

fall 2004

atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



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- retro holidays
- eichler time warp
- split-level ranch
- party pad



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atomicranch™

MIDCENTURY MARVELS

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cover

The living room of this 1956 split-level ranch house is distinguished by its flagstone wall, hardwood floors and the homeowners' vintage Heywood-Wakefield coffee table and nubby orange couch. Pull Pee-Wee's string and he says, "Welcome to my new playhouse ..."



THE MAGAZINE FOR THE REST OF US

meanwhile... back at the ranch

A recent e-mail from Pat and Bill Bandy of Maryland expressed their appreciation of our magazine but also asked if Atomic Ranch will show more geographical variety. The short answer is yes, we will.

The long answer is that we and this magazine are in California simply because of the historical forces that brought our grandparents and parents out West—turmoil in Europe, poor crops in the Midwest, GIs cycling through to the Pacific, the promise of greater opportunities—all contributed to California's growth and help explain why we are here now. And where you have postwar growth you have midcentury housing; we have found excellent

examples in our own backyard.

I admit that the first issues do show a California bias, but Atomic Ranch is a national publication; we will feature interesting homes wherever they were built. We are developing future stories from New York, New Mexico, Oregon and Toronto. We have subscribers in every state, and as additional interested readers find

us, we welcome suggestions and contribu-

tions for neighborhood stories and individual features. We

have received great reports from Texas, Florida and Washington, D.C., and I am

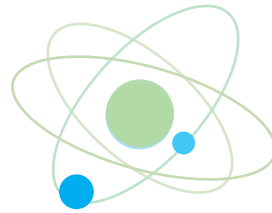
just itching to go on a road trip. Our long-term goals are ambitious.

The bread and butter of Atomic Ranch will always be stories that showcase the outstanding midcentury homes of regular people with good taste. And while we have no aspirations to be a semisolarly forum for midcentury minutiae, our territory includes related lite history, current living solutions and exciting new products.

This magazine has become an all-encompassing endeavor for our staff; sometimes it feels like we've built and launched a rocket and it has just cleared the tower.

Jim Brown
Publisher





modernwisdom

* We were delighted with the first issue of Atomic Ranch. We liked that so much of the magazine revolved around normal folks like us updating and maintaining their homes.

My wife and I really identified with the "Orange Juice" owner when he said, "Everything about this house was bad." Our 1967 home had many ills that we didn't find out about until we moved in. It is nice to know that we are not the only couple who felt downhearted when the oven died, the toilet would not stop leaking in the wall, the furnace proved faulty and the electrical panel was failing. But through it all, we are still charmed by our MCM home and its yet-to-be-realized potential.

There are plenty of magazines devoted to how millionaires build their dream homes. It is nice that Atomic Ranch recognizes that the rest of us have dreams for our homes that we create more slowly.

Kevin Knauss

via e-mail

* My heart started beating [faster] when I discovered your link. I live in Baltimore and there are no good ranches here! When I tell my friends that I want a modern ranch they look at me like I'm crazy. The truth? I'm trying to get my husband to move west so I can get my ranch!

How about feature articles on areas of the country that do have cool ranches—besides L.A.?

Kimberly White Erlinger

Baltimore, Md.

We are featuring ranches and modernist tract homes across the U.S., with an emphasis on Southern California so far just because of proximity. In addition to the East Coast and Midwest homes shown in no. 2, coming soon is a feature on a great small modern ranch in upstate N.Y., and the holiday decorating article in this issue shows a modern D.C. apartment. There's a lot of interest in your neck of the woods, so I'm sure more great examples will be winging their way to us soon. —ar editor

* I was impressed with the number of homeowners in your magazine who knew so much about the history of

their houses. I'd be interested in an article describing how one might go about finding out the history of one's home. I also think a neat idea would be following a renovation from start to finish—an ongoing feature/diary-type thing.

Karen Phillips

Fullerton, Calif.

* I'm in heaven knowing a regular source of mid-century homes and furnishings will be arriving on my doorstep on a regular basis. Living in Orange County, Calif., I'm fortunate to be surrounded by three Eichler tracts within 10 miles of my modest '50s home. I grew up with all the Googie bowling alleys and the theme motels that once surrounded Disneyland.

Interest in all these things has been good and bad. Good for all the reissues from Herman Miller, Knoll and brand-X knockoffs at Target and the like. Bad because of all the great items that once could be found at thrift stores and garage sales are now going to dealers and auction houses so folks like me just have to work harder hunting for deals. Being born in 1961, these artifacts are as familiar to me as my mother's voice and just as comforting.

I support your magazine by including my one-year subscription and hope all who read it do the same. I also hope you offer a fetching cover box to hold the first four or eight issues. Will you be offering other merchandise?

Clarence Williams

Santa Ana, Calif.

How 'bout it? Write us at editor@atomic-ranch.com and tell us if Karen's and Clarence's suggestions/requests resonate for you, or if you have other articles and products on your wish list. —ar editor

* For almost six months my wife and I have been searching day and night for a Craftsman home to buy and restore. We looked at close to 45 homes and lost out in two bidding wars. We finally were in escrow on a wonderful early Craftsman in the Highland Park area of Los Angeles. We had been negotiating price changes

Congratulations to Rodney Honeycutt, John Rielly, Jaede & Mike Shramek and David Wright, who completed readers' surveys and won cool (or useless) stuff.

with the selling agent for more than three weeks and they weren't budging. Finally, we made our last offer knowing full well that it would be rejected, and it was.

A little despondent (and hungry) we headed to our new favorite coffee spot, Fatty's in Eagle Rock. I grabbed my usual copy of *American Bungalow* and ordered breakfast; then something caught my eye at the register: It was Atomic Ranch.

As we turned one page after another the idea of pouring all our blood, sweat and tears (not to mention money) into a house that was so rigidly controlled by the conventions of the Arts and Crafts movement suddenly didn't seem like any fun at all. After returning home and reading Atomic Ranch cover to cover twice, and then researching Eichler tract homes for several hours on the Web, my mind was made up! My wife and I got up early on Sunday and drove out to Granada Hills to check out the Balboa Highlands community. Wow! That was it. We knew right away that our focus had changed from turn of the century to middle of the century, from hardwood to plywood, from fine finishing to Formica and fun—because isn't fun what life is really supposed to be about?

Tomorrow we are looking at a midcentury house to buy and I'm truly excited. I haven't felt this way in a long time, and I guess that's why I'm writing this letter. Thanks for publishing your magazine.

Jason J. Wawro

via e-mail

* For years, my wife and I have been wondering why no one had published a magazine dedicated to the house that started the suburban revolution. Thankfully, you filled the niche. The first two issues have been awesome.

I would like to respond to Dan Simpson's letter (summer 2004, issue 2) where he states about '50s ranch houses: "For the most part, they have no character, charm or aesthetic appeal. They're ugly." He adds that they are an "architectural blight" and "cheap junk." As an "uncivilized eccentric," I would have to disagree.

Our 1956 brick ranch is beautiful, charming and full of character. It is so well built we struggle to put nails in the

wall in order to hang pictures. After almost 50 years, the wood floors and stairs are as quiet as the day they were built. The peach-and-black-colored tile in the bathroom is in near-perfect condition. In the kitchen, the Formica with the obligatory boomerang pattern is in pristine shape. The Brammer Living Kitchen is full of character but, oddly enough, is quite practical.

Needless to say, Dan's assessment of these midcentury masterpieces is wrong. Maybe if he managed to leave his civilized community with its blighted neighborhoods and quit being such an elitist, he would see the beauty of the



Matt's Ranch

atomic ranch. I'm sure there were homes built in the '50s that were of questionable quality; that can be said for any era. To generalize that most 1950s ranches are junk and that the architects and tradesmen who built them were not as skilled as their predecessors is ignorant. My house is proof: I would put my home up against any of the mini-mansions built today as far as quality and character. Which leads to the question, In what type of house does Dan live?

Matt Mosher

Fort Thomas, Ky.

Write us at editor@atomic-ranch.com or send a note to Atomic Ranch, Publishing Office, 917 Summit Drive, South Pasadena, CA 91030. We'll print the good ones.

KATIE goes to

HIGH POINT

Our pal Katie visits High Point, N.C., home of the late John Coltrane and the equally talented 2004 “American Idol” winner, Fantasia Barrino, as well as the site of a giant corn maze and the World’s Largest (four stories) Chest of Drawers. If that’s not enough, there’s the twice-yearly wholesale home furnishings show that draws 75,000 attendees from 110 countries. What’s new this year, you ask?

Text and show photography Katie Hatch

The spring High Point International Home Furnishings Market in North Carolina displayed its usual mixture of everything from Louis XVI replicas to ultra-modern European furnishings. However, I was thrilled to see that one of the hot trends this market, in both furnishings and colors shown for 2004–5, was “Retro.”

Both true vintage furnishings—refurbished 1950s furniture from companies like Twenty Gauge—and fresh twists on classics like the new line by Todd Oldham for La-Z-Boy and rug introductions from Haziza were dominant in the fashion-forward showrooms. In addition, retro colors were all the rage in furniture, accents and accessories. Even the buyers and sellers flaunted the style in their apparel selections, wearing 1940s and ’50s polka dots and bold-print feminine dresses and capris.

While certain showrooms have always been midcentury puritans, this trend seems to be coming from everywhere and only growing in popularity. The influx of a new generation of consumers and retail buyers with a flare for fashion (more Gwen Stefani, less matchy-match Garanimals) and design-educated sensibilities (they actually know who Charles Eames was) has helped to put a chip in the glass ceiling of stale design. This is a true breath of fresh air in the smoke-filled corridors overflowing with good-ole-boy designers who find insulting ways to interpret Mission, French Provincial and Federal styles each market. Even JC Penney’s new ultra-hip and knowledgeable design director, Broc Clark, shows great promise for what the JCP catalog has in store for the future. Add to that the ever-increasing popularity of DIY programs like “Trading Spaces” that show consumers how to take chances with design and color as well as how to refurbish great midcentury thrift-store finds.

So, the upshot of this trend is that, for atomic ranch owners or wannabes, there are even more options to select from to furnish and decorate our midcentury homes.



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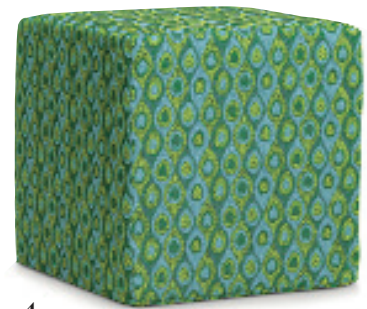
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who's got the goods
countdown:

- Chicago Textile 10
- Emissary 9
- Fire Farm Lighting 8
- Dellarobbia 7
- Oggetti 6
- Haziza 5
- Todd Oldham/La-Z-Boy 4
- EQ3 3
- Karim Rashid/George Kovacs 2
- Global Views 1



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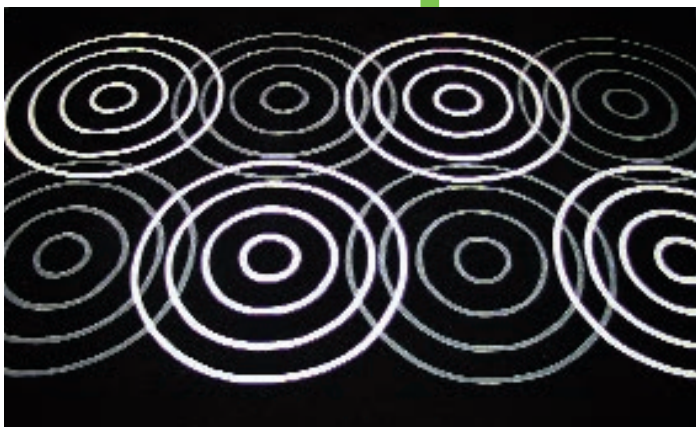
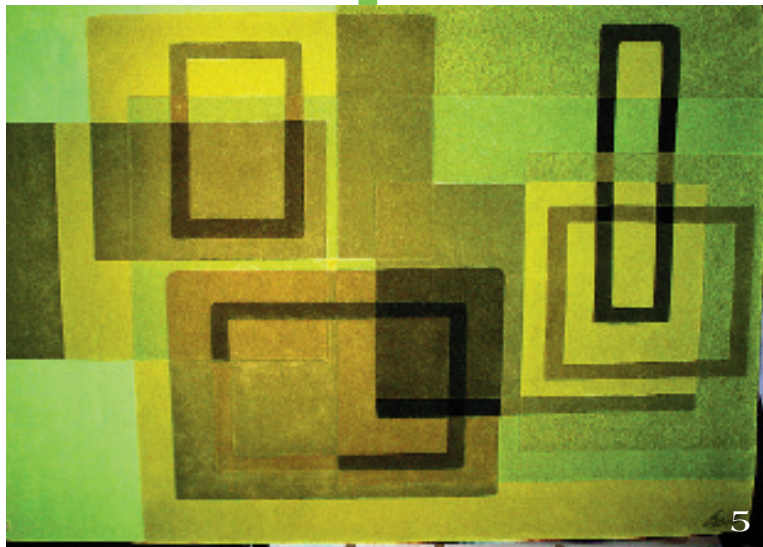


4



black *white* *chartreuse*

The manlier version of the Doris Day combo — call it the Rock Hudson color palette.





4



pink
white
black

Super hot in fashion for the fall, this is kind of a Doris Day midcentury look.



1



fuchsia tangerine grape

The newest modern design colors for the MTV generation.



7



7



3



5



5

Katie's Top 10 H-P Favorites

10. **Chicago Textile:** Fun midcentury-inspired prints on their No-Tip Cylinder table/stool/ottoman caught my eye.

9. **Emissary:** Arthur Wang, the creative director, has a true sense of the aesthetic for midcentury accessories. Their multi-faceted vases in turquoise, chartreuse and black and white grabbed my attention.

8. **Fire Farm Lighting:** the new introductions—pendant lamps with colored cutouts—were “atomi-licious.”

7. **Dellarobbia:** Accents, upholstery, accessories and showroom design were all a 10. The boxy shape of their turquoise sectional immediately reminded me of the avocado sofa in my grandfather’s ranch house.

6. **Oggetti:** Fabulously retro showroom design that took vases in green and alabaster (\$25–\$75) and paired them with rattan-faced wall cabinets (\$675) and a chartreuse color-block painted wall—a great 21st-century twist on midcentury design.

5. **Haziza:** The new rug collections answer a question I’ve been asking for a long, long time: What happened to

area rugs to coordinate with midcentury chairs? Thanks!

4. **Todd Oldham for La-Z-Boy:** They are finally addressing a new generation in a great, new way.

3. **EQ3:** The designs are retro-forward, fabulous and affordable: \$399 for a Commander chair or \$299 for a Tub chair hooks both twentysomethings and their modern-inclined parents.

2. **Karim Rashid for George Kovacs:** Rashid—the Charles Eames of our generation, best known for clean-line, amorphous products for Nambe, Issey Miyake, Pure Design, Tommy Hilfiger, Sony and others—designed these lights; need I say more?

1. **Global Views:** Walking into the showroom was like stepping into the Palm Springs Biltmore Hotel in 1958, with Sinatra playing on the radio, martinis flowing and hors d’oeuvres straight from a feature film set. The new intros include fabulous leather magazine holders that look like retro Chanel handbags in black, white and pink combos. Everything about it was pure midcentury optimism!

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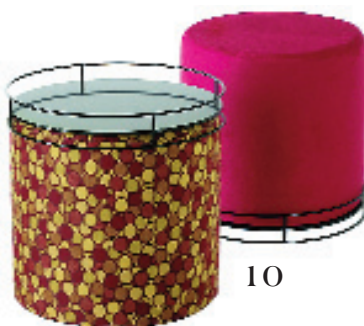
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2



8



10

orange avocado brown

A "Brady Bunch"—version of retro color.

Home furnishings designer Katie Hatch lives in a midcentury ranch in Santa Barbara, Calif., with her husband, automotive artist Jim Hatch, and their dogs and cat. Her design loves include furniture and accessories by the great midcentury companies—Heywood-Wakefield, Bertoia, Eames and Nelson.

eagle rocks

And they weren't even house hunting...

It was a warm Sunday afternoon—the perfect day to take a drive and enjoy the beginning of another Los Angeles springtime. Our plan was to head up to the mountains, a 15-minute drive from our neighborhood in northeast Los Angeles, but we never made it. Only a few blocks up the hill from our then home we spotted an Open House sign.

text Apryl Lundsten

photography Jim Brown







“Let’s take a peek,” I suggested. My husband, David, agreed.

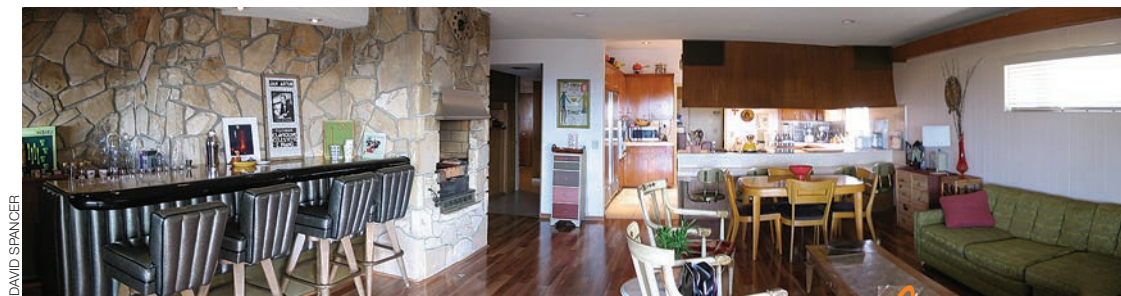
From the outside, it looked like a fairly typical 1960s ranch house—simple lines, an attached garage, no-fuss yard and flagstone rock adorning exterior walls. But the second we walked through the mahogany double entry doors, we discovered the house was anything but typical.

Váyback Máchine

Flagstone from outside continued on the interior walls and we were wowed by the home’s other details: original terrazzo floors, flawless wood paneling and walls of glass that hinted at an incredible view. And around every turn the house got better and better—and more and more unique.

The living room had an S-curve rock wall and fireplace hearth that seemed to float above the floor. The family room had one of the coolest wet bars we’d ever seen, upholstered in original black and silver vinyl, with tons of cabinets, four mint-condition barstools and more rock. Next to the bar was an indoor barbecue, complete with a rotisserie and all the original tools. Above the barbecue was a built-in clock that still worked. The place was obviously a party pad.

Connected to the family room was the kitchen, which boasted even more original



DAVID SPANCER

one of the *coolest* wet bars we'd ever seen, upholstered in original black and silver *vinyl*



treasures: vintage stainless steel appliances—a Sub-Zero-style refrigerator, a built-in coffeemaker and a toaster that pulls out from the wall. A low breakfast bar with five suspended gold vinyl seats that swivel divided the kitchen from the family room.

“It’s like the best flea market find ever!” David, a swap-meet junkie, exclaimed. I had to agree. And the Rat Pack-style of the house certainly matched our eclectic design sense and our collection of mainly ’50s and ’60s furniture.

And then there was that view. Through sliding glass doors, the family room led to a large flagstone patio from which we could see across Los Angeles to the ocean. Griffith Park, Glendale, Hollywood, Century City, Santa Monica, a tiny bit of downtown and a strip of the blue Pacific. We pinched each other. One of our favorite pastimes was driving around L.A. searching for the perfect romantic view. We knew we had found it—and our home.

Taking the Plunge

In a whirlwind week we made an offer and sold our Highland Park house. A month later we moved into the Eagle Rock pad and officially called it home.

And we continued to find fabulous details: a makeup table in the master bath with a three-panel mirror; built-in hampers and a bright orange hairdresser’s sink in the



the *kitchen* boasted
even more
original *treasures:*
vintage stainless steel appliances



laundry room; and in the hallway stereo cabinet a shelf with an old label that read “polka records.” Outside on the patio was another barbecue, this one set into a large rock table with seating for eight.

Every new discovery made it obvious to us that we had totally scored and we became curious about our new home’s past. Eager to learn its history and find out about the original owners, we began researching soon after we moved in.

Our realtor had given us a copy of the building permit, which listed the original owner’s name, along with the architect and contractor. A trip to the Los Angeles Hall of Records came up short: neither the architect nor the contractor were on file. But neighbors filled us in: the contractor was Ralph B. Rogers and the owners Helen and Mario Carazzo. Unfortunately, all were deceased.

An Internet search of the architect’s name, Julian Pollok, turned up a contact for an attorney, not an architect. I called him anyway, thinking (hoping) maybe his father

The dining table and chairs are Heywood-Wakefield. A long green sectional with original upholstery was built for the home and inherited from the Carazzo family, as was the coffee table.



“This was the
party house;
everyone loved
coming here and hanging out”





had been our architect. After some confusion with the receptionist, and her exclaiming, "Mr. Pollok is a lawyer; he doesn't build houses!" I spoke to Pollok, who had been a home designer in the '60s before going to law school. He'd worked with Rogers designing and drawing plans for many homes in Eagle Rock and Glendale, including our house.

Built in 1966, we learned ours was the first house in a subdivision created by Rogers, who had been a prolific builder in Eagle Rock for many years. All his homes have a distinct style and, in fact, he built a post-and-beam-esque house for his daughter just down the street. But what we really wanted to know was, Who were the Carazzos? What were they like?

Dance Into the Past

From a neighbor I was able to get the names and phone numbers of the Carazzos' daughters. From them I learned all about the couple who had crafted our dream house.

Mario and Helen owned a nearby liquor store for 20 years. They had three daughters: Monica, Marisa and Patti. When the girls were little their dad would point up at the then-undeveloped hill and say, "See that spot up there? We're going



we walked through
the mahogany **doors**
and discovered
the house was anything
but typical

to live up there someday.” The girls didn’t know whether to believe him or not.

For years, the couple collected ideas for their future house. “They had stacks of brochures and business cards from companies they saw at home shows,” Patti Collier, the Carazzos’ youngest daughter told me on the phone. “They knew exactly what they wanted when they were ready to build the house.”

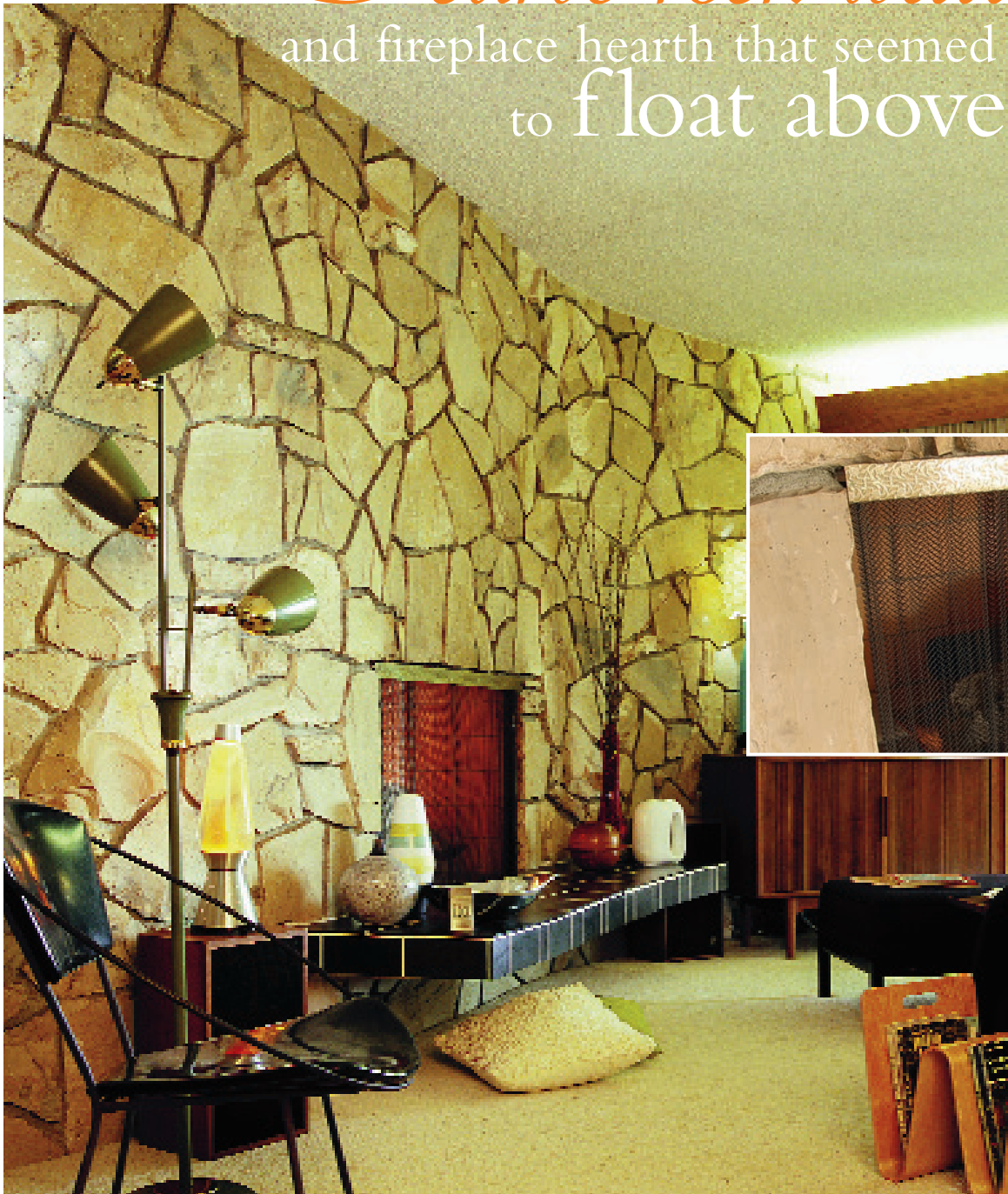
And what they wanted most was a home for entertaining.

“This was the party house,” confirmed middle daughter Marisa McBride. “Everyone loved coming here and hanging out. Family, friends—my parents made everyone feel welcome and happy to be here. And they loved polka and hosted dances on the patio.”

When we found out that the architect and McBride still lived in Los Angeles, we decided to throw a party to meet them. We wanted to know anyone who had been

the living room
had an
S-curve rock wall

and fireplace hearth that seemed
to float above the floor.



The Lundsten/Spencer living room is populated with '50s and '60s swap meet finds, hand-me-downs and gifts from friends.

involved with our fabulous house. Julian Pollok pointed out details and remembered the special touches Ralph Rogers used when building his homes, like the stone used in the walls. McBride brought photo albums and showed us pictures of Christmases, summer barbecues and other events celebrated in the house: her dad with a grandchild sitting at the makeup table in the master bath, New Year's revelers kicking back on the sofa sipping cocktails, and Mario and Helen soaking up summer sun on the back patio.

McBride was thrilled the house looked pretty much the same as it had when she was growing up. When she saw the orange sink in the laundry room still intact, she got a bit teary-eyed. "I have the hairdresser's chair that matches that sink," she said. "It's the same color. I'd love for you guys to have it. Mom would want it to be here."

McBride also brought her mom's favorite cake, promising to share the recipe, and told us that behind the bar her dad had carved champagne glasses and bubbles into the floor and filled them with resin. Unfortunately the bar floor has been covered over with linoleum and wood, but someday David and I want to see if we can find Mario's champagne glasses and bring them back to life. While we do plan on eventually updating a bit, most things about the Carazzos' hilltop cocktail lounge will stay exactly as is.

Every morning when the sun rises on the city and every evening as it sets over the hills of Griffith Park we feel proud that we get to live in Helen and Mario's long-awaited dream house. Which accidentally became our dream house, too. ✦

Apryl Lundsten is a writer and David Spancer works on a popular TV sitcom. They share their ranch house with two cats and a dog named Scout.



Home designer Julian Pollok and his wife Suzanne (both in white shirts) met the original owners' daughter, Marisa McBride (third from right), her friend Debby Golden and current homeowners Apryl Lundsten and David Spancer (far left) at a party to honor the Eagle Rock ranch house.

side[bar]

From Bowie to Sinatra, the jukebox spans as many eras as the clientele has over the years. Formerly a divey watering hole called Topper's, Eagle Rock's Chalet welcomes longtime patrons as well as hipsters attracted to the neighborhood's newly emerging vintage style.

A stone wall is the backdrop for the bar along one side—almost identical in style, if not scope, to the wet bar in Apryl and David's Eagle Rock home just up the hill. The pink neon sign serves as a homing beacon for those in search of a warm—yes, there's a year-round fireplace roaring, even here in Southern California—dark—it's almost too dim to see your fellow patrons, but that's just incentive to wander to the jukebox for a perusal of the offerings—watering hole. Cushy booths from which to keep an eye on the door, banquettes along the wall to lounge in and a front alcove to fill with your friends. Beer, wine and full bar.

—Cheyenne Wortham



The Chalet
1630 Colorado Blvd
Eagle Rock, Calif.
323-258-8800

home page

Palm Springs, Calif.

We live in Riverwoods, Ill., but bought a “Swiss Miss” Alexander vacation home last year. We filled the place up with period furniture and art from all the local shops, plus many auction items bought in Chicago. Great things are still lower priced in the Midwest than in California. We always kid people that it gets built in the Midwest, sold to Californians and sent back to the Midwest when the folks move on and the kids sell it at auction. Then we buy it in the Midwest and send it back to California!

Gary & Joan Gand

Woodland Hills, Calif.

We bought this ranch home in 1974, when it had just turned 20 years old. It is now middle aged—exactly 50. My family and friends have enjoyed it here so very much. It is a great home, with a beamed-ceiling living room and French doors that open to the patio and pool area. Over the years, many parties have taken place both indoors and out, and even a wedding in the lovely backyard. Most of the original features are intact, and almost everyone remarks about the wood floors, which were covered with gold shag carpeting when we moved in. Several years ago, I tore out a breakfast nook and my son told me I would regret it some day. I do!

Barbara Joan Grubman

Fort Collins, Colo.

My neighborhood has an eclectic range of ranch-style homes, with no house similar to the next. After total restoration of the bathrooms, kitchen and living room of my 1966 house, the easy-going, carefree feeling flows within the living space. The roof and ceiling seem to float above the structure, from the bathrooms with chrome-edged laminated counters and hanging chrome light fixtures to patios off the kitchen and living room. Those patios are extensions of the living space versus just a place to have a barbecue. Let the fun begin!

Dale Schmaltz

California readers are mailing in their house pix, but help us feature other areas of the country as well. Instead of e-mailing us about our West Coast bias, send in a high-resolution photo or sharp snapshot and a couple of sentences about your cool pad for our next issues. See contacts page 3.



Palm Springs, Calif.



Woodland Hills, Calif.



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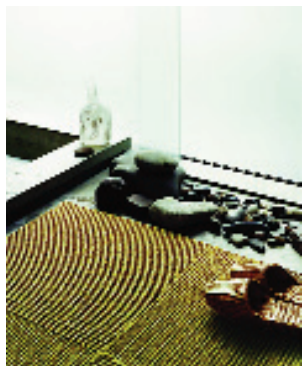


Fort Collins, Colo.

COOL|stuff

"Housepet" on Your Floor

Interface FLOR's founder, Ray Anderson, has gained some notoriety as one of the few good guys in "The Corporation," a documentary film about corporate culture and all that's come to mean. The company, which has made a serious commitment to environmentally sustainable practices, produces a cool product, too: 19.5" carpet tiles in a bevy of colors and patterns that arrive in an oversize pizza box for DIY installation. Wall-to-wall or area rugs are laid down with low-tack adhesive dots, and individual tiles can be washed in the sink when the neighbor's dog makes your house his. Available through Design Within Reach, or check retailers at www.interfaceflor.com.

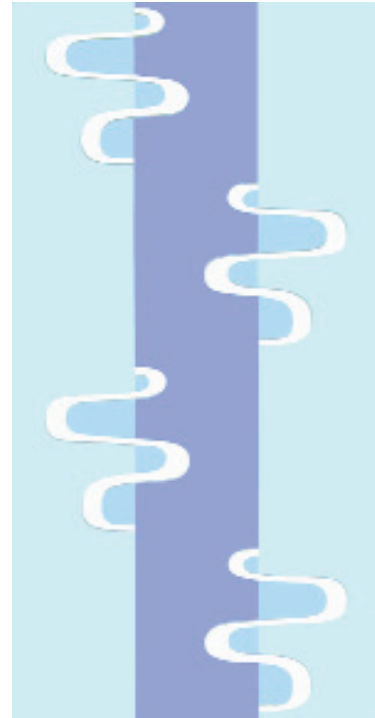


Divine Davenport

Val Perez-Ibardolasa counts Florence Knoll and Jens Risom among the influences that have led to her line of vintage-looking couches, chairs, benches and ottomans. The Dexter sofa comes in an armless style, or with tufted cushions as shown here, or in a loose-cushion version—best bet for swallowing friends' spare change and TV remotes. Choose upholstery in polyester blends, cotton, wool crepe, ultra suede or Spinneybeck leather. Val also stocks period Scandinavian pieces, tiki-wares, Vessel's Architectural Pottery reissues and other modern delights. Retro@home in Emeryville, Calif., ships anywhere within the continental U.S.; prices start at \$1,895 for the basic couch. Visit www.retroathome.com; 510•658•6600.

Pop Tarts

Parker, Ariz., might seem like an unlikely artist haven, but that's where Tonya and Sande Newton, a mother/daughter duo, produce their contemporary take on midcentury art. Their murals, decorative painting and canvases are prominently featured at the Del Marcos Hotel in Palm Springs, and their work is sold at Orbit Gallery in Edgewater, N.J., and Retro@home in the San Francisco Bay Area. Examples of the Retro Pop Art style vary from Sande's blue "Worm or Virus" to Tonya's "Dinner at Eleven," above, but there's loads more to browse through at www.retropopart.net.



Affordable Fun

New furniture with a modern aesthetic sometimes turns out to be poorly constructed and not durable. Not so for the office, bedroom and living room furniture from Kerf Design in Seattle, Wash. Nathan Hartman and his wife, Kate Thorley, are RISD graduates who craft plywood and plastic laminate furniture for people all over the country. Consoles start at about \$750 for a basic design, but small tables go for as little as \$220. It's an opportunity to have a unique piece of modern furniture that is designed specifically for you. With the client's needs in the forefront, all consoles, dressers and bookshelves are available with either solid maple or aluminum tube feet and come in a variety of colors. www.kerfdesign.com; 206•954•8677.

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GROWING UP



EICHLER

text Scott McConnell
photography Richard Johnson

Karen McHugh lives in a Craftsman cottage in Los Angeles with her husband, Kevin, and young daughter, Perci, but some 35 years ago she grew up in an Eichler development in San Jose, Calif. Her father, Richard Johnson, took these remarkable snapshots, which capture a young family's life in a brand-new house.

Bought in 1963 for \$25,000 the four-bedroom, two-bath home was part of the Mossbrook Circle development. Richard was a scientist working at NASA's Ames Research Center and Karen's mother, Sondra, was a classically trained pianist. This was the first real home for the couple, who moved to the Bay Area from Southern California.

Richard was excited about his new job—part of the Viking team assembled to look for life on Mars—and the Eichler's post-and-beam design felt like a fresh start. "It was totally different from anything I knew growing up on the East Coast," he says. "I liked the simple lines and it was on a corner lot and wasn't surrounded by neighbors. It was almost affordable."

Karen's father also distinctly remembers the difficulty of establishing landscaping in the bulldozer-compacted adobe soil and the immediate need for a sunshield on the southwest exposure. The architecture must have also been a departure for Sondra, who grew up in North Carolina. But she had worked in a modern furniture store there and had an appreciation for good pieces. The couple furnished their new home with several Eames chairs, an upholstered wire-mesh Bertoia chair and a couch from Thayer Coggin, another North Carolina native.

The Johnsons divorced when Karen was young, but her memories of the house are still close to her heart. Perhaps because she spent only her earliest years in the Eichler, this first home has given Karen a strongly felt but almost proverbial appreciation for space, light and architecture that she carries with her to this day. After Mossbrook Circle, Karen moved to the mountains with her mother and sister but would refer to any house in a tract as an "Eichler"; she assumed that was the name for all suburban homes.

This series, shot over several years, predates Karen's birth, but the family moments captured on film parallel her own experiences several years later.

Karen's story in pictures and in words.



My sister Lauri is at the sink, opposite, standing on a great Danish Modern high chair that we still have. On the other side of the counter was the dining room, and the base of that open pass-through was my favorite spot for hide-and-seek.

This shot of Lauri and my mom shows off the inside. I loved the structure, the consistency of an Eichler. All my life I've dreamt of spacious places. Being a baby in the house, it felt so palatial, very warm and comfortable. I went back a couple of years ago and was shocked to see how small it really was. The people who own it now have it full of furniture; we had it very sparsely furnished.



The nice thing about Eichlers was the great indoor-outdoor feel; the outdoor spaces were just as livable as inside. We used this as our play area, had birthday parties, painted there. This photo is fairly early, because the bamboo my dad planted later grew out of control and the new owners tore it out.

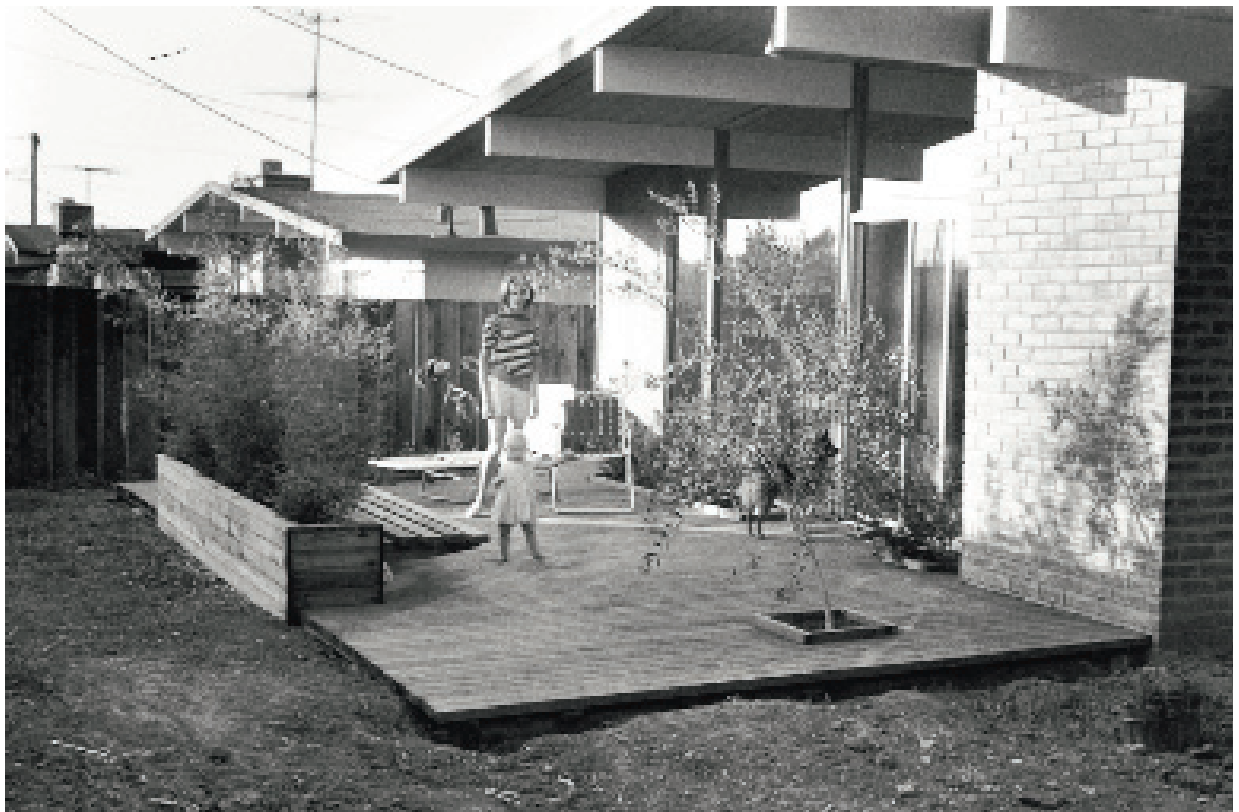
We loved our neighbors; they remained a part of our lives and a network of friends throughout the years. When we moved, it was very heartbreaking; I remember how sad I was.





My mother and her mother, Grammy, with Lauri. I think in the picture my mom is pregnant with me and she's holding what looks like a Kodak 6x9 camera.

A view of some Eichler backyards: You can tell it's right when they first moved in—the unlandscaped yard and Lauri's unsteady walk. Skooshi, our dog, is standing at the sliding glass door waiting to be let in.





Lauri with Skooshi in the playhouse my father built. It was a little hut at the side of the house with a ladder on one side and a slide on the other.



This is of both my sisters, Lauri, and Milci, who died when she was 2½. The living space was very much our playground. My mom's piano is in the background; I remember dancing in the living room when they had company over—kind of being the entertainment while the music was playing. We still have the Bertoia chair. We kids called it the mouse chair because one time our cat, Bummer, caught a mouse and left it in the chair. Lauri refused to sit in it.





That's Mama J and Poppa J, my dad's parents, on their first visit to the house. Here the shrubs are still new; now you can't even see the street.

This is Lauri on her first birthday in the dining room. That's what the house was about—family, being together. There was so much light in our Eichler. For me that's what home is—everything else has been secondary. We spend our lives trying to re-create that sense of home, that sense of space. My ideal life was in that house. ♥



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Garden Grove, Calif.



Palm Springs, Calif.



Northridge, Calif.



homepage²

Garden Grove, Calif.

Our 1952 home has original cork floors, great picture windows, limestone fireplaces, cedar pitched ceilings with exposed beams and many stories to tell about the lives spent here. It was named "Pleasant Ranch" by the architectural firm that designed it and it sits on almost an acre of land that was formerly an orange grove. We inherited blueprints and beautiful photos of the construction from the 83-year-old original owner, with whom we have become good friends.

Ron & Gia Emory

Palm Springs, Calif.

For the past 12 years I've lived in a standard 1947 postwar home in Orange, Calif., with all '50s furniture and appliances, including a 1956 Kelvinator Food-a-rama refrigerator. But all this time I just wanted the right house for my vintage stuff. Over the summer I picked out this midcentury 1959 Alexander butterfly roof home. To afford two mortgages, the Palm Springs house, with its open carport and breezeway, is a seasonal rental. The kitchen and living room make you feel like you are surrounded by the desert landscape and the pool area out back.

Scott Oglevie

Northridge, Calif.

My house is a one-off contractor-built home from 1947. I am the fourth owner and the house was never altered in any way, including the impractical one-car garage. The original linoleum countertops are still present in the kitchen and the master bath, and there are lots of built-ins, including drawers and closets in the very small ship-cabin-style master bedroom. The bedroom wing has ribbon windows and there is parquet flooring in every room except the kitchen and bathrooms. It survived the Northridge quake in fine form, requiring only the replacement of one glass slider.


Chris Sales

Have yourself a RETRO little Christmas

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown photography Jim Brown & Travis Smith



Todd Westover with wife Caz and baby Alice enjoying their aluminum tree.



knew Charlie Brown was a complete dork when he passed up “a great big, shiny aluminum Christmas tree” in favor of that scrawny evergreen. When “A Charlie Brown Christmas” debuted in 1965, those metal trees symbolized bad taste and rank commercialism—but we know better now.

Christmas is steeped in tradition, and towering firs, European-style ornaments and toy trains circling the tree were just as popular in the '60s as they were 40 years earlier or later. At my parents' postwar stucco box, we always had a real tree often draped in what I now know was lead tinsel. We would argue over the merits of carefully placing each tinsel strand or the efficient toss-at-the-tree approach. We also decorated with soap powder snow whipped up in my mother's mixer when that was a popular low-cost substitute for a flocked tree. Aluminum trees were for our more gauche neighbors.

Today, for those of us with a yen for something less mainstream or an urge to save a tree, there's more on the menu than twinkly lights and singing snowmen. Meet two midcentury families who embrace their modernism year-round.

East Coast

Travis Smith and Skip Przywara live in a 1964 modern high-rise apartment in D.C. overlooking Rock Creek Park. Skip is a graphic designer, while Travis runs Good Eye 20th Century Interiors, two careers that give the couple an inside track on another passion: decorating for Christmas.

“Not only are we ‘retro heads’ (sorry—midcentury modern enthusiasts), we're huge fans of Christmas memorabilia from the 1950s through the '70s,” says Travis. “And because we own a vintage modern store, we are privileged to scout for it year-round while buying furniture. We have accumulated a large amount of Christmas decor—ornaments, trees, lights and other delights.

“During the '60s, I remember the holiday season officially started when you saw the little Norelco Santa buzzing around in the snow in between Thanksgiving football games,” he recalls. “Now Christmas is big business and the season starts much earlier. As avid collectors, Skip and I are thrilled with this jump start; we love this holiday and all the glitz and glamour that go with it.”

The pair decorate three theme trees each year, as well as their tiki bar and dining table, beginning shortly before Thanksgiving. Typically there's a green aluminum tree done in vintage tiki style, a pink one with hand-blown glass ornaments and plastic Sputnik stars, and the main tree in the living room hung with “'60s Bored Housewife Crafts” (see Be Like Travis). This 4' one has a rotating stand and a Penetray color wheel “for that psychedelic effect,” Travis jokes.

The partners go all-out with special kitschy table decor and tiki lights and accoutrements when they entertain. They found an A-frame dollhouse at a Delaware antique store and were instantly attracted to its modern design. They deck it out for the holidays, too, so the Fisher Price Family gets to have their own little retro Christmas.

Travis is full bore with his wrapping as well. “I believe I was heavily influenced by a ‘Brady Bunch’ Christmas episode where all of the gifts were shown in fabulous early '70s colored wrapping and giant, over-scale ribbons—very Marcia,” he laughs. “I have always been into gift wrapping, even as a small child. In fact I used to art direct my own presents, insisting to my mother that they all had to be color coordinated.”

Three thousand miles away, another creative couple has a weakness for sparkly objects as well.

West Coast

Todd Westover fondly remembered aluminum Christmas trees from his grandmother's house in the '60s. “I always thought they were cool. Everyone had them, and they made me feel happy,” says Todd, the art director of a motorcycle magazine. His wife, Caz, grew up in Brooklyn, and to her

family they symbolized nouveau riche bad taste—only fresh, real trees for them, thank you very much. After the Westovers moved into their 1961 house in the Mt. Washington section of Los Angeles, Todd dropped some hints to his mother that he sure would love to find one of those “chrome” trees.

Mom came through, finding a 6' vintage tree and color wheel at a yard sale in Wisconsin for about \$150 and shipping it out for the couple's first Christmas at the new house. The tree was a “Pom-Pom” type made by the Aluminum Specialty Company in Manitowoc, Wisc., Todd's birthplace. Caz, a documentary film researcher, was less than stoked over the prospect. “I told Todd maybe we could set it up in the basement and have a real tree upstairs,” she says. But when it arrived and they wrapped the wood trunk in aluminum foil and inserted the sparkly branches, Caz stepped back and got it.

Last year the couple threw a retro holiday party dressed in mod clothes and served Tom and Jerrys from a period drink set. When the color wheel punked out a week before the party, they found a replacement online and had it rush shipped.

The only downside for the Westovers is that the magical turning color wheel with its exposed lightbulb is a powerful attractant for Alice, their 18-month-old daughter. She obviously recognizes real holiday fun when she sees it. 🍷



BE LIKE TRAVIS

The Tree

Our main decorations are the Styrofoam balls pinned with sequins, rhinestones and plastic gems that I call “’60s Bored Housewife Crafts.” I started buying these at estate and yard sales about 10 years ago and you can still find them there and of course on eBay. Through the years, we have fine-tuned the collection, and our favorites look like elaborate Faberge eggs. Because they were handcrafted, each has its own personality: we have “The Marilyn,” pink sateen with gold and white accents; “The Princess DJ”; “Elvis”; and “Liberace,” a heavy ornament with crystal beads that looks like a miniature chandelier.

The Table

Last year we decorated our table with a vintage ’50s red tablecloth patterned with very modern looking black stick reindeer. Our centerpiece was a Fiberglass hand holding a mini ’60s white flocked bottle brush tree with red velvet ornaments. The hand used to be a department store display fixture.

For dinnerware, use plain white or mix it up with different vintage dishes you find—whatever works for you. We made our own napkin rings out of ribbons and vintage gift tags—whimsical little elves, Santas, angels, etc. I found candy cane candles at an estate sale—it’s amazing what people will save and you can still use. We complemented each setting with vintage Christmas matchbooks and ’50s holiday tumblers; ceramic Santa salt and pepper shakers complete the picture.



The Bar

The holiday season isn’t complete without parties! We decked out our vintage boomerang-shaped rattan bar with lights and other exotic decor. Because we are devoted tikiphiles, we like to mix that in with holiday decor; thus, we have the ceramic monkeys playing in the pine boughs sur-

rounding a vintage bamboo lantern. You can drape old Christmas lights around, or use new plastic tiki-head lights like we did. Of course we always like to serve mai tais in vintage mugs garnished with swizzle sticks, fresh fruit and paper umbrellas.

The Wrap

I started picking up vintage leftover holiday wraps, bows and tags at sales, and I like to mix and match them with new papers. I especially love the old tags and seals, and use them as repeated patterns on solid colored papers. You can also attach small vintage toys and collectibles to the bows for an extra gift to the recipient.

—Travis Smith

Skip Przywara, above, tends the bar while Travis Smith wraps packages in vintage papers.



RETRO Resources

Trees, lights and other fripperies

First introduced in 1959, the unabashedly fake trees were marketed for their convenience, durability and space-age good looks. Their ubiquitous rotating color wheels were developed for good reason: strings of electric tree lights could turn your tree into a shocking experience. The trees were popular for about 10 years and came in naturalistic colors like red, pink and blue as well as the silver standard.

www.aluminichristmastrees.net

Vintage trees ranging from \$150 for a silver six-footer to \$350 for a rarer gold one. Also sells old but working color wheels (\$75) and tree turners (\$85) for that spinning bush effect.

www.hamacher.com/public/sh/68165.asp

Pricey new aluminum models—\$350 for 5’ or \$420 for 7’—and modern color wheels for \$69.95. Or how about a 7’ red tinsel tree? Made of foil-finish PVC, light strands are OK on this one.

www.cheesylights.com

This site carries color wheels for \$50 and preassembled sparkly silver trees at affordable prices—\$35 to \$136—if you like the look but don’t have the bucks or inclination to go the purist route. If you’re not jumping on the metal tree bandwagon, maybe tiki, flamingo and palm tree, lobsters or plumb-bob holiday lights on a traditional tree will do it for you. Don’t miss the menorah and star of David or dreidel light strings.

www.ebay.com

Different sizes, conditions and styles listed at any given time, along with color wheels and tree turners. Prices range from \$50 to \$130, with some listings shown unassembled; buyer beware of missing limbs.

www.olddchristmaslights.com/aluminumtrees.htm

Nothing for sale, but an exhaustive history of all types of holiday lights, as well as in-depth background on aluminum trees; a good place to find out if those eBay lights you’re considering present serious safety issues.

www.contemporarycloth.com and www.reprodepot.com

Two great sites for holiday and other retro fabrics. Check out “Rubberband” and “Flame” at Contemporary Cloth or “Christmas Kittens” and “Spinning Dreidels” on ReproDepot Fabrics’ site for tablecloth or table runner ideas. From \$8.50–\$10.50 per yard.

www.kitschmasland.com

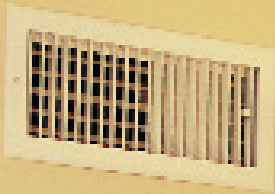
Travis Smith’s online ode to vintage Christmas collectibles.

Christmas: 1940–1959 by Robert Brenner

The subtitle of this book is “A Collector’s Guide to Decorations and Customs,” and it lives up to that with a good introduction to the field of available items and a detailed discussion of Christmas traditions through the decades. Available through www.schifferbooks.com.

Kitschmasland by Travis Smith

Due out from Schiffer in 2005, it’s chockfull of Travis’ nostalgic memories and fun holiday ideas.







The layout of their 1956 L-shaped ranch is kind of strange, Kellman further volunteers. Less of an open floor plan than in many similar-age homes, the living room is off the front entry and is separated from the kitchen and family room by a hallway. The 2,600-square-foot house has two bedrooms and a bath at the top of a short flight of stairs, with the master bedroom and another bath a few steps above that. Back downstairs, the former carport under the home's front facade was annexed by previous owners as a fourth bedroom and is now Kellman's office.

The couple had to have asbestos abatement done, which involved a then-pregnant Griswold moving out to stay with various friends during the months-long remodel. Sexy stuff like new plumbing, electrical and heating/air conditioning systems has

had to come before the wished-for exterior paint job and upgraded landscaping. Previous owners enclosed part of the rear patio for a dining room, and now cooking, eating and TV watching all happen in one interconnected space that looks out onto the pool. The couple changed out the windows to high-efficiency vinyl models in this area, a choice Kellman says he probably wouldn't make now, and they note that while they love the look of their new bamboo floor, it does chip and ding some under daily use.

Griswold's home-improvement role is that of pragmatist. She contributed some ideas of her own—the blue color palette in

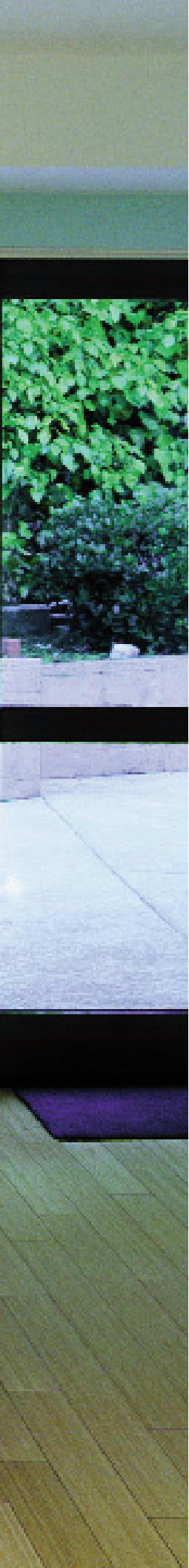


the house was her suggestion—but reins in what Kellman calls “my more stupid ideas.”

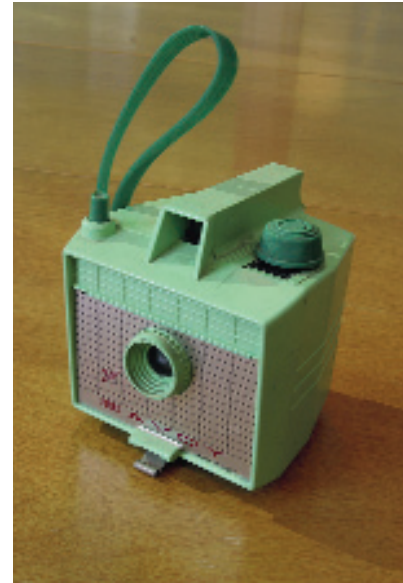
“Some of the furniture that Craig thinks is really cool looking is just not comfortable,” she says. Vintage items that passed muster in the living room are a bright orange couch and two Danish Modern chairs, both from Futures Collide in Pomona, Calif. Several Heywood-Wakefield tables came from a local college flea market, and other H-W pieces were shipped out from Detroit where Kellman has family. The reproduction Nelson ball clock above the fireplace is from MoMA in NYC and a starburst Nelson clock in the family room was bought on eBay.







The Heywood-Wakefield dining set is used for everyday meals in the Kellman-Griswold home. A Savoy child's camera and California Freeform dishes by Metlox, dating from 1954, are part of their midcentury and toy collections.



Outside, he envisions low-maintenance landscaping that employs boulders, native plants and “spiky stuff,” while she favors color and an absence of rattlesnakes in her backyard. (The steep natural hillside—home to lots of wildlife—is held back by a retaining wall next to their pool and backyard patio.) The couple is still negotiating a compromise solution that will fulfill both their expectations. Another item on the arbitration docket is the compact kitchen: Kellman would like to upgrade the late-'70s look with its dark Mediterranean cabinets, but Griswold doesn't want to be without a kitchen as long as they have a toddler. With another child planned in the next couple of years, the kitchen doesn't feel like a priority to her. “I'd rather move than redo the kitchen,” she says.

The midcentury living room has oak floors, one wood-paneled wall with a built-in lighting soffit and a flagstone fireplace with a cantilevered hearth. Kellman points out that an ashtray stand came from his great-grandmother's house in Detroit, while the blue and black upholstered chair and the funky floor lamp with a table that looks like an artist's palette were picked up at swap meets. Some items are things he probably wouldn't buy again, he confesses.

Kellman's taste in architecture is changing as well. “I've begun to like different materials than those I first admired,” he says. “I like more elegant things now. I still appreciate the freeform flagstone work [on our fireplace wall], but now that I see some of the brickwork that Neutra did that's very rectilinear, that more strict design mandate is very appealing.”

While little of his own artwork is on display, “there is an interconnectivity between my career and the house,” Kellman says. “I love animation from the '50s and early '60s. It was really different from the round, rubbery cartoons of the 1930s and '40s. There was an emphasis on flat, graphic design and color, inspired by modern fine art and commercial design of the era.



The simplicity, economy of design and harmony between geometric and organic elements is similar to structures built then.

“It seems like there was a focus on the future in so much of the art of the period,” he continues, “including architecture, and it was really optimistic and hopeful. I think there’s a similar comforting nostalgia I feel when I look at good midcentury animation and good midcentury architecture.”

Some of those bright period graphics are seen in framed original Disneyland posters, as well as the voluminous collection of toys they have stored away while Sam is too young to realize these are more than just playthings. During our visit a “Big Boy” Tinkertoy set, Lincoln Logs, Yogi Bear and Pee-Wee Herman character dolls, and plastic Top Cat and Mr. Magoo figures played off against a hefty plywood-bound Neutra book on the blond living-room coffee table. In the dining/kitchen area are framed animation cels of Fred Flintstone and George Jetson, and leaning against the bright red wall in the hallway is a 6’-tall cartoonish painting by Kellman of the pair in nuptial gear that was signed by all of their wedding guests as a memento.

So while Craig, Christine and Sam’s house might not yet be a complete showcase, it’s definitely a home with a personality—one that they hope to further unveil with thoughtful, measured projects as time, money and life allow. ✨

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for complete list.

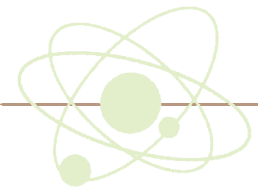
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Palm Springs spins a web

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where'd you get that?

katie goes to high point pp. 10–15

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- 2. Karim Rashid for George Kovacs
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- 3. EQ3 www.eq3.com
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- 5. Haziza www.haziza.com
- 6. Oggetti www.oggetti.com
- 7. Dellarobbia www.dellarobbiausa.com
- 8. Fire Farm Lighting www.firefarm.com
- 9. Emissary www.emissaryusa.com
- 10. Chicago Textile Corp. www.chicagotextile.com

Other companies mentioned:

- Twenty Gauge www.twentygauge.com
- JC Penney www.jcpenney.com

cool stuff pp. 33

See Retro Pop Art's work at Orbit Gallery,
201•945•8900 🍷 Del Marcos Hotel, 800•676•1214
🍷 Retro@home, 510•658•6600

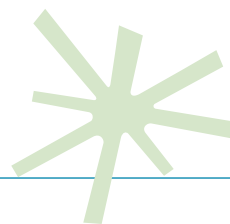
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Eichler websites: www.eichlernetnetwork.com 🍷
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Homeowner recommendations for vintage
furnishings: Pasadena City College Flea Market,
1579 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, Calif.,
8 a.m.–3 p.m. first Sunday of each month 🍷
Futures Collide, Pomona, Calif.; 909•865•2705.

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866•415•3372
www.contemporarycloth.com
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www.detango.com
- Happy Laugh** 60
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www.happylaugh.com
- Modern Handbag** 60
www.modbag.com
- ReproDepot Fabrics** 9
www.reprodepotfabrics.com

architecture & design

- Forward Design Group** 49
760•533•1950
www.forwarddesigngroup.com
- Lami Design/Gregory LaVardera** 49
856•662•4909
www.lamidesign.com/plans
- Terra Bella Landscape Design** 48
310•398•3878
www.terrabellalandscape.com

bookstores

- DigModern.com** 61
www.digmodern.com
- Hennessey + Ingalls** 49
310•458•9074
www.hennesseyingalls.com

events & galleries

- Dolphin Promotions/Miami, Palm Springs and Chicago Modernism shows** 29
708•366•2710
www.dolphinfairs.com
- M&M Enterprises/Michigan Modernism Exposition** 17
586•465•9441
MandMinfo@aol.com
- Orbit Gallery** 48
201•945•8900
www.orbitgalleryspace.com
- SOHO San Diego Modernism Weekend** 59
619•297•9327
www.sohosandiego.org

good works

- Angels for Animals** 40
626•799•3948
www.angels-4-animals.org

hotels & realtors

- Del Marcos Hotel** 60
800•676•1214
www.delmarcoshotel.com
- Doug Kramer/Realtor** 41
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www.kramerproperties.com
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- ValleyModern.com** 16
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midcentury vintage

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