. His friend takes a seat in the Cone chair by George Tanier while he pours a glass of brandy from the bar concealed in the rotating bed and pushes the button to close the curtains.<sup>1</sup>*

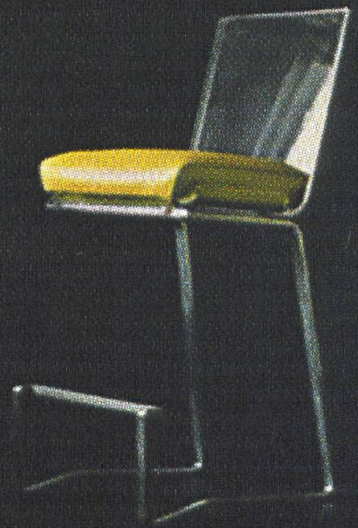




As we stand at the end of the dining-area bar we get an elbow-bender's view of almost the entire length of the house—past the pedestal dining group, past the image-reflecting pool, and on into most of the rec area, with the half-drawn drapes of the living room showing above it. The waffle-iron recessed lighting overhead is used throughout the house, can be turned on in sections; its dial-controlled intensity ranges from romantically dim to gala bright.



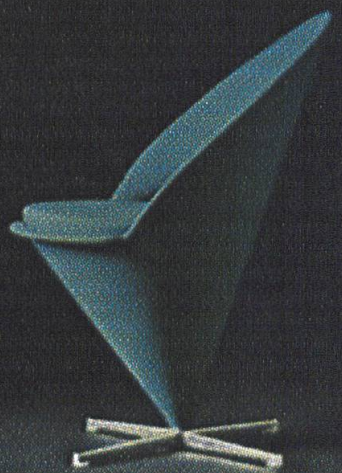
SAARINEN CHAIR BY KNOLL, APPROX. \$165.



PLASTIC-BACK BAR STOOL BY LAVERNE, \$360.

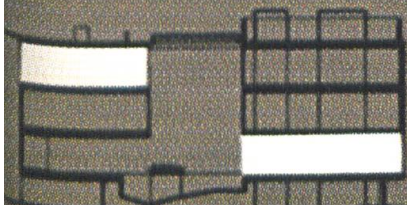


BEDROOM FIREPLACE BY UNI-BILT, \$119.



CONE CHAIR BY GEORGE TAMER, \$199.





Master Bedroom: the rotating bed, a refinement of the Playboy Bed (November 1959), has been electronically turned on its 360-degree base to take full advantage of a romantic fire. The drapes, glass door and skylight have been drawn back so that the star-flecked sky is almost our ceiling. The carousel-striped coverlet has been turned down. We've poured a brandy nightcap from the bar concealed in the rotating headboard, propped up our pillow, and push-buttoned several hours of balladry to add the proper final notes.



Playboy's contributions to publishing and the American attitude to sex was beyond the more notable sexually explicit nude centerfolds and «the girl next door». Hugh Hefner founded Playboy because he wanted to propose a new masculine ideal for himself and for other men. Prior to the first issue of Playboy in December 1953, the standard views of life glorified marriage and suburban domesticity, anything else struck as an oddity. The American heterosexual man's identity was based on the traditional family structure, «the wage-earning husband, the caretaker wife and children». But this patriarchal structure loosened and marked a shift to a new type of domesticity when an economic boom followed World War II. The postwar gender norms were challenged, which caused insecurity concerning the deeper meaning of masculinity, whilst women took an expanding role entering the working place and the domestic space.

Hugh Hefner was a new father and married to his high school sweetheart, but felt trapped by the conformity of conventional society. Men's magazines at the time were limited to the narrowly defined masculine ideal: the hardhearted breadwinner who liked to fish, hunt and pursue other outdoor activities. It was the perfect time for him to launch Playboy and its own masculine ideal. Hefner promoted a good-life concept; a liberated lifestyle for the heterosexual man. The message was loud and clear: enjoy yourselves.

«We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an hors d'oeuvre or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex.»<sup>1</sup>

Hugh Hefner was living the life he endorsed in the pages of his own magazine and became central to what he thought meant to be a modern man. In order to enter into this formula, it was necessary for the reader to think of himself as a bachelor in learning. Playboy educated and instructed their readers on how to be a happy, swinging and culturally articulate man about town. It also required men to adopt a stereotypical feminine excitement in decorating, consuming, hosting and cooking. The readers could find assurance in their heterosexuality when the preparation was to approach the «girl next door», by being irresistible and show sophistication through discussions about Leroy Neiman and knowing which Duke Ellington song was right for the moment.

Early on, Playboy suggested that their new lifestyle vision was fundamentally rooted in the indoor space where they could live a life that imitated image. Playboy saw the essence of architecture and design as an important tool for seduction. The magazine became a treasure trove of modern design and featured it heavily between the mid 1950s and the late 1970s. A «Playmate of the month» was photographed in front of a table set with Saarinen Tulip chairs and a spread called «Sitting Pretty» featured women posing lasciviously across elegant furniture, seductive in their sensuous outfits. A cycle was built when mid-century design became *en vogue*. Playboy kept delivering various features, one was as a series of sensuously realized homes such as the «Bubble House», a portable pleasure dome with inflationary proportions and «The Elrod House» that was famed for hosting the fight scene in the James Bond film, «Diamonds Are Forever».

In each example, the idealization was the same: the realm of design became the ultimate wingman and evoked sexual fantasies. The perfected interior culminated when the lifestyle of Playboy merged with modern mid-century design to launch a new typology—called the «Bachelor Pad». The new domain signified a concept of masculine space, where the bachelor was able to control every aspect of the interior landscape and to accommodate women in their apartment as smoothly as possible. The Playboy lifestyle and the newly coined residence were imagined by Hefner and architects and showed an abundance of vivid illustrations, plans and sections.

In the issue of May 1962, one spread featured «The Playboy Town House»—an imagined project by Playboy, set in a typical brownstone



A Playboy's Pad: Airy Aerie, May 1964. Architect: Fred Lyman<sup>2</sup>

neighborhood. Together with the architect R. Donald Jaye, Hefner envisioned a three-level luxury habitat, inspired by the case study houses of Neutra and the Eames Brothers, with open and smooth free-flowing spaces, floor-to-ceiling glass and masonry.

The house was divided into three parts: in the front was the ground-level garage, the first-floor recreation area, the second-floor living room and the third-floor master bedroom. The upper rooms were planned to provide maximum privacy, with locks on stairways and elevators to keep the bedrooms and the study traffic-free when desired. The middle part of the house was a pool in a three story high hall with a sliding skylight on the top that could be observed from every floor to every floor.

Differing to other homes at the time, the bachelor pad transformed the discourses of seduction and sophistication into the design principles and as a revelation of his personality. The Town House imagined for one man, was made to be extremely lush and extravagant with an awe-inspiring centerpiece of a three story high ceiling over the swimming pool. The overall inspiration came from hunting lodges and was used in a subtle non-literary way: dead animal heads and cabins were translated into the use of rich dark colours and expensive rough natural materials. The teak and fieldstone walls in juxtaposition with the cork tile flooring worked perfectly as a backdrop for the bachelor to display his bartender skills at the built-in bar.

No detail of the domestic space was left untouched. The preciseness of every item and its usage and impact gave the bachelor the perfect setting on how to control a *mise en scène* of seduction. The house was enhanced with a clever electronic center that could control every aspect of the house with a remote. The signature feature of the bachelor pad was accompanied by modern furniture from the foremost designers at the time: Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, Archizoom,.... The role of Playboy became even clearer when each space was described in tremendous detail with individual objects being separately identified with the designer, price and manufacturer. The more detailed the more intensely the reader desired to get in. The magazine functioned like a catalogue so the readers thought they had a part of the fantasy in their own lives.

When Playboy stopped featuring architecture and design in the magazine to engage in social and political issues of the day all eyes were on the Playboy Mansion. Since no other features of the bachelor pad were built, Hugh Hefner's residence was to be considered the ultimate pad, with its stately Gothic Tudor-design and the «Woo Grotto» as the *pièce de résistance*. During the climax of its popularity, going to a party at the Playboy mansion was a sign of status. But as times have changed and Hugh Hefner is laid to rest, the domain is a relic from a bygone era. Because the bachelor pad was so allied to the rise and fall of Playboy, the typology itself has now become an outdated concept.

<sup>1</sup> based on «Playboy's Progress», May 1954, p 22–23.

<sup>2</sup> «Playboy», December 1953, p. 3.