

ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN / MAY SUNG,  
SUBU DESIGN ARCHITECTURE  
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# A HANDMADE TALE

IN PACIFIC PALISADES, A BESPOKE HOME CELEBRATES  
A YOUNG FAMILY'S PASSIONS AND INTERESTS.

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May Sung takes a client-centered approach to her practice. "I like to create homes, not houses for my own ego," says the architect. It's a philosophy that has served her well, particularly for a recent commission for friends in Pacific Palisades. After years of renting, Yahlin Chang, a writer and co-executive producer of *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series, and her husband decided to build a custom home. As with any ground-up project, there were myriad considerations but the primary objective was to create an abode that referenced Yahlin and her husband's time on the East Coast—they met at Yale—and to encourage a love of reading in their children. With a storage unit full of books that hadn't seen the light of day in years, the homeowners knew library space was also a must. "The idea of creating something from scratch specifically tailored to our needs was quite appealing and working with an architect that understood our family made a lot of sense," says Yahlin.

The couple had hoped their new home would blend with the neighborhood's traditional styling, but they also wanted something one-of-a-kind. "The intellectual idea was that the house would be a Cape Cod with a Postmodern twist," says Yahlin. The result is an inventive H-shaped plan with wings in white clapboard and a receding central section clad in black metal. From that concept, "the rest all fell in line," says Sung, who worked with general contractor Joel Fischer and his associate, Jerry Luza, on the project. One wing consists of the garage and kitchen on the main floor, with the children's rooms upstairs; the other contains a playroom, guest room and Yahlin's office on the ground floor, with a large master suite and the husband's office above them.



Architect May Sung designed the great room in the Pacific Palisades home of writer and producer Yahlin Chang to be sophisticated yet family friendly. The space centers on a painting by Karen Kawarsky. In the living area are an Eames lounge chair from Jules Seltzer Associates and a chandelier from Cassina. A trompe l'oeil wallpaper by Couture Déco lines the stairwell.

Beyond the Arcadia pivot door, the architect's dog, Maddy—pals with the family's Labradoodle, Henry—sits on the entry's sofa. Above the sofa are a mirror and sconces from RH. Lining the shelves are volumes from the family's extensive book collection—a key driver in the design and purpose of the home.



Ringed with chairs from Jules Seltzer Associates, the dining area's Jiun Ho table from Thomas Lavin features a custom stone top from TriStone & Tile. Sung also used the material for the living area's fire surround.

In the living area are a Vioski sofa in Perennials fabric and a Magni swivel chair upholstered in Lavender fabric. The coffee table is from Room & Board; the rug is from RH. Max's Custom Cabinets fabricated the kitchen millwork. There, Sung paired Vitra barstools with a Parachilna pendant fixture. The nearby terrace is furnished with a Kartell sofa and stools and chairs from Herman Miller. Pierre Landscape realized landscape architect Meg Rushing Coffee's vision for the outdoors.



Decorative artist Nicolas Pasquale Valle painted a ceiling mural of the cosmos—designed to inspire—for the children's reading room, just off the library tower. The table and seating are from the client's previous home. Overhead is a light from Mass Beverly.

The structure's central portion, which contains the clerestoried stairwell or "library tower" as the family calls it, floods the foyer, living area and upstairs reading room with light. "I love the library tower. It's a great way for anyone coming into our home to get a good sense of who we are right off the bat," says Yahlin, explaining that their collection of books includes acquisitions made during their university days and her six years in the cultural department at *Newsweek*, in addition to many inherited from family. "As we moved from place to place, we'd shed different possessions but always keep our books with us in the hope that one day we'd have a place to put them all. For the first time, we finally have all the shelf space we need." While the shelving itself is located on the second floor, a bookshelf-print wallpaper that playfully mirrors the collection is visible on entering the home.

The wallcovering, witty and understated, reflects the rest of the interiors, which Sung also oversaw. "We definitely wanted a clean palette and cool colors," says Yahlin. But she was less sure of how she wanted the furnishings to look. "My taste really developed during the process. May was able to translate our desires into a style that was perfect for us," she says. In the great room, where Sung installed a traditional coffered ceiling, the family now enjoys contemporary pieces and a few midcentury classics like an Eames lounge chair and Cherner dining chairs. Space was also made for the family's Steinway ("Music is an important part of our lives—my sisters and I grew up playing classical piano," says Yahlin.) and an art collection that features works by Canadian watercolorist John Bennett and an abstraction by Karen Kawarsky, commissioned specifically for the dining area. Titled *Dusk*, it was inspired by an aerial view of the handmaids and the importance the showrunner and costume designer placed on finding just the right shade for the characters' now-iconic red cloaks. Meaningful touches continue in the adjacent kitchen where a pendant fixture recalls Chinese lanterns, a nod to Yahlin's Taiwanese heritage.



In the master bedroom, artwork by John Bennett hovers above the Vioski bed and night tables. The Liaigre lamps, Romo banquette fabric and de Le Cuona drapery sheers are from Thomas Lavin. Santa Cruz Designs fabricated the custom banquette and window treatments. An RH carpet grounds the space. The walls are painted in a Farrow & Ball shade.



Standing in a corner of the master bathroom, the tub and the tub filler are by Waterworks. Above the vanities are pendants from Niche and a mirror from Room & Board. The tile is from Ann Sacks.

Personalized designs persist upstairs, too. Inspired by the decorative ceiling of a Manhattan bookstore, Sung proposed a mural of the cosmos for the reading room. "It's a lovely place for the kids to do their homework," says Yahlin. Contributing a further fanciful twist, says Fischer, "We painted the sprinkler heads gold so that they would blend in with the stars and planets painted on the ceiling." In the master suite, the goal was serenity but with one special addition: The husband requested a secluded office. "He wanted privacy, so we created a secret bookcase door," says Sung.

Outside, Sung worked closely with landscape architect Meg Rushing Coffee to navigate restrictions concerning the

protected oak trees on the lot. Besides devising a seating and dining space off the great room, "We created a lower play area off the main rear entertainment and dining terrace from the house," Coffee explains. "The yard then slopes gradually to the rear property line."

Sung notes that a sense of fun threads through the indoors and outdoors. But achieving that feel wasn't as easy as it seems. In fact, Yahlin points out, it consumed the architect. "She really went above and beyond. She would dream about our house at night!" For the architect, though, love is the reason. "You've got to love your home," she says, and credits the homeowners, adding, "because they were so involved, the love is even greater." ■