



# Natural SELECTION

An acclaimed Los Angeles architect helps reinvent a Manhattan Beach residence for a young couple and their two children, while incorporating a Japanese display concept with her own natural spin.

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When Mona and Sanjay Khurana first spotted their home in Manhattan Beach 2½ years ago, it wasn't at all what they envisioned as their dream house. "It was a Mexican contemporary style, and it was painted purple, red and yellow," says Mona, a software engineer. "It was very compartmentalized and all closed off."

The couple, who at the time were living in Marina del Rey, were drawn to the home's large, 0.2-acre lot, sweeping views of Malibu and downtown, and close proximity to schools for their two children.

"The bones of the home were good and it was extremely well-lit and sunny, but the home itself didn't fit our aesthetic style. The layout of the home wasn't ideal for a family of four with two small children," adds Sanjay, a spine surgeon. "We had an intuitive feeling that, with the right inspiration, we could transform this home into a beachy, warm, modern, well-lit and kid-friendly home."

After a series of "designer tryouts"—design presentations from various architects—the couple hired Pacific Palisades-based architect May Sung,

principal of SUBU Design Architecture, whose projects include a private horse ranch in Los Olivos, a Beverly Hills residence and La Serena Villas in Palm Springs.

"It's an urban lot, and we tried to integrate every inch," says May of the resort-like, 6,000-square-foot home featuring a kids playroom (a converted space from the former garage), a pool house, an outdoor swimming pool, a large master suite with a living roof, and a small putting green. "It was about learning how they live as a family with two children. Home is their haven. It's an anchor of beauty, joy and stability, and reflects Mona and Sanjay's dream."

For the major overhaul, weekly meetings were held between May, Mona and Suzanne Ascher of Waterleaf Interiors (Sanjay was hands-on with all of the technical components such as speakers, televisions and audio/visual) to decide on components such as an open floor plan, large windows, French oak floors, furnishings, palette and a sculptural staircase that leads from downstairs to the upstairs master suite and children's rooms.







"Before, they had this utilitarian staircase," adds May of the large spiral staircase that acts as a natural partition between the living room and dining room and kitchen areas. "It's a sculptural form that brings the eye up, and it tells a story."

In the kitchen, May created a kid-friendly yet glamorous space with durable, stain-resistant quartzite for the countertops, a mercury glass hood, smoky-hued glass pendant lamps, and a hammered aluminum dining table paired with plaid, upholstered benches for craft projects prepared by the children. "At first I was like, 'I don't know about a mercury glass hood, it's kind of 1970s, but now I love it,'" adds Mona.

In the living room and seating areas, a neutral, grey-and-white palette serves as a canvas for large, colorful artwork and objects and a natural-hued seafoam fan that resides above the fireplace.

May, also influenced by Japanese concept Tokonoma (display areas) wanted to create a space at the entry to showcase the couple's large, marble Ganesh commissioned and hand-carved by an L.A. sculptor.

"I love how she brought in herself to the house, and we must have looked at 20 different Ganeshes," adds May, referring to Mona's selec-

tion process. "Part of the concept is borrowed by the Japanese idea of tokonoma—the idea that there is always a display area or a decorative scene to anchor each room. Except I used natural elements such as a green wall or a green roof to infuse that idea."

For these natural elements, May created a master suite with a living roof and an indoor/outdoor meditation room featuring a living wall, a living roof and a large cast sculpture: *Lignum Spire #3* by Seth Kaufman.

"I love the master," adds Mona, who initially spotted one of Kaufman's similar sculptures on The Strand in Hermosa Beach and loved it so much she told May, who was serendipitously able to procure it. "You can kind of see the Hollywood sign, and it feels like an extension of the bedroom. It's like going away to a hotel, and it's so Zen."

In addition to creating a serene space that fit all of their functional needs, the couple also had other important criteria: to have plenty of space for entertaining friends, room for the kids to play and hosting pool parties. In the backyard, landscaped by Manhattan Beach's Rob Jones, AstroTurf replaces traditional grass and frames the rectangular-shaped outdoor swimming pool.





Adjacent to the pool is a pool house with radiant heated concrete floors, a large-screen television, sofas and pocket doors. "We have pool parties almost every weekend," says Mona. "People who come over ask, 'Where could you possibly go on vacation that would be better than this?'"

Now Mona and Sanjay can't imagine living anywhere else. "Since we saw it being built, there was never that moment when you see the house for the first time," adds Mona. "We already felt at home before we moved in, and it always felt very familiar and comfortable because for two years we saw it maturing. On weekends we used to bring the kids over, and they would play pretend like they were coming down for breakfast after sleeping in their new room or watching TV in the family room. And so when we moved in, it fit very natural for them."

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May also admits it was a true labor of love. “I miss it,” she says. “It’s like having a baby when you’re in the process and there sometimes twice a week. The whole idea is the lifestyle and creating an oasis. But there are still so many spaces where the kids can run around. Now I’m so surprised what it looked like before. When we finished and were photographing the house, a neighbor walked by and said, ‘Oh my god, I love this house. It changes the whole street.’”

“We love our new home,” adds Sanjay. “Not a day goes by where we don’t appreciate nuances that make this home warm, functional and beautiful. Every morning there is a lot of gratitude for what we have.” ■



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