

interiors





BESPOKE LA

INTERIOR DESIGN: JOAN BEHNKE
ARCHITECTURE: HARRISON DESIGN
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ROCHELLE GORES FREDSTON AND HER HUSBAND, David Fredston, were unprepared for the presentation assembled by their interior designer, Joan Behnke, and their architects, Bill Harrison and Robert Tretsch. The 29-year-olds had recently purchased a dark, low-slung 1970s ranch house in Beverly Hills with their expanding family in mind (daughter Colette is now three, Claire arrived November 2013, after construction wrapped up). The team showed the Fredstons, among other things, a heart-shaped bathtub à la Lana Turner, shag carpeting and one hideous finish after another.

"We could see their faces contorting, trying to be polite," remembers Behnke. "We got halfway through and burst out laughing." Egged on by Gores Fredston's father—for whom Behnke has designed several projects—the team had devised dual presentations: one serious, the other a complete spoof.

There was method to this madness. The real architectural intentions were audacious, and the interiors were a 180-degree departure from the 1933 Spanish-style residence the Fredstons were leaving, which featured zebra-print patio furniture, an office with Tiffany-blue walls and a living room draped in a graphic red floral. The joke lightened the mood, helping minds open enough to embrace the daring project.









THE EXISTING HOUSE, RECALLS HARRISON, principal of Harrison Design, looked “like a bad bowling alley.” Project architect Tretsch describes light-obscuring overhangs “that visually crushed you.” They proposed retaining only outer, and a few interior, walls (the minimum to placate zoning ordinances). Then they brought in builder John Finton, whose clients include Simon Cowell, Ben Stiller and Mark Wahlberg, to help them realize the new 10,000-square-foot “soft modern” structure with double-height public spaces, clerestory windows and a greatly enhanced indoor-outdoor relation.

A minimal palette of materials—zinc roof, stucco and stacked natural-edged travertine walls, limestone floors and bronze-framed glass windows and doors from Fenestra that showcase irregular, Mondrian-like grids—was essential. “It draws you through the plan and makes it connected,” says Harrison. Adds Tretsch: “You want a carefully curated palette so you balance the main idea with the stucco.” That main idea? Stunning 24-inch-thick walls of the aforementioned travertine that delineate the home’s axes and move from indoor to outdoor. “We all liked keeping the single story of a ranch-style house, which works for young kids and for being pregnant,” adds Gores Fredston.

Last year, Forbes dubbed Joan Behnke “the billionaire

whisperer” for the caliber of her clientele, which includes a United Arab Emirates diplomat, aerospace equipment tycoon Robert Veloz, Amway executive Bill Nicholson, and “it” couple Tom Brady and Giselle Bündchen. Her work is as diverse as that clientele. For the Fredstons, she suggested a highly bespoke environment that was nevertheless comfortably modern.

“They were with-it in terms of fashion and design,” notes Behnke. (Gores Fredston owned Arcade, a go-to apparel boutique for celebrity stylists, and she now sits on many boards, including that of fashion label J. Mendel.) “I told them, ‘You’re a young couple. Why get encumbered with antiques, which are a responsibility? Why not make it more youthful?’”

The Fredstons agreed, though they had a caveat: “No white sofas,” Gores Fredston told Behnke, who responded with a monochromatic palette accented by reds, minimal use of pattern and “very practically oriented, kid-friendly fabrics that wouldn’t require a lot of maintenance.” To wit, sofas in the family room were covered in Loro Piana blue corduroy. The living room curtains were made of a poly-cotton blend from Sahco (through Bergamo), and its sofas were dressed in a Sina Pearson mohair. Finally, drapes in Gores Fredston’s office were made from Sandra Jordan alpaca.





WHICH IS NOT TO SAY THAT THE HOUSE IS JUST ABOUT Colette and Claire. Holding those Sahco drapes aloft are bespoke chains suspended from the ceiling to just under a soffit. Behnke, in fact, custom-designed most of the furnishings. The foyer's wood and bronze Splash console, sconces and hammered brass chandelier are all her designs. So are the living room's two-part lacquer coffee table; the dining room table (surrounded by customized Dana John chairs), buffet and sconces; and built-in shelving throughout executed by Silver Strand. Behnke also designed bronze fretwork in the Fredstons' bath that was fabricated by master metalsmith Pierre Quinton and cleverly references the home's 1970s ranch origins in a chic way.





THE DESIGNER ADORNED CABINETRY WITH EXQUISITE custom Pashupatina hardware and illuminated rooms with pendants and chandeliers from Pagani (master suite), John Pomp (living room), Lindsey Adelman (dining room) and Naomi Paul (family room). Significant artworks—a Calder in the living room next to a glass-enclosed “jewel-box” wine cellar, a Larry Poons abstraction and a Pierre Bayle ceramic vessel in the dining room; a Sam Francis in the study—keep the caliber of the interiors always in the ascendant. Finally, Dennis Hickok, the late, great landscape architect behind the Getty Center, designed the gardens.

No, there is no heart-shaped tub in the master bath (it’s Victoria + Albert) or shag carpet (mostly Tai Ping). But it’s clear the notion of these jolted some creative thinking...with spectacular results. ■

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