





Speck House

Designer Jamie Bush takes a scrap of a beach shack and turns it into a huge, decadent design statement

By Alexandria Abramian-Mott | Photography by Ethan Pines

The term *jewel box* may be an overused one. But when it comes to Jamie Bush's dazzling dot of a Venice beach house, the expression is more than justified. It's here, in a series of petite rooms with scant square footage (all told, less than 1,200), that the designer's talent gets huge room to roam. By blurring interior and exterior areas, making premeditated plays on scale, and adding just-so doses of color and texture, Bush pulls off a real-deal decorating feat: He doesn't just make small feel bigger. He manages to make a diminutive 1950s box feel downright opulent.

"The key to small spaces is that you have to make room for a few grand gestures," says the designer, who has a master's degree in architecture from Tulane University and has worked for the likes of Kelly Wearstler and architects Marmol-Radziner. (He's currently doing interiors for a Marmol-Radziner-

designed house, as well as a hotel in Hawaii and a clutch of homes for Industry bigwigs.) In the case of his own home—which he shares with Stephen Calipari, a piano teacher—one of the grandest of all gestures includes his use of Calcutta gold marble. The gray- and gold-veined white stone extends from bedroom to bath, kitchen to living area—even to the outdoor patio. "I'd say this floor is the biggest defining factor in the house," says Bush, who was born in Long Island, New York and moved to L.A. in 1994. "It's sweeping. The veins are large and almost abstract, and when you use a simple material like this in a big way, it allows a space to feel both modern and decadent in this way that I really love. It both defines and unifies the space."

Defining and unifying the rooms is key to the project. Bush's architectural background reveals itself in his approach to elongating

LEFT: In the living room, Bush covered the sofas in vintage '60s fabric, installed vintage lotus-blossom pendant lights and added a shot of bright green with downtown's Grotto Stool. ABOVE: It's hang time for Bush in the library. Painting by Joe Downing. Pillow fabric from International Silks and Woolens.





“Almost every vertical surface in the bedroom is the same shade of faded lavender, so that you’re enclosed by the color. That ends up feeling grand.”

the house by aligning interior doors so that both the width and depth of the space are broadened by unfettered sightlines. Stand in his 10-foot-by-15-foot library, with its 9-foot-long Futurama in Los Angeles sofa and gallery-size abstract painting, and you can see all the way through the music room and the living room to the bedroom hallway. “Being able to optimize the longest distances in small spaces is key to making them feel bigger,” says Bush, who took the additional step of unifying all of the doorways along the line: “They’re all

double doors, and then I hung a panel above all of them. That makes them feel tall and skinny and helps draw the eye up—again, to make this feel bigger than it actually is.”

Bush also draws the eye up by wallpapering many of the ceilings. In the bedroom, he uses a grain-like Keith McCoy paper on the ceiling. In the music room and library, it’s a custom McCoy fern pattern. He also “wraps” rooms in tile, fabric and wood. In the kitchen, the sand-colored ceramic square penny tile isn’t just used

ABOVE: In the master bedroom, Old World Weavers’ Belgian linen drapery and custom Dunn Edwards paint are a perfectly matched “faded lavender.” Vintage ikat throw from Bali; vintage Italian lamps from Rewire.
OPPOSITE PAGE: In the sitting area off the living room, twin vintage chairs from French 50s–60s have cushions covered in Clarence House’s Mistolino. Artwork by L.A. artist Cliff Lecuyer; vintage Moroccan side table from Lawson-Fenning; grass cloth wallpaper by Art People, available at Niermann Weeks.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Vintage West German pottery lights from Retro Gallery work as one-of-a-kind sconces in the library. A resin figurine from artist/designer Dorothy Thorpe graces the hallway. The main patio area gets cozy with wicker chairs, a sunshade from Brown Jordan and a West Elm jute rug.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The high-drama dining room has vintage Milo Baughman table and chairs with Osborne & Little orange Venus fabric.

as the expected backsplash. Instead, Bush went whole hog. “I made a rule,” he says. “If you’re a vertical surface in the kitchen, you get covered in the tile. It’s a more urbane gesture.” And for the library, his favorite room in the house, he took the bleached white oak he used for the floors and extended it up onto the walls and built-ins for a “Japanese sauna box effect.” Similarly, for the bedroom, Bush took a few bolts of “faded lavender” Belgian linen and draped it along almost every vertical surface, effectively covering every square inch of wall (the closet, the bookshelves, the windows) in yard after yard of ripple-fold fabric. The lone exposed wall is painted in custom-blended Pratt & Lambert that matches seamlessly with the drapery. “Too many small moves that are all the same scale make rooms feel fussy,” says Bush. “And in the bedroom, it really feels enclosed by the color, and that ends up feeling grand.”

Bush’s other design mantra for small spaces? Repetition, be it the eight identical carriage house French doors in the living

room, library and music room; the dining room’s matching mirrors; the twin Karastan carpets in the library and music room; or the living room sofas. “Piecemeal just doesn’t look good,” says Bush. “The eye wants symmetry, and that’s especially important when you’re dealing with small spaces.”

So what was the learning curve for a designer whose usual client lives in a far grander pad? “My typical projects are really large-scale homes, so obviously I really had to work at this. The challenge here was that we have this nondescript box from the ’50s. And the goal I had was to find a way to make this space somehow exceptional.” The results? Bush cites his decision to enclose the entire house in 8-foot-high walls and ficus hedges as one of the most important. “Not only does it give us a sense of privacy and increase the square footage of the living space, but there’s also something very carefree about the fact that you can just walk from space to space, whether you’re naked or not,” says the designer. “And there’s something really decadent about that.” ■

