

JAMIE BUSH PUTS AN ORGANIC MODERN SPIN ON CALIFORNIA DESIGN

by Mallery Roberts Morgan | January 2, 2017

The Los Angeles—based architect and designer grew up in a family of famous artists and down-to-earth farmers, a background reflected in his mix of high style and raw surfaces.



A leading light in the Los Angeles design world, Jamie Bush opened his eponymous firm in 2002, launching a career he had been unconsciously preparing for while growing up in a highly creative family in New York. Photo by Nicholas Maggio. Top: The sunken living room of this Beverly Hills home features a serpentine sofa and Ondine high-back lounge chairs by Vladimir Kagan. A custom-designed curved sofa by Jamie Bush + Co. is positioned across from a pair of Haas Brothers polished brass stools from R & Company. Photo by Douglas Friedman

Bush was raised back in east in Bayport, on Long Island. “I had a magical childhood,” he says, recalling the 1850s Greek revival sea captain’s house in which he grew up. “It had a widow’s walk and Corinthian columns and was filled with antiques. We had a menagerie of animals in the yard: horses, ponies, dogs, cats, rabbits.” He spent summers in a beach house on Fire Island or on his great grandfather’s dairy farm, in Holtsville. “I grew up immersed in nature, farming, collecting seashells and bones, coming home only when dark. We spent all year on the water, ice boating in winter, sailing in summer.”

Bush comes from a large, highly creative family. “Half were dairy farmers on Long Island, and the other were painters, designers, photographers living in Manhattan — but everyone made things,” he explains. “My father sculpts animals out of antique farm machinery, my aunt Ruthie painted watercolors. They were or are all great collectors, well traveled, very worldly in art and design. And they all had fantastic homes.”

Family vacations included visits to his aunt Nan, lifelong partner of fashion [photographer Bruce Weber](#). Bush describes their early-20th-century Adirondack camp as beautifully appointed yet rustic and charming. “A completely different aesthetic from their rambling nineteen forties beach house in Miami,” he says.

Bush’s great-aunt Beth Levine was a legendary shoe designer. “She had very modern furniture, and then there would be a van Gogh drawing propped in a corner or a Venetian candelabra on a slick Italian table,” he says of her Manhattan apartment. “Being around that, it just trained your eye.”

“I’m fascinated by the juxtaposition of the raw and refined. I call it an organic modernism,” says Jamie Bush, the Los Angeles—based architect and designer, describing the stylistic thread running through his work. Whether an iconic mid-century house in the Hollywood Hills, a Malibu ocean-side retreat, a historic Italian Mediterranean estate in Montecito or a modernist Lake Tahoe compound, Bush’s interiors all share an underlying interplay of the rough-hewn, organic and imperfect with the sleek, noble and polished.

For the impressive range of principally residential projects his firm creates, Bush says the main focus of the design process is materiality and form. “It’s all about the composition of materials to emphasize their inherent qualities through contrast.”

Located on the top floor of an ornate 1920s Spanish revival building in the La Brea design district, the light-filled loft-like offices of [Jamie Bush + Co.](#) reflect this rough-hewn-meets-refined aesthetic. Ceiling beams and steel columns are left exposed. The space is divided by raw plywood boards commonly used for construction; Bush says he likes them because they look like “abstract marquetry.” Honey-colored wood cabinets set against clean white walls — with the surprise pop of one dusty pink dividing wall — provide a backdrop to neatly aligned white desks occupied by the dozen young architects and designers who make up Bush’s team. Rare vintage Italian glass and chrome tables mix with Brazilian rosewood and leather mid-century seating. Potted oversize black olive trees add the final touch.

Bush, also a painter and sculpture, has built an art studio in one corner of the space. Increasingly, his paintings and sculptures spill over into the design practice, completing a holistic vision for certain projects.



This Malibu master suite features a custom gray cerused-oak built-in bed and nightstand with a recessed cream leather headboard. Wide-plank white-oak flooring and a custom blue and cream Moroccan rug add warmth to the space. Photo by Daniel Collopy



For this Malibu living room, Jamie Bush + Co. designed a custom sectional sofa, which Bush paired with a wire brushed-white-oak coffee table by Stefan Bishop from Cristina Grajales Gallery and a braided-jute rug from Marc Phillips Decorative Rugs. The Serge Mouille floor lamp is from Gueridon, and the Hans Wegner Hoop chair from Wyeth. Photo by Daniel Collopy



A reading nook in the corner of this Venice Beach master bedroom includes a cream suede Ox chair by Hans Wegner, a Dish side table in larch from Grain Design and a vintage floor lamp from Rewire. A mixed-media artwork by Phil Wegner and Moroccan rug from [Marc Phillips Decorative Rugs](#) complete the space. Photo by Roger Davies

Bush also describes the Manhattan loft of his cousin, the painter [Philip Pearlstein](#), now in his 90s: Victorian furniture was placed next to a Memphis chair, a painting by [Lichtenstein](#) was paired with an African mask. “No one in my family is a purist,” he explains. “Everything is a mix of high and low.”

Some of Bush's most amusing family stories are tales of the two worlds — farming and high-fashion New York — commingling.

“My aunt Beth, the shoe designer, was, of course, incredibly chic,” he says. “She and her husband were very jet-set. She'd drive her Rolls-Royce out to the farm, pop the trunk, get out a shovel and dig up potatoes and horseradish, pop it all back into the trunk and drive back to Manhattan.”

Beyond its aesthetic acuity, his family's work ethic has had a lasting influence on Bush. “Because they grew up on a farm, they all remained earthy, with a can-do attitude,” he explains. “They were self-made individuals, very determined. Everyone worked until they died. Both my parents still work. My mother sells real estate, and my sister and father continue farming, as well as creating a museum for my father's collection of antique farm tools.”

After high school, Bush attended Tulane University, in New Orleans. Initially enrolled in fine art, he switched majors and earned his degree in architecture.

Fresh out of college, he moved out west to Los Angeles, where he worked for a handful of architectural firms, including Marmol Radziner.

Eventually, he and a few coworkers decided to set up their own practice, using their credit cards to finance a small fixer-upper as their headquarters. “We had the office in the garage

and spent half the day on client projects and the other half jackhammering, framing, building,” he says. They ultimately renovated and flipped a few properties. “That sort of thing was a lot easier back then.”

“No matter the type of structure, it’s about understanding its language and what it’s asking for,” says Bush. “You can’t just mimic. There’s a specific language that reveals itself.”

When an architect friend from Bush's days at Marmol Radziner asked him to furnish a significant modernist home, he didn't hesitate. “Having been deeply influenced by my upbringing and having developed an appreciation for antiques, architecture, design and collecting from an early age, it came naturally to segue into furniture,” he explains.

In the early 2000s, Bush visited a project by the rising interior design star [Kelly Wearstler](#) and was dazzled. “It was the period when Kelly was doing the Viceroy hotels. She was injecting so much energy into interiors. There was nothing else like it at the time.” Sometime after, Bush attended a friend’s birthday, he wrapped a gift in vintage Chinoiserie wallpaper. “When it was opened the smell of wallpaper glue wafted out. It was kind of wonderful, and it happened Kelly was there, and we struck up a conversation.” Bush ended up working for Wearstler for a year. He remembers his time with her fondly. “We had big-budget jobs, and it was all super-fun,” he says.

Since opening his own firm, in 2002, Bush has built a reputation for creating high-end, refined California modernist residential interior architecture and design. “There is a lot of detail and innovation that goes into every one of our projects,” he says. He custom designs hardware, furniture, lighting and rugs, mixing these with pedigreed vintage pieces and site-specific commissions from contemporary artisans.

“Even though I’m trained as a modernist, I’ve worked with many styles of architecture,” says Bush. “No matter the type of structure, it’s about understanding its language and what it’s asking for. You can’t just mimic. There’s a specific language that reveals itself in the detailing, history and location. You have to dissect that and create a relevant dialogue that works for today.”



For this Beverly Hills breakfast room, Bush designed an ebonized dividing wall to display a collection of black-and-white photography while masking the TV. The brass and cracked-smoked-glass dining table, topped with Jeremy Briddell ceramics from Christopher Anthony Ltd., is by Kelly Wearstler, and the linen and steel dining chairs are by Minotti. The bear photo is by Jill Greenberg. Photo by Douglas Friedman



A vintage Italian ceiling light by Angelo Lelli from Galerie Harter illuminates this Beverly Hills library, which is clad in crotch veneer mahogany paneling. Jamie Bush + Co. designed the custom sectional; the brass and smoked-glass Claude coffee table is by Madeline Stuart. Photo by Peter Murdock





This Lake Tahoe playroom is outfitted with [Ligne Roset](#) Togo sofas by Michel Ducaroy, Phoenix coffee tables by [Patricia Urquiola](#) and a custom Moroccan rug by Jamie Bush + Co. The ceiling light is by [Serge Mouille](#) from [Guéridon](#). Photo by Ngoc Minh Ngo

Bush says scale and proportion are increasingly important as residences become ever bigger. For a recent mid-century style house in the Trousdale Estates of Beverly Hills, he custom designed a 16-foot-long living room sofa to relate to the radius of the circular room. Anchoring the space, the sofa is teamed with free-form brass stools by the [Haas Brothers](#), a large custom-size oval bronze and travertine Blackman Cruz coffee table and a custom cloud-patterned silk and wool Chinese rug, 26 feet in diameter, which took 11 people weaving side-by-side seven months to complete.

For a modernist Lake Tahoe mountain retreat, the client's brief was "Tom Ford in the woods," Bush says. Brutalist materials that fit the setting — stone, steel, wood and glass — were deployed to create a seamless transition from indoor to outdoor living. "But it's the natural irregularity of the finishes that gives the house soul," he states.

"I like un-lacquered metals so they patina over time, showing history and age," he continues. "I prefer seeing the grain in wood and honed stone — finishes that express the organic qualities of a material.

"As a kid growing up, immersed in nature, I was deeply struck by the infinite variations of patterns and irregularities," he says. "That still speaks to me. I'm drawn to the perfection of imperfection."

Jamie Bush’s Quick Picks on 1stdibs



Sculptural Console by Stefan Bishop, offered by Cristina Grajales Gallery

"Stefan Bishop is a contemporary master craftsman who is just at the beginning of a long fruitful career. He's one of the rare birds who have a deep visceral understanding of the materials they shape, uncovering and manipulating their inherent qualities in expressive, life-giving forms. But this table!"

