



Artist

From his perch in the Hollywood Hills,
David Hockney holds

forth on his adopted home,
stuccoed minimalls
and painting
the Grand Canyon

BY FRED SCHRUERS

Photography by Dan Chavkin

ON STEPPING INTO David Hockney's sprawling Hollywood Hills compound, you have two quick realizations as the gate closes behind you: first, that you've entered what feels like a subtropical aerie, a jumble of brightly painted structures perched on a hillside; and second, that Hockney himself is looking up from his fishbowl of a living room with a mixture of apprehension and welcome. The man can be like his art—expansive, chatty in the “Do you see now?” sense and a touch outlandish—but he can also use a certain British reserve to let you know where his boundaries are. Thus, much later, when he feels it's time to wrap up a photo session, he stands and makes his face long. The photographer, milking time, says

that he studied in an arts program Hockney had mentioned moments before, and now just one corner of the artist's mouth turns up: “I won't ask for your diploma.” • The irony is that Hockney, whose latest work has been described by the *New York Times* as “an uncomplicated delight,” could have made a formidable academic. Though the impact of his newest paintings seems more visceral than intellectual (“You have to put your critical judgment on hold and just let your neurons bristle,” said the *Washington Post*), they're a direct outgrowth of his rigorous, self-guided research into perspective and of the search for wide-open spaces that have made him not just a devoted Angeleno but a driver into the hills, the desert

DAVID HOCKNEY
AT WORK (OPPOSITE);
GRAND CANYON
PAINTING IN HIS STUDIO
(ABOVE).

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hockney at home

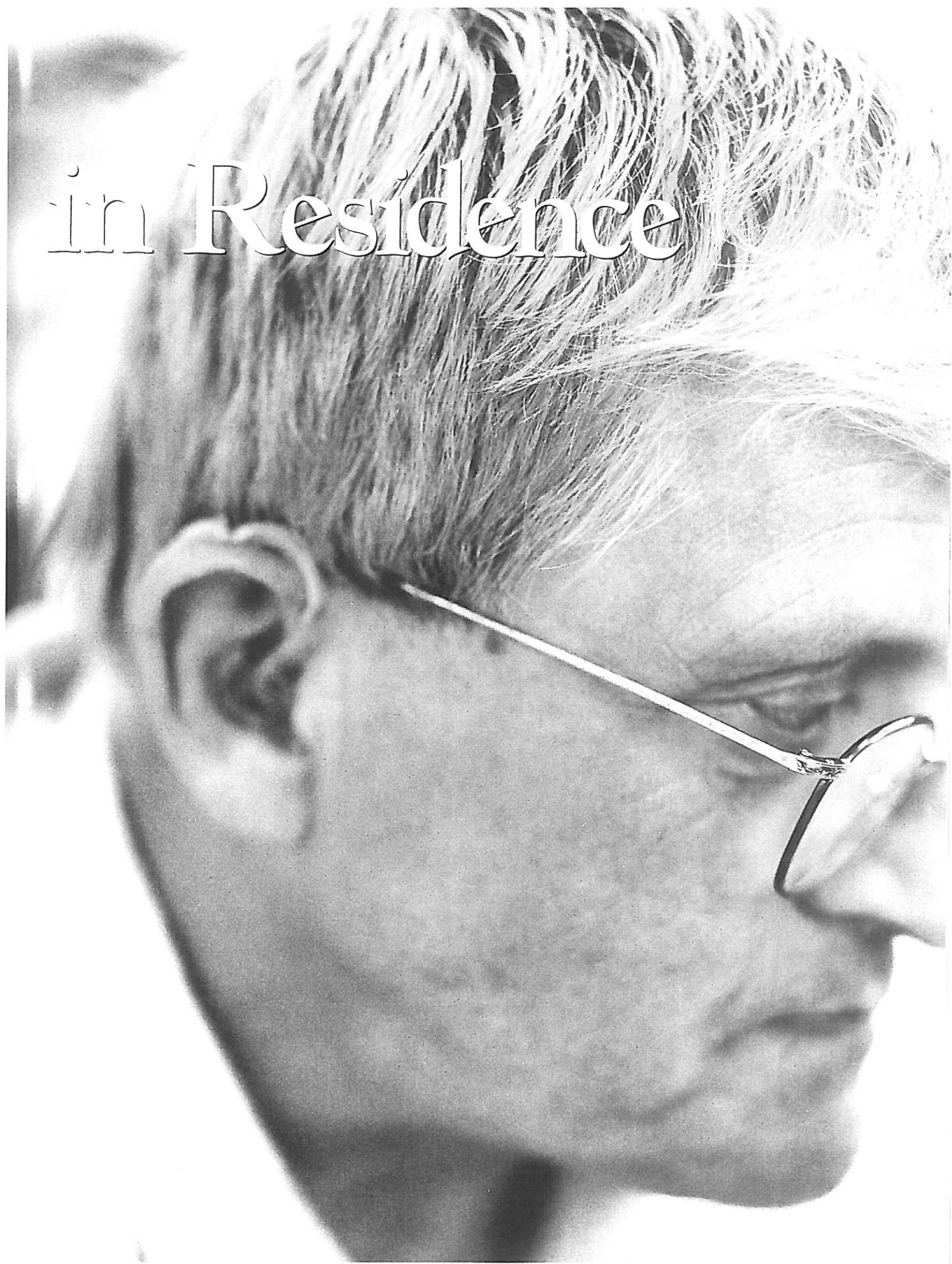
Notice to Our Readers

In June, *Los Angeles* magazine acquired the trademark and subscription list of *Buzz* magazine. We are excited to expand our format—see L.A. Buzz (page 26)—and welcome all our new subscribers!

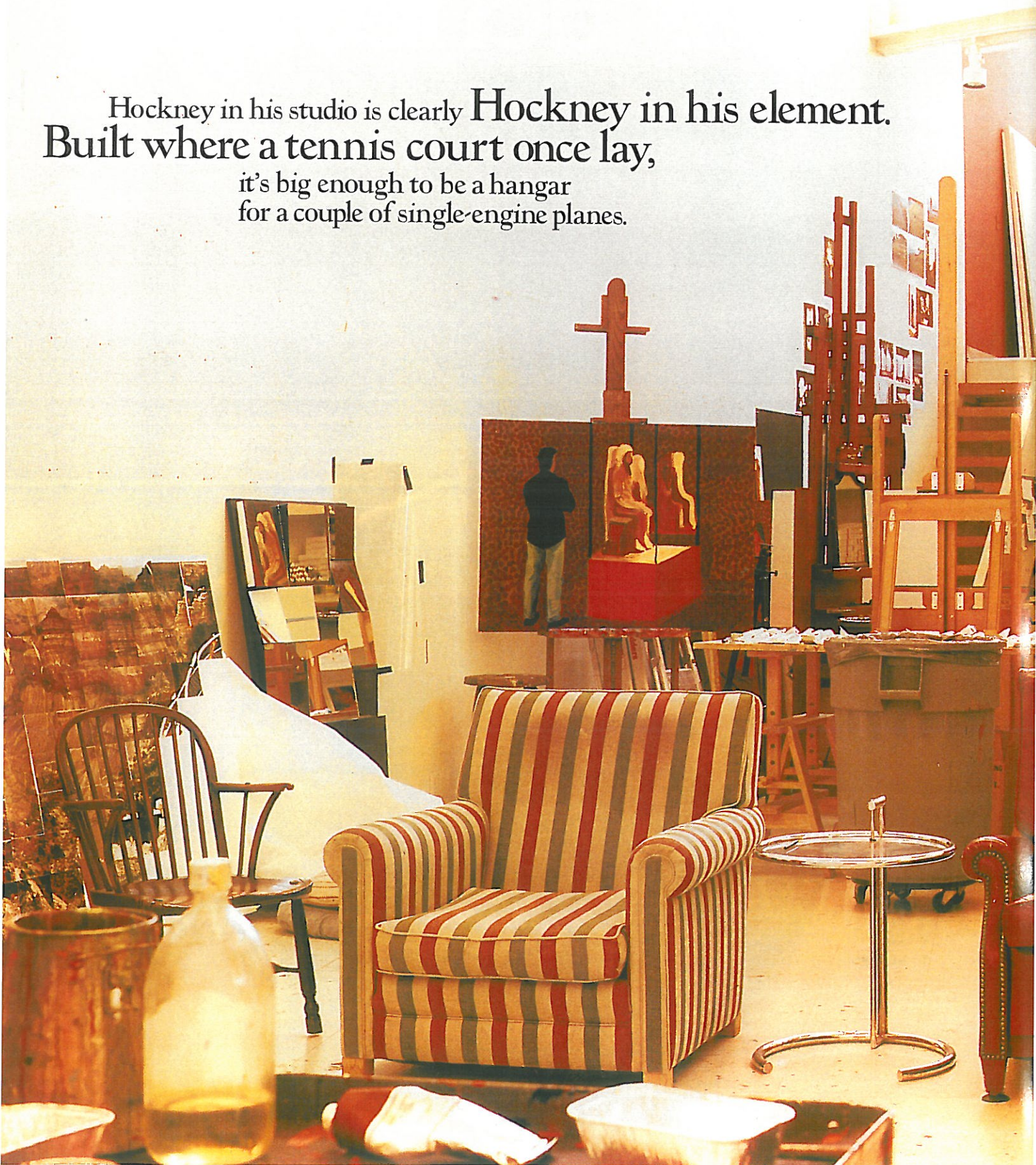
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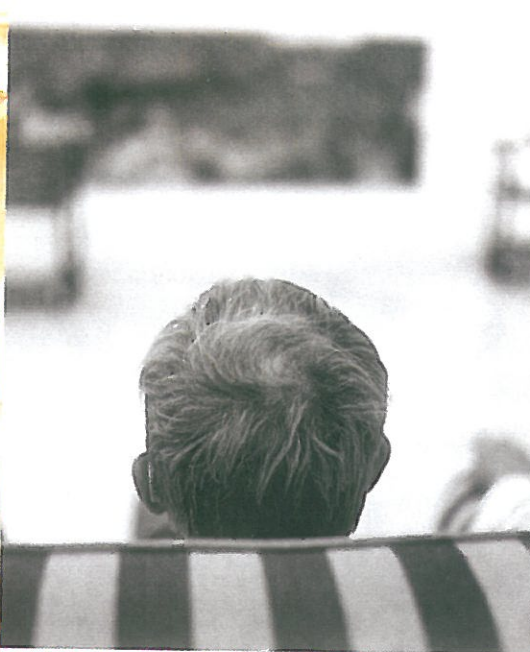
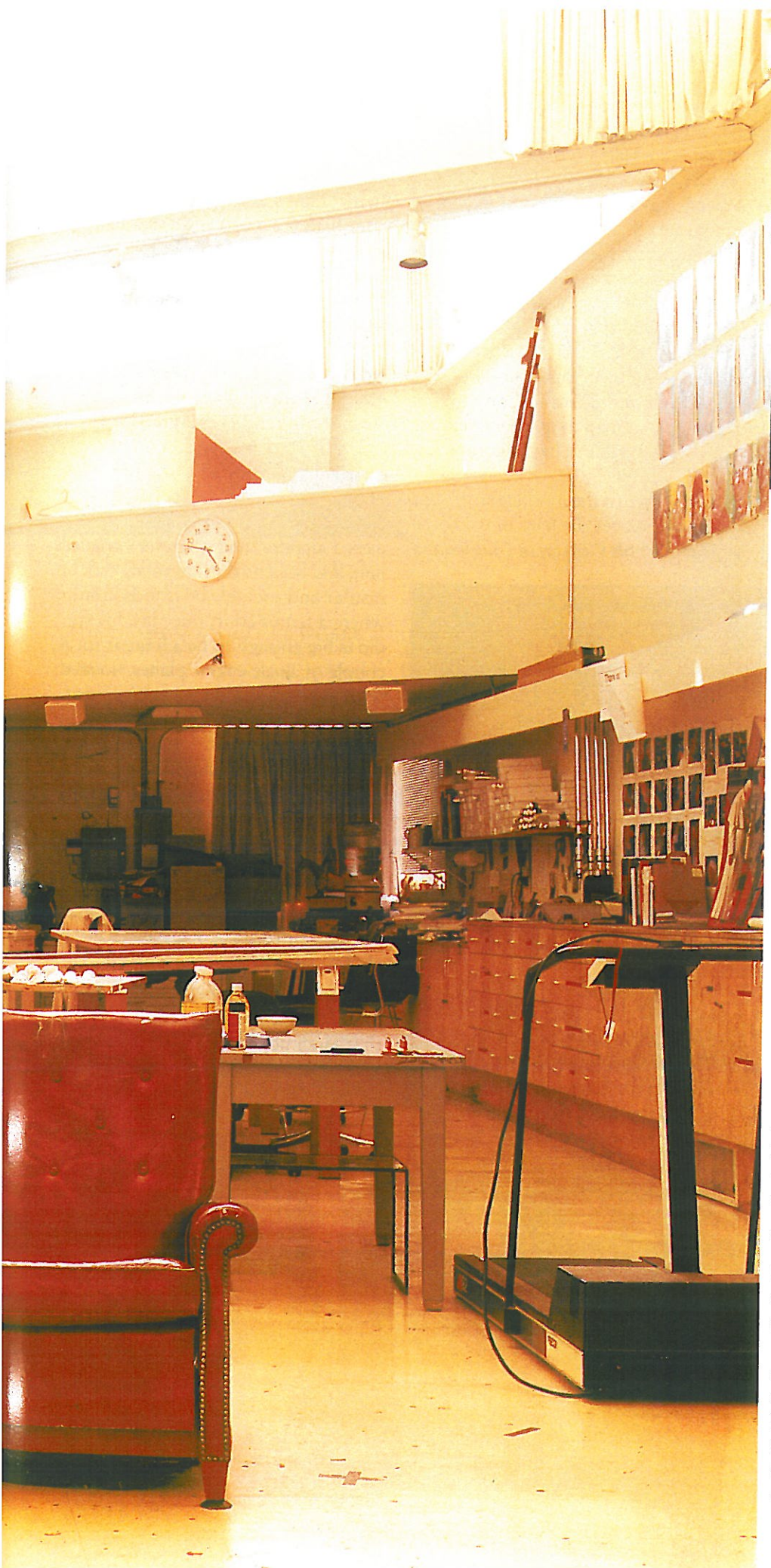
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in Residence



Hockney in his studio is clearly **Hockney** in his element.
Built where a tennis court once lay,
it's big enough to be a hangar
for a couple of single-engine planes.





LIGHT FROM JIGSAW-SHAPED
WINDOWS FLOODS
**HOCKNEY'S HOME
STUDIO,**
ACCESSORIZED WITH SINKS,
REFRIGERATOR,
TREADMILL AND TV.

and beyond, all the way to the south rim of the Grand Canyon.

"I'm attracted to the space," Hockney says, even as he busily shifts a gaggle of canvases in progress for a new Grand Canyon painting to a lower row of hooks on his studio wall. "I find myself deeply attracted to it, yeah." He shuffles back a few steps, looking into his riotously colored canyon almost as a bird of prey might. "And you are in it. If you are in it, you are not outside it—that's the major difference."

If there's a touch of braggadocio in that assessment—Hockney's not above restating that the canyon is unphotographable, "even for Ansel Adams," and hinting that no other painter has the élan for the job—the 61-year-old artist may have earned it. "Hockney is beyond fashion," says J. Paul Getty Museum director John Walsh. "His paintings have helped teach me how to see the West. He's not afraid of any subject. The ideas never stop coming."

Los Angeles art lovers have their chance to see the results of his latest travels at "Looking at Landscape/Being in Landscape," which runs through October 24 at L.A. Louver in Venice. Comprising four large views of the Grand Canyon and six

more of his boyhood home of Yorkshire, the exhibit, which will move on to Paris in December, quite literally presents a dazzling array of color—exotic variations of orange, green, purple, red and gold against cerulean skies—and an intoxicating, involving mastery of individuated perspective. The 60 canvases that rub shoulders in Hockney's 7-by-24-foot *A Bigger Grand Canyon* take turns grabbing your attention, and the work has had the effect of impelling viewers back against the far wall so they can take it all in.

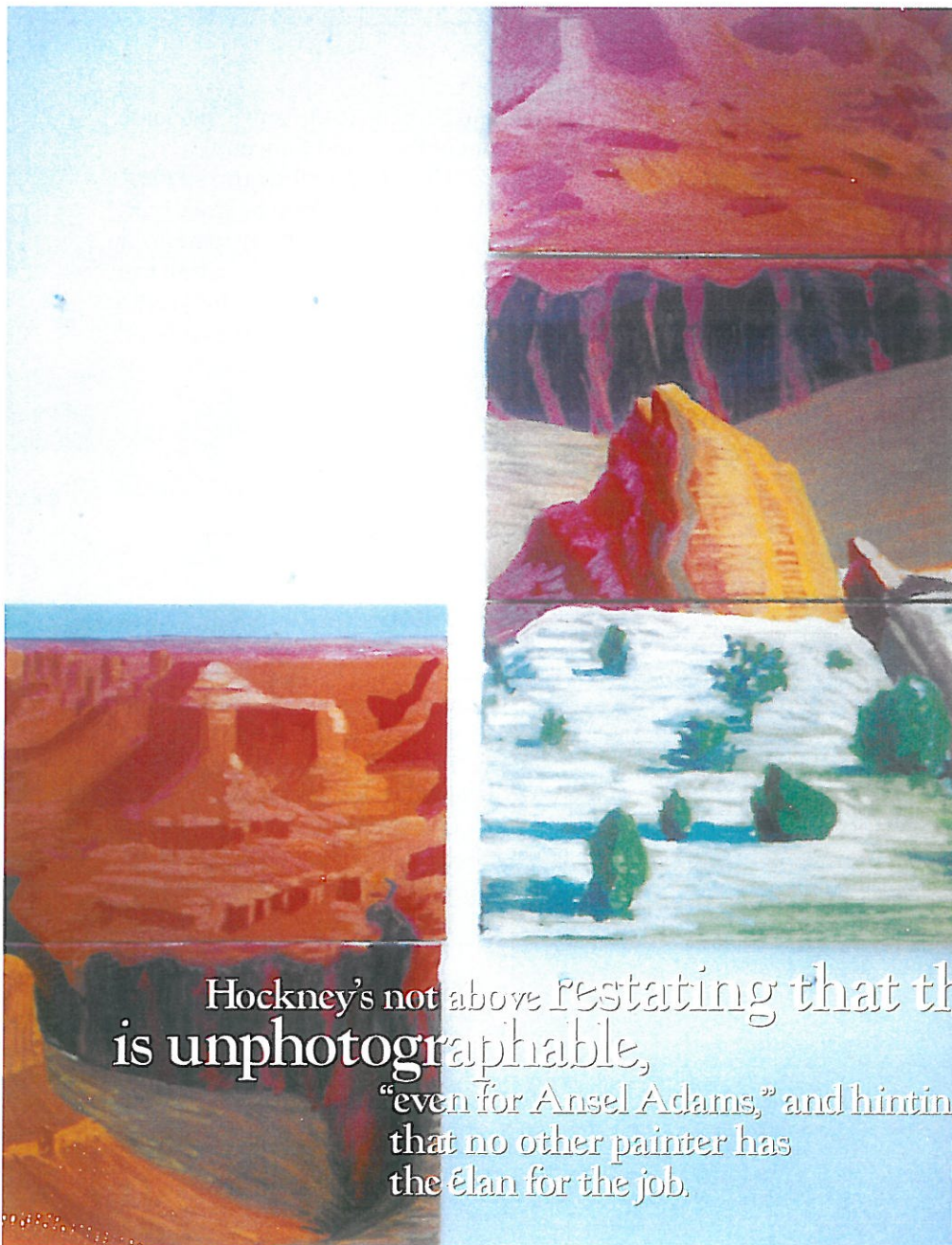
"When I first came to California," recalls Hockney, who was renting apartments here as early as 1964, "I immediately went to Yosemite, the Grand Canyon. I went all around. And I always thought, well, no photographs can really show you what this is really like, they cannot really show you space. So immediately, I started experimenting with photography." Hockney walks briskly to a photo collage that's shaped like an oversize, cracked teacup—an overlapping array of regular snapshots that makes a puzzler's photograph of the Grand Canyon. He started such work in earnest around 1982, then "I seemed to go every year, or three times a year. I wouldn't have known this years ago, but I have agoraphilia, or whatever claustrophobia's other face is."

Hockney's coinage would literally translate to "love of the marketplace," but what he's really describing is an urge for the open spaces. Instead of using the almost Grandma Moses-style helicopter shots of *Nichols Canyon* or *Mulholland*

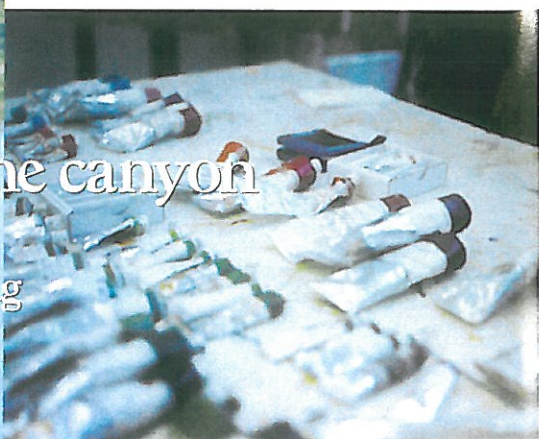
Drive: The Road to the Studio, he's put himself (and the viewer) in the driver's seat, precipitously over a plunging landscape. There's tension in his new spaces but not the tension of confinement. "That's one reason, probably, I came here years ago without knowing really why I would choose to come to L.A. and not New York City," he says. "You see, New York City would be a bit claustrophobic to me."

HOCKNEY IN HIS STUDIO is clearly Hockney in his element. You can readily imagine him as a young boy in some private corner of his crowded family home—he's the fourth of five children—in the semi-industrial city of Bradford. There, he drew "soldiers, I suppose" and whatever intrigued him, and became the interesting mix of insular and sociable he is today. Built where a tennis court once lay, his studio is big enough to be a hangar for a couple of single-engine planes, flooded with light from high rows of jigsaw-shaped windows, gleaming white, accessorized with fax machine, phone, computer, dreadnought copiers, sinks, refrigerator, treadmill, small TV and a pair of deep-bottomed chairs.

When he finishes a pack of Camels—an occurrence frequent enough to make any surgeon general pound his forehead—Hockney slides open a drawer and, without even looking, fishes a new pack out of a ready carton that doesn't quite mask what appears to be a good-size box of condoms behind it. It's clear that Hockney loves life, loves a good joke, especially on himself. He's chortling as he pulls out a Yorkshire newspaper that shows him in the foreground of a color photo that also includes his 4-by-10-foot canvas *Salts Mill, Saltaire Yorks* from the current exhibit. He looks jolly, the golden-hued mill peni-

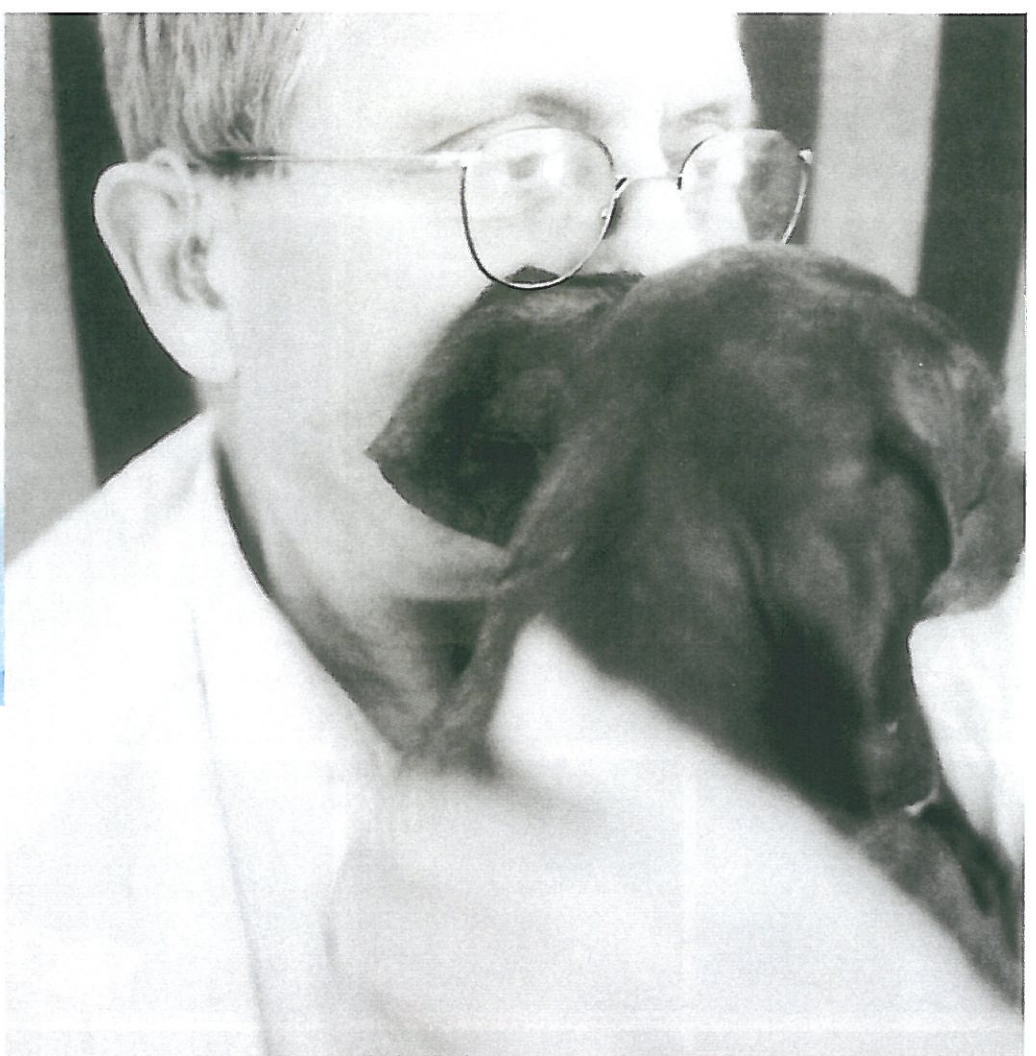


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HOCKNEY'S TWO DACHSHUNDS, STANLEY (NAMED FOR STAN LAUREL) AND BOODGIE, KEEP THE ARTIST COMPANY WHILE HE WORKS ON HIS NEW GRAND CANYON CANVASES (OPPOSITE).



tentiary-like. Then Hockney unveils the tabloid's bottom fold: SEX BEAST JAILED. "I figure," he says, deadpan, "it was innocently done."

He skips the mocked-up poster that reads THANK YOU FOR POT SMOKING and moves on to a photo of Castro in a blue suit and sturdy brogues bending to shake hands with the pope on a red-carpeted patch of Cuban tarmac. "Stunning photograph, isn't it? With the foreshortening from the telephoto lens, it looks like a Piero della Francesca. You can tell Castro's not used to wearing those, but the pope has obviously got a beautiful pair of red shoes on. Just look at the shoes—handmade in Rome. I'm glad of that. I'm glad there's still . . . even the garbagemen in Rome, six fittings for a shirt."

Hockney himself seems quite comfortable in his moccasin-style loafers, set off by red-striped socks that evoke a rugby uniform. He wears a floppy yellow shirt that was obviously expensive enough to last some years, and it isn't a bad match for the corn silk-colored hair that's still kept boyishly unkempt. Arrayed by hue in a fairly neat file are a couple dozen fat tubes of oil paint, some ("Kings Blue Deep") from English supplier Michael Harding,

some ("Ton Jaune de Naples") from Sennelier, the Parisian shop that furnished Gauguin with colors.

INEVITABLY UNDERFOOT ARE HIS DACHSHUNDS Stanley, with 12 years' tenure, and Boodgie, with 9. They grumble at the ankles of visitors but are peculiarly threatened by the ring of the phone, yapping alarmingly and causing Hockney as he answers it to shout, "No! No!" ostensibly at the dogs but perhaps also at the interruption. As he travels between his studio and the main house, Hockney, limber on the steep staircase, complains of a defect he may have inherited from his father—progressive hearing loss. When he changes rooms or conversational partners, he adjusts a device that's wired to his earpiece. In quiet settings, he's fine. Anywhere else, he's severely challenged to hear: "And it has become quite strong now. I am well aware of the powerful effects there are." He's referring not just to missed information but to the inner tumult that arises from not hearing people, and his resultant gradual move away from socializing. An almost poignant added consequence is that Hockney's feelings about his 19 years in L.A. have taken on a lightly burnished, nostalgic glow.

"Restaurants have been hopeless for a long time," he says. "Long before they stopped the smoking, I stopped going anyway. Or I have gone only to ones I know are very quiet—meaning the unfashionable because the fashionable ones are all too noisy. The one I preferred, but is not there now, was the Imperial Gardens, which was next to the Château Marmont. Japanese. I was a regular there for years and years and years, virtually always at the same table. I loved it."

Hockney's home, though it overlooks the San Fernando Valley, is just a couple of bends away from Mulholland where it meets Laurel Canyon—convenient to Sunset Boulevard. "Just drive down the hill, didn't have to call, really—it was

here. As the *New York Times* recently put it, "Mr. Hockney is best known for . . . depictions of Angelenos leading the luxe life around backyard pools." To peer through the long wall of glass that borders his kitchen and dining area and see the vibrant blue of the wooden deck we recognize from *Terrace with Shadows* or the pool that presumably was the setting for *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* is to be reminded of how the Southern California lifestyle both teases and irritates the rest of the planet. Hockney may have come here partly for the city's putative permissiveness or simply its climate: "[English] bedrooms are cold, yeah. I couldn't imagine anybody running around naked in a bedroom."

He's been forthrightly gay since his first sensual studies of young men hit swinging '60s London (but elusive as to their impact on his father George and mother Laura: "They wouldn't make any comment at all"). His real beef with his native country, as chronicled by his good friend and fellow émigré, painter R.B. Kitaj, has always been the curse of class distinction. As Hockney says, "If you come from England, that is the one thing you do notice. I pointed it out to a friend from a very wealthy family who always asks, 'Why do you like it so much—America? You like all those gadgets and everything.' I said, 'You see, you've always had a dishwasher, dear—there was a lady in another room. We didn't. So if you see a machine that does it, you're a lot more impressed.' English aristocracy who came to America wouldn't notice that, because it didn't mean anything to them. But it did to me."

HE HAS NO APOLOGIES for expatriating himself, though people "do tend to think you're living in exile or something, which I find a bit ridiculous. 'No, I live in my home. I've lived in this house for nearly 20 years.' Once you've been here six months, you're an Angeleno, aren't you?" Hockney lends no credence to those who complain of L.A.'s sporadically ugly, stuccoed minimalls and mansions of kitsch. "You just drive

past them. It's not actually an ugly city at all; it's actually a rather attractive city." And, like his friend director Billy Wilder, he feels constantly blessed from above: "This marvelous light in California—even on a dull day, it's still very intense. That's why Hollywood is here."

There are other good reasons why Hockney has always felt at home in L.A. "I used to say I was brought up in Bradford and Hollywood," he says. His dad was a movie buff, and Hockney grew up with weekly trips to "the flea pits, as we called them. Hollywood was at the end of the street, really, because most of the movies were American. I am the last generation brought up in England without television. You'd go see anything, frankly. You just went to the end of the street."

Hockney, for all his successful explorations in stage design for the opera, has resisted the movies' siren call to enlist his artistry. But he's not entirely blasé; despite a case of jet lag, despite the fact that "I'm not a very social person," he recently went to his pal Roddy McDowall's house for dinner with Kirk Douglas: "It was rather thrilling, in a way."

Hockney first arrived in Los Angeles with visions not of movie stars but of the cruisers who hung about in the shadows of downtown's Pershing Square in John Rechy's novel *City of Night*. He found a motel at the bottom of Santa Monica Canyon, bought a bicycle and set out down Wilshire. He got there—18 miles later—and immediately bought a \$1,000 Ford Falcon. He made the acquaintance of expatriate British writer Christopher Isherwood, executed his first two L.A. paintings (*Plastic Tree Plus City Hall* and *California Art Collector*) and effectively became an Angeleno.

**"If you go to the opening of MOCA,
you're in a pit.
If you go to the opening
of the Getty,
you're on top of the world."**

Circa 1964, L.A. neophyte Hockney lived on Ocean Park Boulevard, near where the road takes its scenic plunge toward the Pacific, and then on Main Street in Santa Monica. "Sam Francis had a studio nearby; it was then just an ordinary little street." He met Ed Ruscha early on: "Thirty years ago. I admire him. A marvelous artist, a very poetic sensibility. One night, I said, 'Well, I'm going home early. I'm painting a picture of the Grand Canyon.' And Ed said, 'Well, a miniature, of course.' Which is very witty, and that's him."

The homegrown Ruscha had his own show recently at the Getty Center, a facility Hockney approves of, to a point: "L.A. should be rather pleased with it. The rooms are very good; they make you look at pictures." But he indicts its exterior with the same quirky carp he levels at much modern architecture: "From the outside, it would look terrific with more ornaments." A slow smile. "Mention the word *ornament* to almost any architect, and they cringe."

He does celebrate the Getty's "marvelous spot" on a Brentwood peak, in contrast to the Museum of Contemporary Art's downtown oubliette. "In the end, I did point this out about MOCA. If you go to the opening of MOCA, you're in a pit. If you go to the opening of the Getty, you're on top of the world."

Hockney's got his own hilltop, of course, a zone that's more workshop and cottage than shrine and mansion. But his laboratory is found in the winding roads he plies almost obsessively. In his ample garage, shadowed in one bay, is a brand-new metallic blue BMW Z3. "I must admit that most of the cars I've had in California were convertibles, simply because you see more. It's better for my agoraphilia, isn't it?"

"I tend to drive out a lot; I take people up Highway 2, from Pasadena up to

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artist in residence

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Mount Wilson. Gorgeous—most people have no idea how beautiful. They're all watching television here.

"I take people up all the time. Get out at the top, walk around and then think, 'Right, well, I'll go all the way back down to the nonsense now.'"

Hockney's growing deafness has only increased his need for space. As he

Drawn to Yorkshire by his friend's crisis, Hockney began relentlessly photographing his surroundings. This resulted in the collage of agricultural scenes titled *Husbandry in East Riding* and the landscapes *Garrowby Hill* ("From the top of it, you see the whole plain of York"), *North Yorkshire* and *Double East Yorkshire*. The latter was completed after Silver succumbed (like Hockney's late great friend, the curator and critic Henry Geldzahler) to pan-

creatic cancer. Before his death, Hockney recalls, Silver told him, "Paint these pictures, David. Keep on painting them. Life is a celebration, really."

Hockney has been a loquacious, beguiling host, but he's got Grand Canyon canvases to complete for the more expansive European shows, and he's thinking of a new set of portraits of his now aging dachshunds. He looks at them snoozing, all snouts and short legs. "They do lie around a lot more," he says. There'll be at least one more interruption before he sets to work; a Mercedes sport-utility vehicle has pulled up outside, yielding a pair of what are surely L.A. art collectors, 1998 style.

Hockney rises, bearing the hamburger in progress with a certain elegance, and repeats his friend's counsel: "Life's a celebration—Jonathan told me that 10 days before he died, actu-

Hockney may have come for the city's putative permissiveness or simply its climate: "English bedrooms are cold. I couldn't imagine anybody running around naked."

points out the changes he's made in the main house—he ripped off a low ceiling to make an atrium out of a palm-shaded bungalow—it's clear he enjoys his bird's-eye view of sky, treetops and the sooty Valley. He is at heart restless, a trait that has paid artistic dividends. His work, in L.A. and elsewhere, remains partly the product of his urge to drive. "I found myself driving up and down, and so the first work I did, when I moved up here almost 20 years ago, was to paint Nichols Canyon. And for the first time I said, 'Los Angeles has got a lot more wiggly lines than I thought.' Whereas when I lived in Santa Monica, I tended to see it as straight lines, cubes, right angles. When you begin to live in the hills, you suddenly feel there's another geometry."

The loss of friends and the wiggly lines of roads home are very much conjoined in Hockney's new Yorkshire paintings, which were begun during the summer of 1997. Typically, he'd go back several times a year to see his mother, now 97; this time, it was to be near his critically ill friend Jonathan Silver. As a schoolboy, Silver had cheekily recruited the already famous Hockney to provide a drawing for a student paper; more recently, he had turned the manufacturing village of Saltaire into an arts center and something of a Hockney shrine. For years, Silver had beseeched the artist to do some local landscapes.



AFTER A VISIT TO HIS CHILDHOOD HOME, HOCKNEY PAINTED *NORTH YORKSHIRE*, 1997 (ABOVE). "YOU ARE IN IT," SAYS THE ARTIST OF HIS NEW CANYON PAINTINGS, INCLUDING 9 CANVAS STUDY OF *THE GRAND CANYON*, 1998 (TOP).

ally." He looks up with the intent, questioning gaze of a determined self-portraitist. "I mean, I must say this—my friend Ron Kitaj lives here now. His wife, absolutely the picture of health at 47, died suddenly of an aneurysm. I couldn't believe it when they rang me here. And I rushed over—this is a close friend. But one effect it has is you always think, 'Well—enjoy today. Enjoy it if you can. You don't know how many more days there will be.'"

With that almost hawklike alertness he conceals under the gentlemanly demeanor, he finishes the thought so that it sounds like a benediction: "You might as well do that." LA