

A black and white photograph of a workshop. In the foreground, a red wooden chair with a woven seat is positioned on a wooden workbench. To the right of the chair, a large collection of tools, including various chisels, planes, and hand saws, are laid out in neat rows. In the background, there are several large, dark, rectangular blocks, possibly pieces of wood or metal, and other tools. The word "designed" is overlaid in a large, red, serif font across the middle of the image.

# designed

"Even those of our visitors unfamiliar with Japanese customs change their shoes for indoor slippers instinctively when they see our floor," says Marion Nakashima. "I'm sure that no one now thinks of it except as a natural gesture of appreciation for fine wood."

# for living

by eddie shimano

scenefotos by ken mazawa

A dream come true, and not only in its commonly-accepted sense, is the New Hope, Pa., home of George and Marion Nakashima and their seven-year-old daughter, Mira.

Hugging the top of a high hill near the Delaware river, the house is a fulfillment of a philosophy put into practice, a belief carried out to its ultimate end.

For George Nakashima is an architect who believes that the architect should not stop at the drafting board but should actually work with building materials. His home is 90 per cent owner-built with help from Marion and Mira. Nakashima has a B.A. from the University of Washington, a master's from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a graduate diploma from Fontainebleau, France; and has practised his profession all over the world.

He is an articulate artist and his own words best explain his point. In an article he wrote for the magazine, Arts and Architecture, as far back as 1941, he said:

"One thing probably wrong with our present setup is over-specialization. . . .Architectural students often finish a course in architecture without knowing how to lay a brick or make a mortise and tenon. . . .The feeling for the plasticity of concrete and the stresses in steel is largely a matter of mixing, tamping, bending and placing the material. From this spirit, form should grow."

George was born in Seattle (and Marion and Mira, too) and after 10 years of practicing architecture in the United States, Europe and Asia, the last two in Japan, he returned to Seattle where he took up furniture making in order to work with the tools and materials he loves. After a year, evacuation came and the Nakashimas went to a relocation camp, Mira then being only a few months old.

From Minidoka, Idaho, the next step was to Pennsylvania where Raymond Loewy, the Studebaker designer, helped them get settled. For a year George worked as a farm hand while the family lived in a rented Pennsylvania



**george**

**nakashima**

**handcrafts**

**a house in**

**pennsylvania**

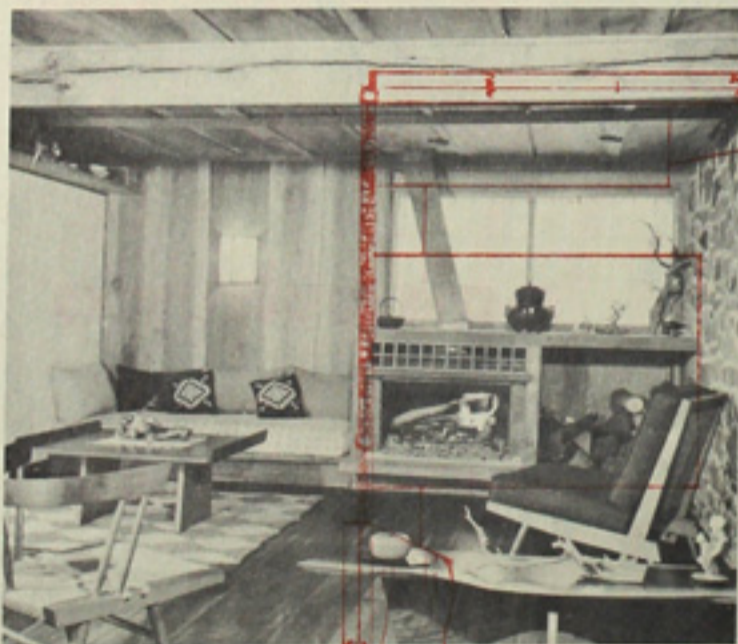
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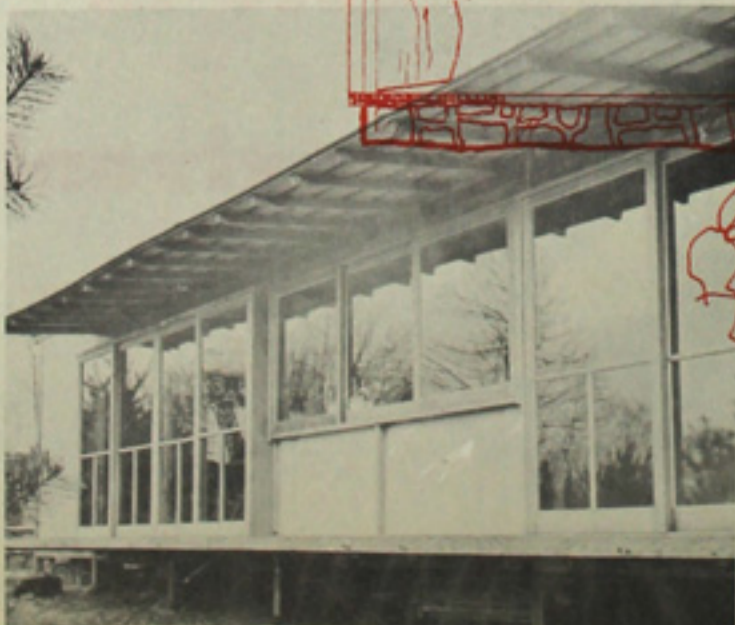
Hand rubbed walnut boards form the living room floor. Ceiling is of 20-inch wide poplar planks. Walls are paneled in cherry and cedar. All of the framing is of oak. All lumber came from trees on his, or his neighbors' property.



"This house does not pretend to be anything from the point of view of design," Nakashima wrote in Arts and Architecture magazine. "The approach is more an expression of expediency in the need of housing."



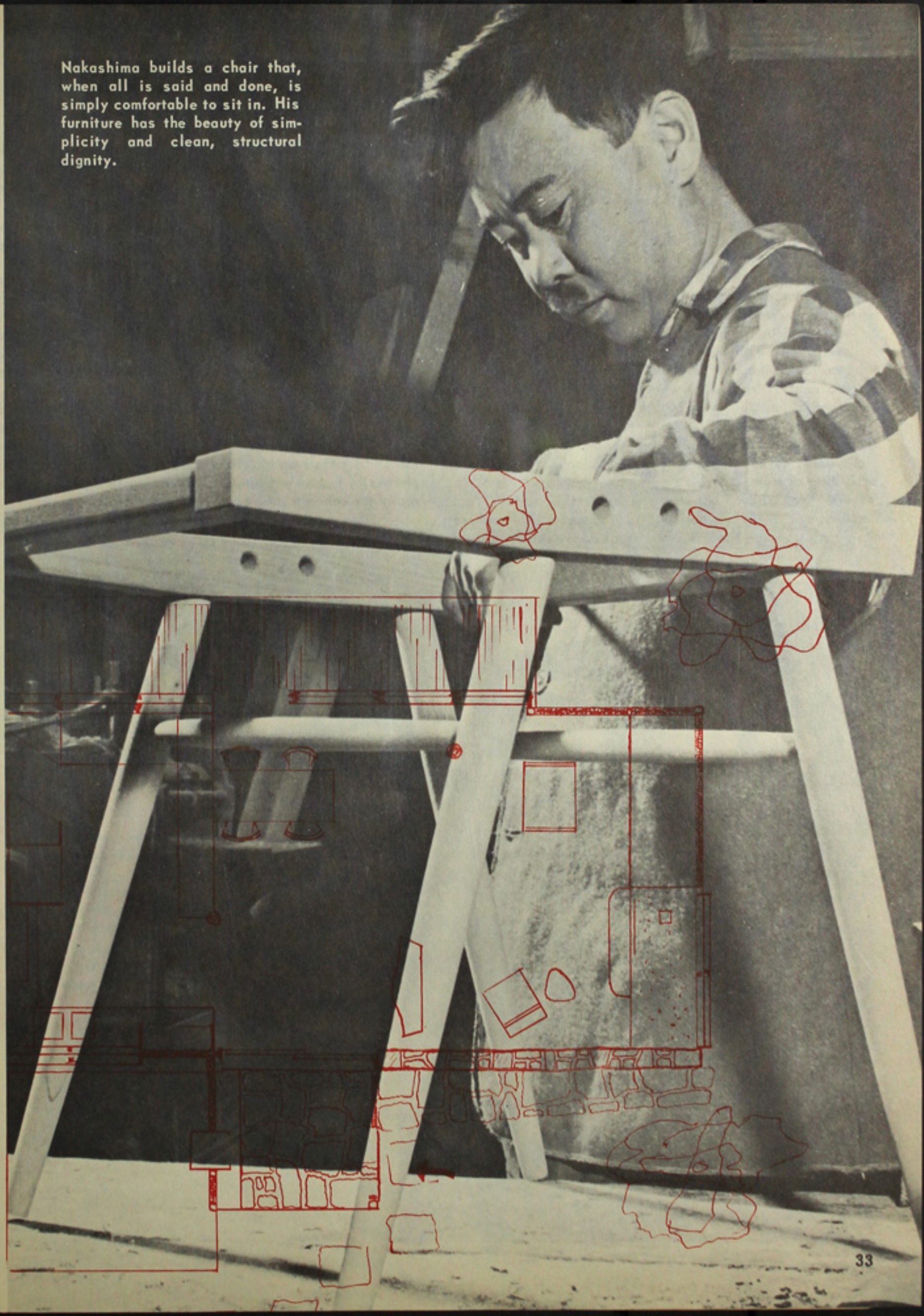
This house was 90 per cent owner built, including millwork, cabinetry, masonry, roofing, ditch-digging, wiring, plumbing, Nakashima even fashioning articles from rough material.



The south side of the house is all glass. On sunny days, even in sub-freezing temperatures, solar heat alone is adequate. Available, however, are an oil furnace and electric radiant heating panels.



Nakashima builds a chair that, when all is said and done, is simply comfortable to sit in. His furniture has the beauty of simplicity and clean, structural dignity.



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Dutch house. The house was sold and the new owner decided to move into it herself. In the meantime, the Nakashimas had bought three acres up on a hill and George had started to build a workshop on it.

Finding no other place available, in May, 1947, the Nakashimas bought a tent, pitched it on their property, and moved in. Until November of that year, while George spent all his spare time building their house, they lived in that tent. When the living room section of the house was finished, they moved—just one step ahead of winter.

After two and a half years, George says the house is still unfinished although the entire house is livable. Their cash outlay so far has been \$4,000—George says he could not duplicate it for anyone who might want a twin to it for less than \$25,000.

"I never liked modern houses, but I love this," exclaim many of Nakashima's guests on their first visit. And George is kept busy with commissions to design the rebuilding of many native Pennsylvania houses.

The Nakashima house is essentially modern, not "modernistic," and it derives its Japanese atmosphere not simply through the use of oriental construction details

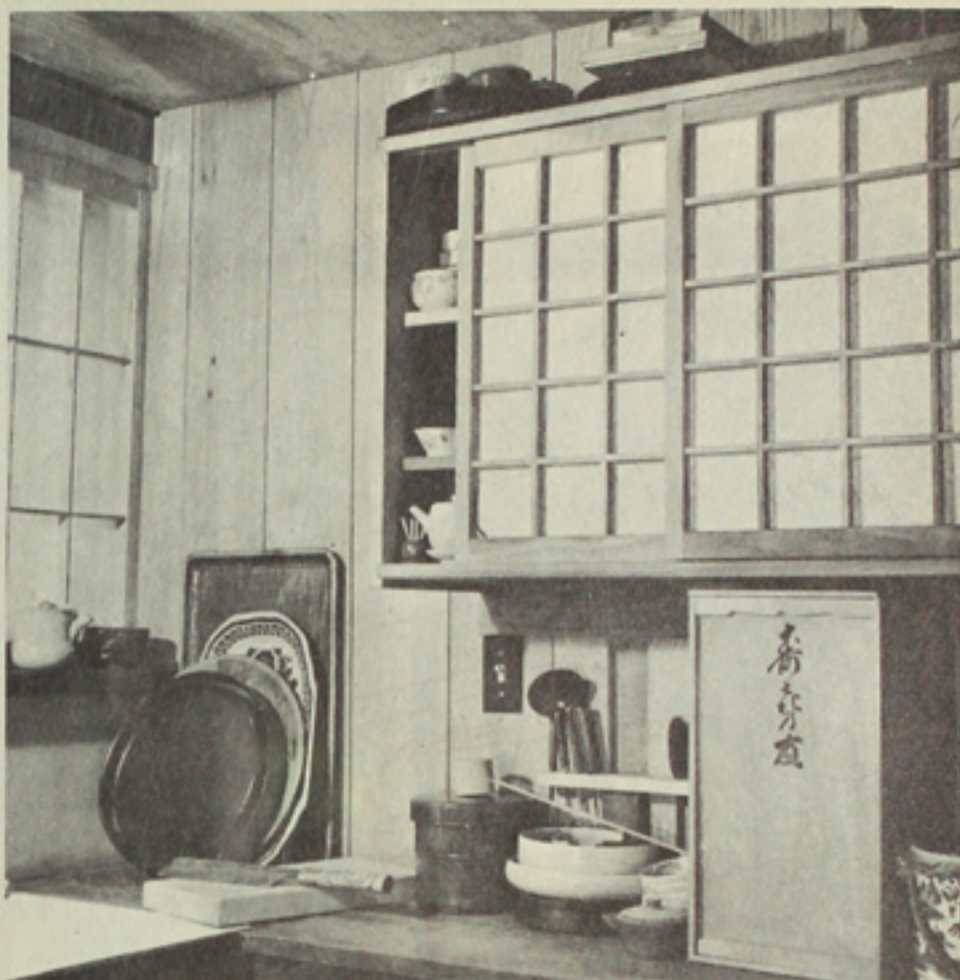
but through its proportions. The aesthetic grace and the simple dignity of uncluttered design allows for the blending of the best in Japanese, modern and early American architecture.

"Essentially," Nakashima says, "the best designer should be a mechanic, but unfortunately most mechanics cannot design. To carry the point further, the contractor is unable to design and the architect usually doesn't know much about building. . . .The so-called industrial designers smell too much of the studio, of watercolor renderings, and not enough of the workshop. . . .There must be planning, it goes without saying, but the conceiver should not let his ideas perish on paper or let them only be carried out by others."

Nakashima carries his point further to include many of today's larger problems. "Specialization is frustration unless it broadens into largeness, into relativity. It is the same pitfall which affects, not only design, but all the phases of human activity from medicine to diplomacy; that too-great concern over contained problems."

To see Nakashima at work and at home is to see this philosophy in action.

Bare wood walls and shoji give the house a Japanese flavor even without the Japanese dishes and other kitchen utensils shown here. The bath is an ingenious combination of the Japanese furo and a coal hot water heater. Water is collected in a cistern during heavy rains. The supply is adequate for all needs except the American style shower or bath.



The Nakashima-designed fireplace has a concrete slab mantel, copper flue and copper hood behind the open grill, all of which radiate heat. On cold days an air duct, built under the floor and fitted with a blower at the kitchen end, pushes cold air from the kitchen into the warmed space around the fireplace and then into the room.





## 'sham without reflects the sham within'

In the outskirts of Kyoto, Japan, at a place called Katsura, is a detached palace built some half a thousand years ago. A half a thousand years ago, a peak was reached in "modern" residential building which has never been equalled.

It was a combination of a mood, a way of life, rare taste and technique, surpassing composition and, for want of a better word, "architecture." The modern residential designers can well hang their heads in shame.

We have gone through some bad periods of almost pure sham in domestic building. Passing in our nightmare, we can draw up images of Cotswold cottages, Spanish castles, Norman timbered chateaux, Italian villas and other brick pile and stucco monstrosities. However, at least now we are trying to purge ourselves of the hypocrisies of the last few decades. A new stoicism in our physical environment—even a new style which is erroneously called "modern"—has evolved but, like all styles, it is not completely lived and is somewhat artificial. The architect or designer

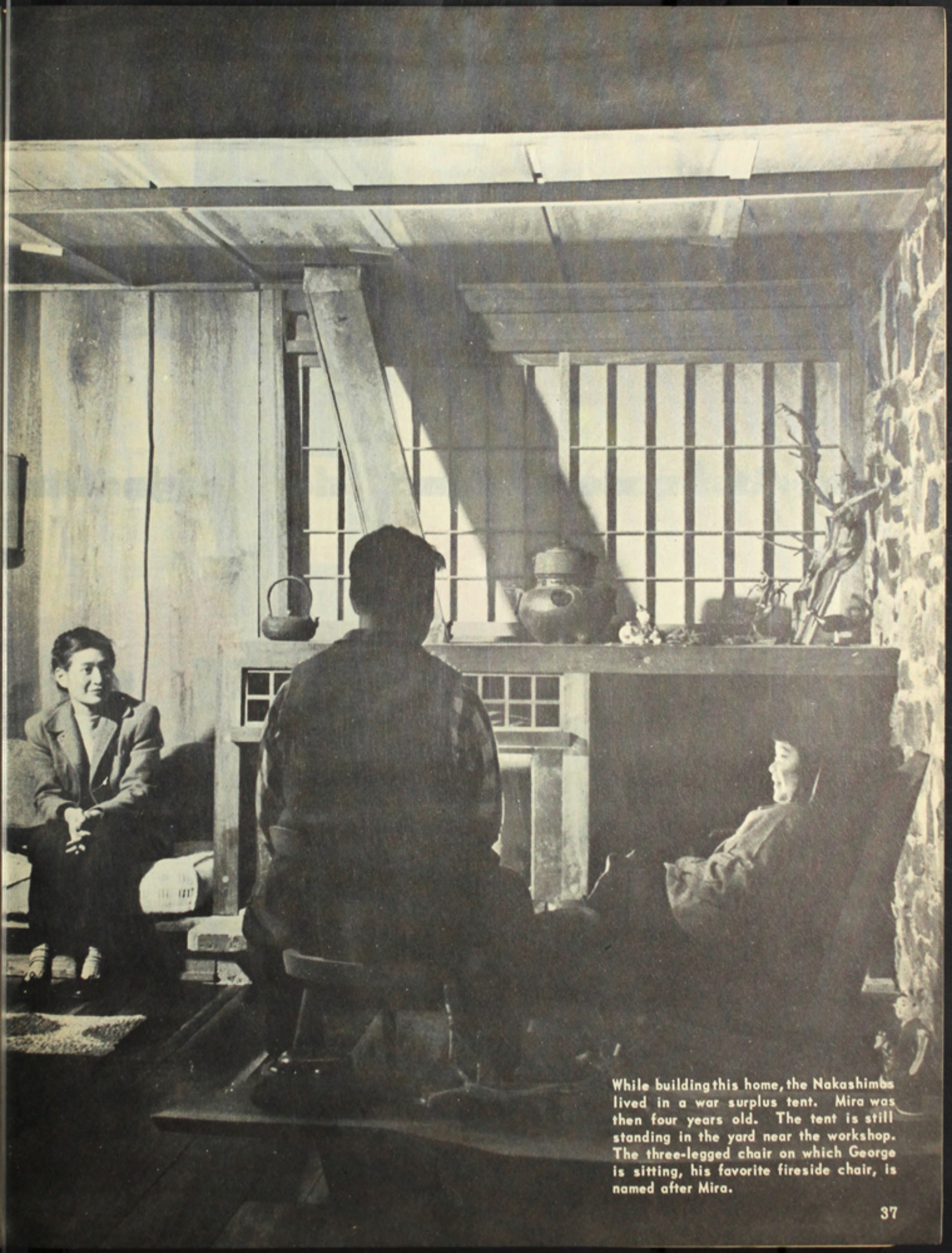
should not be conscious of style, but if style it must be, it should be left to those who appraise at a later date.

To seek and find a three dimensional truth, such as one can witness in Katsura, should be an ideal of those who live and work in a three dimensional world.

But there again our problems multiply as our environment reflects the mood and the spirit that lies within. The sham without reflects the sham within. The Doric banks, the Tudor Gothic universities, the Spanish villas—what lies they are! Materialism and truth never were, and never can be, good bed-fellows.

The peace and beauty which we can see at Katsura can be seen also at Mont Saint Michel and Chartres whose aspiration certainly is much higher and sublime. But Katsura speaks to us on a human scale with a message of inner peace of great meaning in a troubled world.

*George Nakashima*



While building this home, the Nakashims lived in a war surplus tent. Mira was then four years old. The tent is still standing in the yard near the workshop. The three-legged chair on which George is sitting, his favorite fireside chair, is named after Mira.