

# Beauty in Diversity

OLD WORLD AND NEW AGREE ON A HILLSIDE IN LOS ANGELES

Architecture by Harold Levitt  
Interior Design by Martynus-Tripp  
Text by Peter Haldeman  
Photography by Tim Street-Porter

It's a common complaint in better neighborhoods across America. Where are the properties that haven't been remodeled into oblivion? "We'd been looking for a year, and everything we saw had been added on to or overbuilt or had no personality," recalls one woman who grew up in a fine home on the west side of Los Angeles and planned to resettle in the area with her husband after retiring. "When our realtor called and said we had to see something, we came flying."

The source of their excitement was indeed a find—a hillside villa built late in his career by the noted architect Harold Levitt. A second-generation modernist, Levitt designed airy, streamlined environments that took full advantage of Southern California's benign climate and natural beauty. Unlike many of his peers, he focused on high-end residential projects,

conceiving sumptuously lofty homes for celebrity clients from Debbie Reynolds to Lew Wasserman. Built in the early 1990s, the villa boasts Levitt's signature clean lines and dramatic proportions, but it's also one-of-a-kind. Its entrance—an 18th-century French door floated in a wall of glass—announces a cozy spin on modernity, a look that embraces flagstone floors, slump-stone walls and log overhangs.

Discovering this jewel was one thing, polishing it another matter altogether. The couple had collected art and antiques for most of their lives, but they quickly realized that their things didn't fit the house. "I guess we'd never had ceilings that high," the wife says with a laugh. "We moved in, and everything looked like the Munchkins lived here." Their next thought was to "go modern" with the furnishings. But that was before they paid a visit to the house across the

Martyn Lawrence-Bullard and Trip Haenisch, of Martynus-Tripp, created a European villa-style interior for a Los Angeles house designed by Harold Levitt in the early 1990s. Rigari Pierre Bonnard's 1925 *Chien Chassant des Oiseaux* hangs in the living room. Edelman leather and Glant velvet on sofa. Larsen fabrics on footstools. Mansour area rug.





The dining room features a two-panel work by Edouard Vuillard, *Sacha Guitry dans les Couloirs du Théâtre*, 1922. Dinner service from Herend. Flatware from Christofle. Linen napkins from Hermès. Chair suede, Ralph Lauren Home. Exquisite Surfaces oak floorboards.

street and discovered the talents of Martyn Lawrence-Bullard, the designer who was redoing their neighbor's Tuscan-style residence. According to Lawrence-Bullard, they started out small. "I went over, and they said, 'Maybe to begin with we could just pull together the living room,'" he recalls. "Well, before you knew it..." Before you knew it, three years had passed, and

every room in the house had benefited from a top-to-bottom makeover. Lawrence-Bullard, who worked on the house with his partner, Trip Haenisch, at Martynus-Tripp, is an English-born former actor with a flair for the dramatic. It was his inspiration to revamp what he calls a "ranch house villa" into "a cross between an 18th-century Italian villa and a Por-

tuguese quinta. We wanted to give it more of a European flavor." To that end, some of the interior walls were treated with Venetian plaster (which is mixed with marble dust); white louvered doors gave way to heavy Italian portals and carved Portuguese folding screens; and prefab mantels were replaced with 18th-century French limestone. With the exception of the master

bath, which was completely reworked, the house's fine bones were left unmolested.

The designers devoted most of their attention to assembling a sophisticated mix of antiques and art. They scoured the auction houses and traveled to London and Paris with the wife to shop for everything from 17th-century olive-wood mirrors that had previously belonged to Babe

Paley (now in the bedroom) to a museum-quality 18th-century Portuguese secretary and console table (living room) to a Biedermeier desk and chairs (office). "We often design a lot of furniture, but here we just brought together the most beautiful things we could find," says Haenisch. A collection of mellow Ushaks, Sultanabads and Aubussons links the diverse pieces: "Mar-

ty's all about color, and I'm more about texture, but both of those things help pull the rooms together."

The designers introduced the couple to Patricia Marshall, a French art dealer, who helped them form a collection that is not upstaged by museum-quality furniture. Pissarro's *La Rivière aux Saules*, *Eragry* greets visitors in the entrance hall. A Blue Peri-

"I love collections," comments Haenisch, who used the wife's office to display the clients' photographs, including work by Richard Avedon, Herb Ritts, Edward Steichen and Horst. On the circa 1830 Austrian Biedermeier desk is a Cartier box. Suede from Donghia.







OPPOSITE: "There's a funkiness I think is charming," Haenisch says of the breakfast area, which has mismatched barstools, a pair of circa 1812 lithographs of melons by George Brookshaw and an 18th-century Dutch tall case clock. Early-19th-century Aubusson, Mansour.



od Picasso hangs in the living room. A pair of Vuillard panels depicting the Moulin Rouge grace the dining room, and the artist's sketches for the panels appear in other parts of the house. Leaving the blue-chip art are pieces by the contemporary artists that the couple continue to collect—Peter Shelton, Joe Goode, Jason Martin. Classic

fashion photographs by Steichen, Horst and Avedon fill a wall in the wife's office. "She has a background in fashion merchandising, and I collect photography," says Haenisch, "so it was fun helping her put together the images."

According to Lawrence-Bullard, "the clients wanted to have fine things, but fine things in a comfortable and

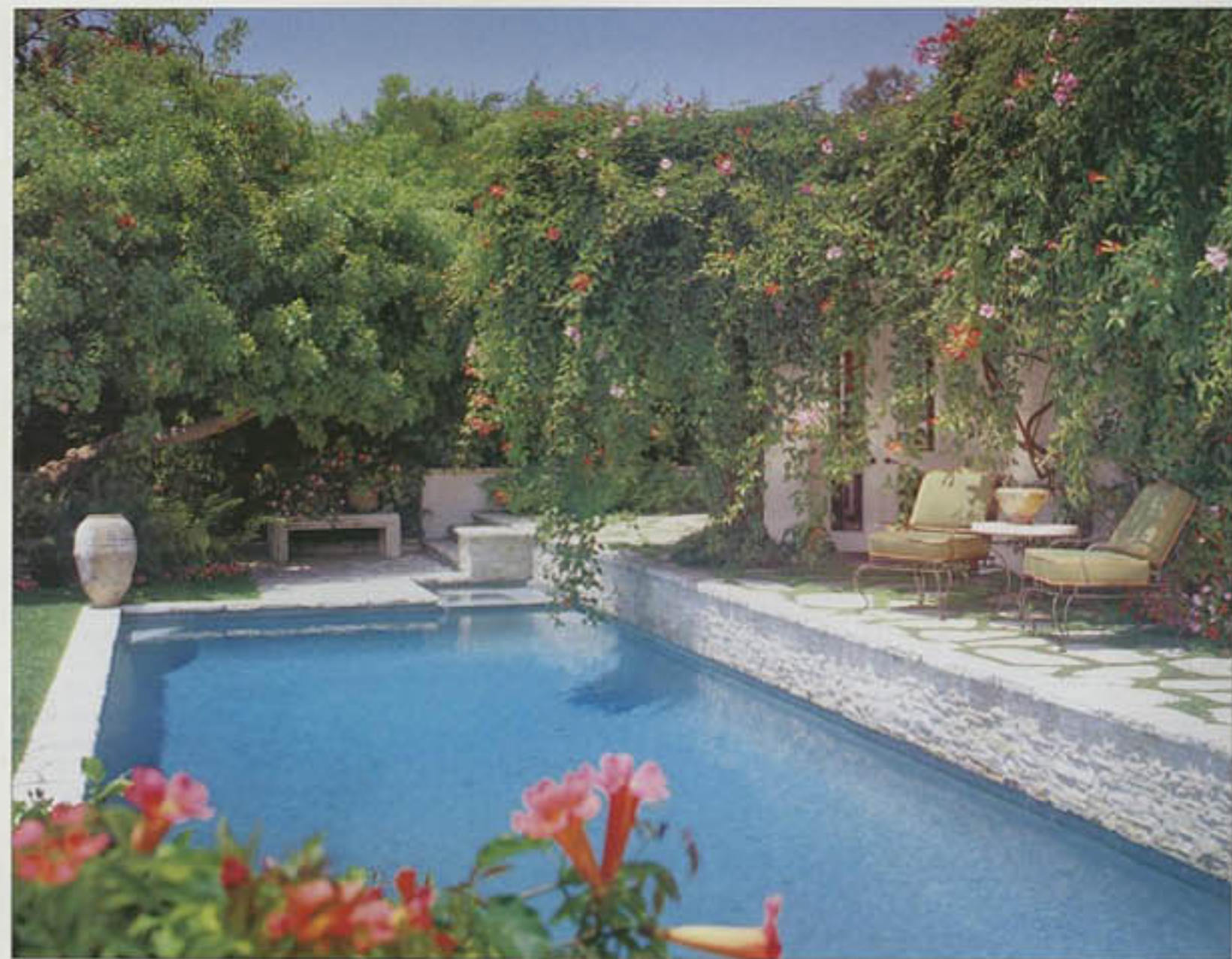
lived-in environment. Everything in that house is something you can sit on or touch." The house's indoor-outdoor nature—its atriiums and floor-to-ceiling glass doors—helps to keep things from getting too serious. Outside, the lush grounds have been tamed into graceful Old World-style gardens. Boston ivy and mature trumpet and wisteria

ABOVE: Two works from Joe Goode's 2000 *Cause and Effect* series are in the family room. Chinese vases and paisley pillow fabric, all of which once belonged to Tony Duquette, from Christie's. Great Plains sofa. Charles Pollock octagonal table. John Hobbs side chair. Quatrain grotto stool.





OPPOSITE: "I used 19th-century paisley shawls as draperies for the master bedroom," Lawrence-Bullard says. The 1915 drawing *Man with Moustache* is by Albert Marquet. The 17th-century mirror, from John Hobbs, was owned by Babe Paley. Italian chair, Charles Pollock.



The grounds have been tamed into graceful Old World-style gardens. You're never far from a shaded bench or a gurgling urn.

vines wrap the house in charm, and the husband worked with landscape architect W. Garrett Carlson to terrace the surrounding hillside with stone walls and walkways. On the one-acre site you're never far from a shaded bench or a gurgling urn.

Indoors and out, the couple host their friends and family (a son and two grown grand-

children) as often as they possibly can. "We entertain probably once a week," remarks the husband, "with big parties every three months. We had 150 guests at our Christmas party. Martyn's also an event planner." In fact, Lawrence-Bullard and Haenisch remain familiar presences in the couple's lives. "Martyn and Tripp's ability, which I think is bor-

derline genius, is that they have versatility without waffling," the husband explains. "They can do a project for a movie star, a socialite, an everyday nice person." Which is why these everyday nice people are now putting the finishing touches on a Hamptons-style beach house in Malibu—courtesy, naturally, of Martynus-Tripp. □

ABOVE: Patio furniture by the designers provides an informal seating area by the pool, which, like the flagstone deck, is original to the house. "It takes years for vines to grow in like this," Haenisch says. "Fortunately, the clients inherited these." Exquisite Surfaces olive oil jar.