

THIS PAGE: Always hinting at the historic, Barrett uses vintage 1940s chairs to frame this classic white mantle, black brick fireplace. A photo from the tenant's private collection adds a personal touch.

OPPOSITE: The elegant dining room opens to a courtyard on either side for open air entertaining on warm days. The wicker chairs add an outdoorsy, porch-life feeling to the elegant room. The custom-made dining table can also double as a buffet for larger parties.



designer profile
CHRIS BARRETT



PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL G. YEARD



SIMPLICITY IS KEY TO MAKE IT ALL HAPPEN. "THERE IS ALWAYS A CHALLENGE," SAYS BARRETT.

Designer Chris Barrett is a master at the art of balance. Like a skilled tightrope walker, she maintains a fine equilibrium between two worlds. She can modernize an Arts and Crafts era home without sacrificing its charm as well as she can add historical context to a contemporary urban loft. Mixing periods and styles is a signature of her design. The key, she says, is learning how to listen to clients and give their vision a voice. "Reading people is so much a part of interior design," Barrett says. "Hopefully I can translate."

Barrett has been translating from her home base at Chris Barrett Design in Santa Monica for the last fifteen years. A graduate of the UCLA interior design program, Barrett got her first job while still in school. Though the path to starting her own design firm was straight, it wasn't necessarily a fast track. "It was a very slow build," she says, but the wait was worth it. Today, she focuses primarily on California-based clients and has branched out to work on projects in Utah and Nevada, including Drai's Restaurant in the Barbary Coast Casino in Las Vegas.

Each space she designs, says Barrett, showcases her clients lives and personalities in bold relief. Each house is "always a reflection of the people who live in it. It's not a cookie cutter business—you want to see the life in your house."

To that end, Barrett makes use of carefully chosen antique furniture pieces and rugs to accent the personality of the space. Special touches like vintage lighting and fixtures accent even the most modern spaces, grounding each project with a sense of history. Barrett looks



to her favorite designers—Andrée Putman, Paul Williams, Jean-Michele Frank, and Wallace Neff—for inspiration, while taking her leading cues from the architecture of the home itself. Her simple, elegant, and livable style has to marry the needs of the resident with the style the home demands. “I like to respond to the architecture and incorporate the client’s taste,” she says.

When Barrett designed an office space for Jerry Moss of A&M Records, she was able to use his love of Art Deco style as a historic basis with extensive art collection as a modern exclamation point. The result was an interior as vibrant and expressive as its tenant. Barrett is currently working on the home of Oscar winning actress Charlize Theron and looking forward to incorporating her personality into the design. “I’m excited about it,” Barrett says. “She’s a really fun person.”

One of Barrett’s biggest challenges is trying to give her clients everything they require in regard to function while maintaining a unique style and staying within their budget. Simplicity is key to make it all happen. “There is always a challenge,” says Barrett. Regardless the obstacle, she works tirelessly to find a solution. If a client wants to change the color of a room without committing to a complete renovation with new furniture, Barrett recommends accenting with paint or floor pillows which offer the added bonus of additional seating. Want to expand a space without knocking out a wall? Try floor mirrors to create an illusion of openness. Desperate for a conversation piece? Barrett says she has had luck with creating mosaics on mirrors, picture frames, tables, and floors. “These can work in so many ranges of architecture.”

Whether she is traveling to the East Coast to find the perfect architectural antique or comparing fabric swatches, Barrett always looks to what she believes is the most essential element of design—her clients—for inspiration. “It’s about the people,” she says. “I love what I do—I have a passion for it.” ■



ABOVE: The cozy breakfast nook and vintage fixtures accent the inviting atmosphere of this communal eat-in kitchen. Though it cannot be seen, there is a custom-made doggie door under the desk so Fido can have the run of the room.

TOP: Barrett designed her own kitchen, shown here. The cabinets are based on a vintage design. The white farm-style sink and antique table island set the historical tone.

OPPOSITE: The living room is the grande dame of this home, built in 1912. Black and white marble floors provide a sharp contrast to the beautifully wood-coffered ceiling. The oversized fireplace with original tile grounds all elements of the room.

