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MAGIC hour

An architect, a developer and an interior designer walk into a home, and the result is Southern California dreamy.

By Abigail Stone
Photography by Simon Berlyn



Collaboration becomes next-level when longtime friends work together. Take this home in Laurel Canyon. A relic of the early '70s, the A-frame style two-story wooden house, with its warren of dark, tiny rooms, was in need of some serious TLC when architect David Thompson of Assembledges, developer Eric Dobkin of Dobkin Construction and interior designer Susan Mitnick of Susan Mitnick Design Studio found it.

"We're a really good design collective," says Thompson of the trio, who have worked—and vacationed—together for many years. So Thompson and Mitnick knew exactly what Dobkin meant when he said that he wanted to create a space he'd love to live in. He envisioned something modern and elegant yet cozy and inviting as well. The space would have a seamless flow between inside and outdoors, and would accommodate two or 200 people with ease.

Thompson started with the front of the home, adding glass to make it feel more open. The next step was to replace the twisting, claustrophobic staircase with a simple, angular model. "Now, those glass railings let you see from the front of the house to the rear," he explains. The lower floor, with its junior bedrooms, including a Jack-and-Jill configuration, was modernized. Then the focus turned to the main floor.

Because the home is built into a hillside, the top floor is level with the backyard. "Originally," explains Thompson, "you went up the stairs and hit a wall, and had no sense of

From top: Andrew Neyer's Big Mobile Light twists and turns above a custom white oak table and chairs from Jay Alexander; Shaker-style cabinetry painted in Dunn-Edwards' Long Lake complements lights by Sam Wilkinson and Decode. Opposite page: A custom sofa and an Eames chair and ottoman sit atop a vintage Moroccan rug. David Trubridge's Koura pendant light dangles over the staircase.





Clockwise from top left: "I loved the idea of this quiet Zen bathroom that was open to a terrace and the trees," says Mitnick of the master bathroom; a Flos IC light hangs over the egg-shaped Aquabagno by Aquabross; Setatario Venato marble covers the den bar's countertop and backsplash. Opposite page: Michael Fiore of Fiore Landscape Design masterminded the backyard.

the exterior." To open up the area, Thompson tore down walls that separated the front of the house from the rear, as well as walls between the living, dining and kitchen areas. "It just opened everything up," says Thompson. As a final flourish, two gaps were blown into the wall that led to the backyard. Inset

with Fleetwood doors, "the result is pretty dramatic," says Thompson.

With the framework of the home in place, Mitnick went about transforming the interior. Recognizing that the space's high, beamed ceilings—as well as its size—were both its selling point and its Waterloo, she washed them in a warm gray-brown. The color, mirrored in the hearth, helps ground the room. A similar optical illusion is performed by the stacks of Soli's Great Wall pavers that stretch upward in the kitchen, echoing the ceiling's herringbone pattern. Custom furniture, including a white sectional and a live-edge dining room table, delineates different areas within the great room. The separation is underlined by visual cues: kitchen cabinets painted in Dunn-Edwards' Long Lake, the Andrew Neyer light over the dining room table and the Moroccan handknit wool rug in the living area. At night, David Trubridge's enormous Koura Pendant, throws a dramatic light over everything.

But like the group's collaboration, how it comes together surpasses the individual elements. "This is what quintessential California living is all about—that melding of the indoor-outdoor life," Thompson says. "That's what sells." He's proven correct when, not long after the house is finished, it's snatched up by a musician. Chalk it up to teamwork! ■

