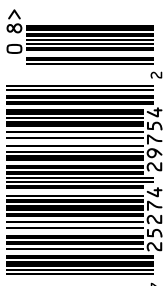


UPSTATE DIARY



HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Mickalene Thomas / Sean Kelly / Judy Pfaff / Mary McCartney / Donald Judd's *Casa Perez*
 Terhi Tolvanen / Brice Marden / Letha Wilson / Georgie Hopton / Kirsten Owen

Casa Perez, Presidio County, Texas.

Judd, Marfa, Texas.

In 1985, Donald Judd, the acclaimed minimal artist, sagely opined that, “everyone knows that nothing is accidental and that everything is fully planned.” In context, he was referring to his own destiny. Even as a young man this monumental figure instinctively knew he would end up in the southwestern states of America. As it transpired, it was the remote town of Marfa, Texas, that Judd would eventually call home, not only in the domestic sense, but also as a home for his incredible body of work.

Words Paul Tierney
Photography Flavin Judd
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Marfa is a unique and divisive place that Judd unwittingly put on the map. It began its artistic evolution when he acquired land and buildings here in the early 1970s, primarily to house his (and others') oversize sculptures and lofty installations. But his appreciation of the landscape, its spare beauty, spawned the idea that nobody should interrupt nature. *Giant*, the James Dean classic, was partly filmed in Marfa — the area's wide skies and mountain-lined deserts as dramatic as the script. But a decade later it was the art set, led by Judd, who put a new spin on this old land.

The land he acquired, now stretching over 30,000 acres of the Big Bend region, was bought with good intention. Judd's love of space, light and infinite continuity compelled him to preserve the area and all it contained, including a series of ranch houses, which he adopted as simple dwellings. *Las Casas*, the largest building, along with *Casa Perez* and *Casa Morales*, collectively known as *Ayala de Chinati*, are as beguiling and oddly beautiful as any of his artistic output. What he preserved and subtly enhanced showcased a personal aesthetic years ahead of its time.

Luckily the Judd Foundation, initiated by the artist in 1977, retains and protects his legacy at Spring St. in New York, and here in Marfa, where permanent installations of his most superlative work reside. One of the main trustees is his son Flavin, a respected photographer who works tirelessly to keep things in order. His was a youth split between the urban throb of SoHo and the arid reduction of Texas. As a teenager in the '80s, digital noise was eschewed in favour of clean air. Life was frugal but rich in texture.

Capturing *Casa Perez* in a series of poignant images for this story, Judd Jr. returns to his teenage haunt, still in thrall to its simple beauty. He is both poetic and pragmatic, inheriting, one senses, the forthright attitude of his father. What must it have been like living here with only clouds for company? In an era of Fiorucci and rampant consumerism, the

bare painted walls and stripped back aesthetic must have jarred. They also, it transpires, inform his work at every turn.

Paul Tierney *Looking at your photography — the way you capture natural light against strong, structural shapes — I wondered how you approach an image.*

Flavin Judd I don't know how I photograph things. I see things and just do it. But yeah, light is everything. It doesn't work without it. And seeing is light, so it's the same thing basically.

PT *Is there a particular kind of light in Marfa?*

FJ At *Casa Perez*, it must be about 6,500 feet up, it's a very contrasty, bright light. I just happened to be there on one of the rare days when it's not bright and contrasty.

PT *And the lack of artificial light. You must get incredibly vivid starry skies out there?*

FJ Oh yes, it's like being on the moon. It's lit up. Even with an absent moon it's still really bright and absolutely amazing, but that's not something you see very often at all.

PT *I've never been to Texas. What defines that area? Is that part of the state quite particular?*

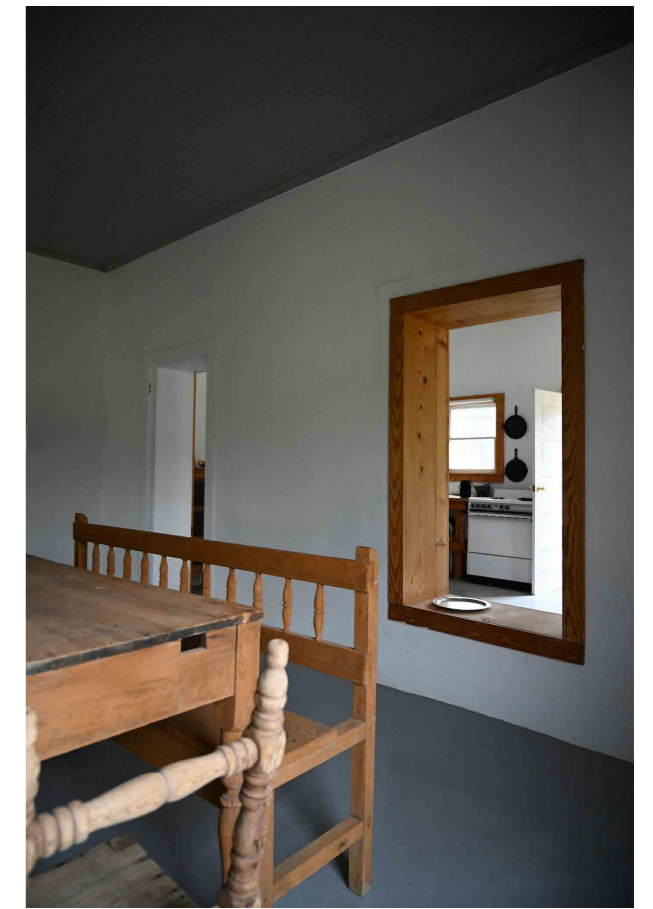
FJ It doesn't look like the rest of Texas at all.

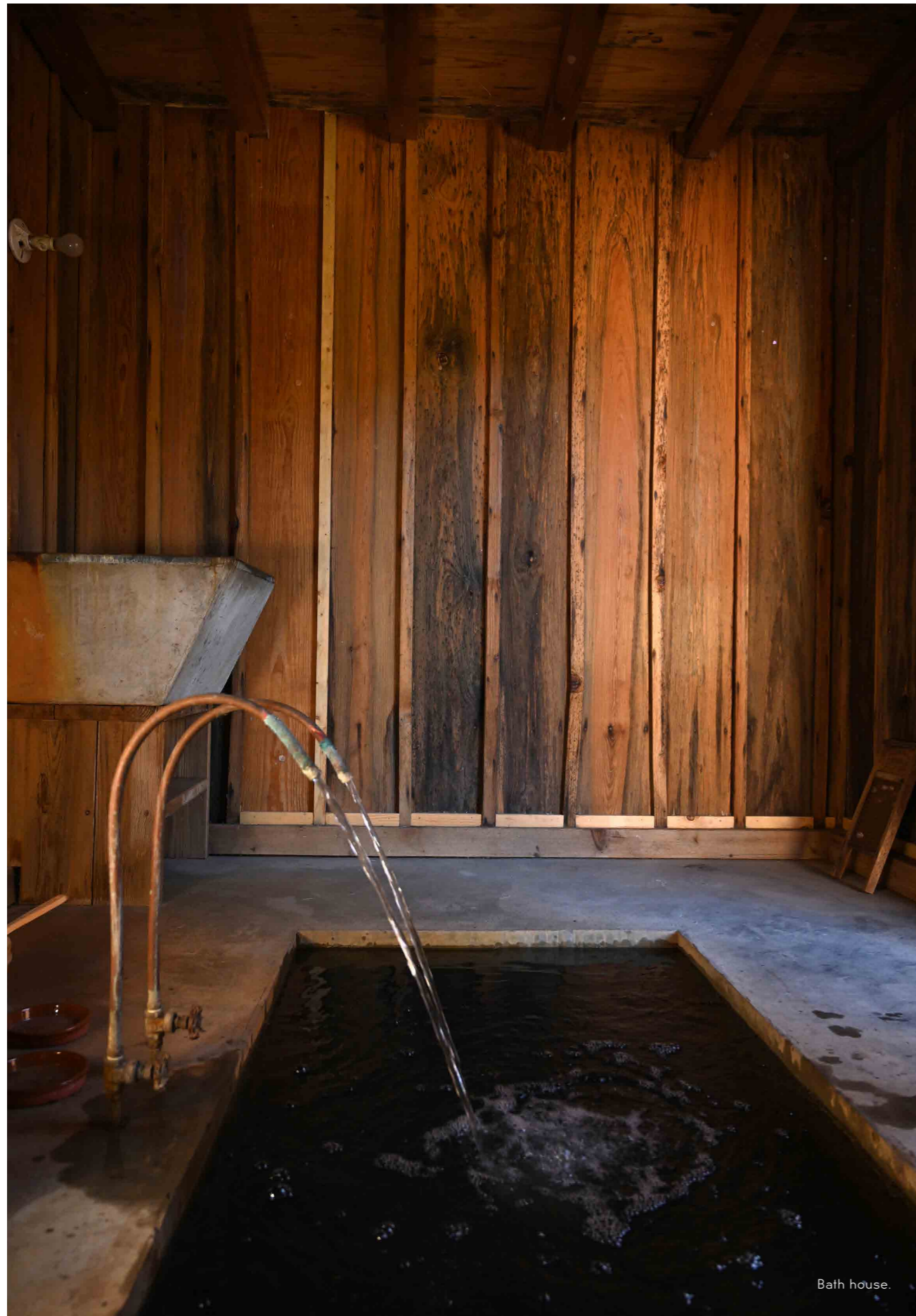
PT *How much has Marfa changed over the years?*

FJ It's become the Texan version of the Hamptons, which is exactly what Don was trying to escape. Marfa has changed quite a bit. We have our own Soviet

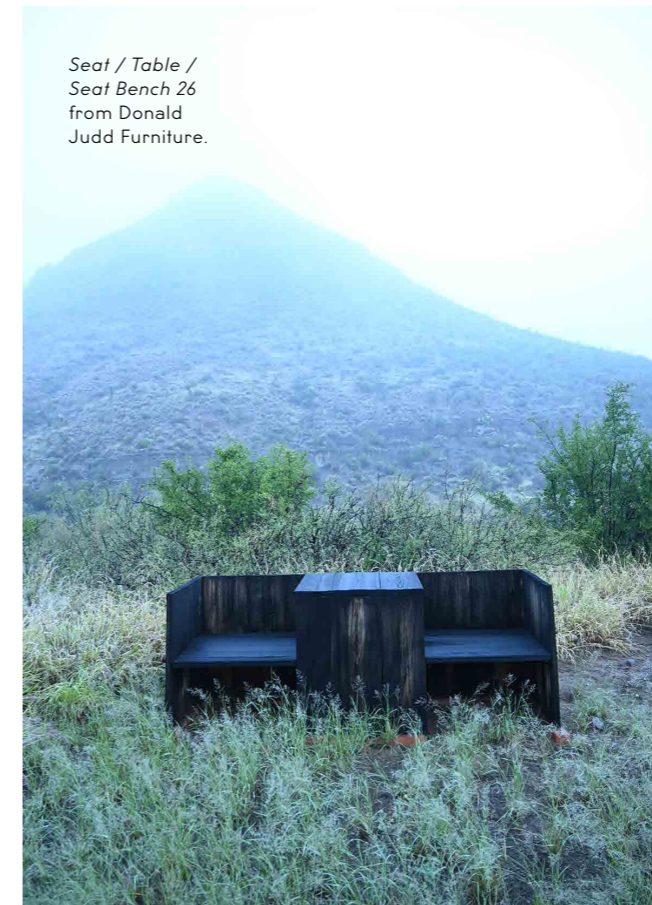


Opposite: *Tiendita* Above: *Library Day Bed 15*, from Donald Judd Furniture. Below left: Kitchen (detail). Right: Dining room.





Bath house.



Seat / Table /
Seat Bench 26
from Donald
Judd Furniture.



Stalinist hotel, which is a bit strange, but that's why *Perez* is nice because it hasn't changed at all. The only thing that's changed is the date of the newspapers in the fireplace.

PT *When you look back to your youth, what are your earliest memories of living there?*

FJ The interesting thing about *Perez* is that it was our second ranch house. I only started going there, I think, in high school, so it's likely more of a present place than the other properties. But the fact that it hasn't really aged has somehow left it a little more ... current, and it's also the ranch house that I visit most often.

PT *When you're young you don't know any different, but living an itinerant life between Spring St. and Marfa was definitely unusual. Did it strike you as such?*

FJ Well, I know it was unusual because I knew people who were very proud to live in small shoeboxes on the Upper East Side, and to me that was a total mystery. So I knew it was unusual, but to me, other people were unusual, not me.

PT *When I look at Casa Perez, I see it in two different ways. On the pages of a magazine it looks obviously spare and minimal, but very photogenic. And yet I'm sure the reality of living there is very different. Did you find it hard going?*

FJ No. Hard going is when you're in a room with flower print wallpaper everywhere, that's really, really tough. I mean there are things that you have to adjust to with all the ranch houses. *Casa Perez* didn't have hot water, so it could be difficult, but it's worth it.

PT *Tell me about the aesthetic of Perez. It's pared-back, maybe a little unyielding, but feels more relevant than ever.*

FJ Well *Casa Perez* is basically a country house, right? You don't go there to live six months at a stretch — you bring stuff out there and you bring stuff back. So that's one thing. To me, it's a normal kind of house, and

that's because it's stripped down. People like flower print on every surface of their house, which would drive me insane.

PT *Don changed the face of modern sculpture. Did being from the Midwest lend him a different sensibility?*

FJ I think in a certain way, because the way he thinks is very much a farmer's sensibility, like the way our ancestors made cabinets and built buildings. So there's a very, very practical sense. Making art should have been a clash but he made it work. Don was extremely pragmatic.

PT *But he obviously enjoyed furnishing each property. Do you find there's a weird juxtaposition between modernity and traditionalism going on in each of them?*

FJ Maybe, because he didn't believe in either of those two categories. I think he wanted things that were of their time. Nice things. And Spanish pottery is nice, which is just as nice as Mexican tables, which is just as nice as German knives and French tools. It all goes together. They're all good.

PT *I've just been looking at the images you took at Perez for this story. You hone in on details, from books to kitchen utensils, to the Spanish pottery you mentioned. Were they chosen for their design or functionality?*

FJ Just because he liked it and there was a store in Switzerland, just across the lake from our place, and so it became incredibly easy to get it, so we have a lot of Spanish pottery. And then some of the other stuff is older, from New York in the '70s.



Pergola.



Kitchen.



PT Don was a pioneer of minimalism. I suppose when it came to the properties it was a very interesting proposition, to align that artistic view with something quite domestic.

FJ First of all, remember that *minimal* was a word imposed by critics and never accepted by artists. It's kind of like saying, 'I loved your pizzeria' to somebody with a 4 Star Italian restaurant. For Don, there's no contradictions, there's no definitions, there are no categories.

PT I'm sure critics have analyzed this in the past and made something of it, but was the practicality some sort of art statement?

FJ Well nothing is purely practical. Even if you have practical implements, like a fork or a knife, you don't choose them irrespective of what they look like. For Don, what things look like was very, very important, obviously. So much so, that he made where he lived according to his wishes, probably to a stricter, higher, more severe standard than most people probably bother with. That included forks, knives, crockery — things like that.

PT And the furniture, was that handmade for the house?

FJ No, some of it is designed by Don, and then some pieces are antiques that are either Spanish or from Mexico, so it's a mix.

PT The out houses, the wooden structures on the grounds, they look very interesting, the way they sit on the land. How do they function?

FJ They're all pergolas with tables, where we would eat breakfast.

PT It sounds idyllic. Don loomed large in your life, didn't he? Can you describe your relationship? What did you learn from him?

FJ Well, I don't think I can describe it. It's like anyone's relationship with their parents. I had a good relationship. I learned a lot. He was my father first and a designer and artist second, and that's where it is.

PT From an art and design perspective, were you aware at an early age of the significance of what Don was doing and what he was trying to achieve?

FJ Well, first of all he changed as he got older. He was never static and Marfa developed as a kind of organic idea, plan, so the whole thing changed overtime. And also the idea of what your parents do changes as your idea of the world changes.

PT I know with the Judd Foundation it's imperative for you to preserve things. Is this so your children will see the work as it should be seen?

FJ Well yes, inevitably it's for my kids, who unfortunately never got to meet Don, but it's also for everybody else. Because I think that if anybody, Don or anybody else, makes something that's really good, then it's part of the culture and it deserves preserving. Too often the culture, or society, is very quick to destroy things that are worth preserving. Luckily Marfa is one place where profits are not getting in the way.

PT If Don were in Marfa today, with everything that's going on, what would he think about it?

FJ He would be at Casa Perez in a second.

PT He'd be hiding, not wanting to see it?

FJ You don't need 20 different kinds of coffee in 16 galleries. I don't really think he would've participated. ■

Juddfoundation.org

Flavin Judd is repped by brydgesmackinney.com

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