

DESIGN & DECORATING

HOUSE TOUR

Playing by House Rules

The dominant architecture of a 1920s Spanish revival, owned by 'Big Bang Theory' star Jim Parsons, called for simpatico décor

BY KELLY MARAGES

IT WAS LOVE at first white-stucco wall when "Big Bang Theory" star Jim Parsons and partner Todd Spiewak walked into this 1922 Spanish-Moorish revival in Los Angeles, designed by Stiles O. Clements, the architect of the city's El Capitan Theatre. The home had intrigued its share of famous owners before, from actor Robert Pattinson to basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. And the exposures offered by its sprawling U-shape—which translated to a light-flooded interior—and a plethora of well-preserved original details sealed the deal. Iron railings and light fixtures plus intricately hand-painted ceilings proved irresistible.

Seeking décor that honored the house's character, especially those ceilings, the pair chose Steven Johanknecht, a painter and student of art history who is a co-founder of L.A. design firm Commune. Mr. Johanknecht also saw an opportunity in the elaborately painted coffered and vaulted canopies. "We wanted to enhance them," he explained, which meant steering clear of neutral furnishings that couldn't keep up with the architecture. But how to design worthy interiors without creating a riot of competition?

The designer's answer: Look at the home as an artwork itself, and choose furnishings whose textures, shapes and colors align with the house. In rooms where the estate's gardens were visible through generous windows and glass doors, he went for similarly simpatico nature-inspired interior elements. When it came to the visual flow of the house, however, he sometimes sought out contrasts. "I always look at it as a journey, how the space unfolds," he said. Since the living room was bright and airy, for example, he could step the adjacent den in deep colors and rich textures.

The result, featured in Anthony Iannacci's book "Hollywood Interiors: Style and Design in Los Angeles" (The Monacelli Press), is an artistic but livable oasis for the owners and their two dogs.

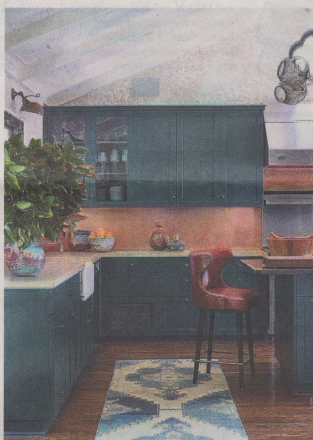


▲ Ceiling Fandom

In a Spanish revival home in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles, owned by "Big Bang Theory" actor Jim Parsons and his partner, Todd Spiewak, original hand-painted ceilings inspired Steven Johanknecht's living-room design. The silk-velvet couch, by Mr. Johanknecht's L.A. firm, Commune, takes its blue cues from the ceiling, while art deco club chairs, upholstered in a cubist Clarence House fabric, add a little pattern to the room. The designer chose emphatic textures that hold their own against the ceiling and arches without hogging attention: Ralph Lauren wool herringbone drapes, a rawhide shade atop a ceramic lamp and leather-covered geometric Holly Hunt ottomans are strong but restrained.

▼ Technicolor TV Room

Mr. Johanknecht sought a contrast to the adjacent living room's airiness when he created the intimate, more aggressively vibrant television den. Lustrous River Blue by Benjamin Moore covers the walls, and the bright red of the built-in bookshelf alludes to the home's Spanish roots. The custom mohair couch by Commune offers a complementary marigold to the walls' azure, and Robert Sommer's 1970s chandelier adds disco-era glitz. Unlike in the neighboring room, virtually every available surface is richly enveloped—with feather-festooned Pollack fabric drapes, burlap wallpaper on the ceiling, and a wall-to-wall Patterson Flynn Martin carpet.



▲ Kitchen of Eden

The kitchen emphasizes natural elements. "It looks out onto a hillside, so there is already a visual relationship," said the designer. Floral wallpaper by artist Marthe Armitage brings the outdoors in, while cabinets painted Benjamin Moore's Hunter Green extend the verdure theme, and to ensure cohesion, Soane leather bar stools recycle the red prominent in other areas of the home. A gleaming copper backsplash offsets the earthy, matte-stone counter and Kevin Willis ceramics. The magnolia tree on the counter keeps things literally lively.



▼ Formal Education

Mr. Johanknecht met the potentially dominating red, gold and green of the master bedroom's dramatic barrelled ceiling with furnishings in more equally resolute colors but averted overkill by choosing shapes symp-

thetic to the architecture. Yes, one Commune for George Smith arm chair is pink, the other plaid, but their rounded forms mimic the arched ceiling and doorways. More curves: the sculptural ceramic side table by Guy Bareff and the scal-

loped edges of the sheepskin throw rug. For the cozy vibe a bedroom needs, the designer drafted more saturated hues: a teal horseshair bed designed by his firm, a tomato wool sisal rug by Patterson Flynn Martin and Farrow & Ball's Olive walls.



▲ Sizing Up

The original black-and-white Terrazzo tiled floor in the entrance coupled with double-height ceilings gave the designer scope for drama: "In a Spanish house, you're playing with scale. With such strong architecture, the gestures need to be bold." Gary Hume's ebullient artwork, "Baby Bird," offsets the tiles' tight ge-

ometry. The red, gold and green Patterson Flynn Martin patterned runner anticipates the earthy color scheme of the rest of the interior. Glazed white ceramic horse lamps topped by rope shades, an oversize bowl for keys and a moss-green hair-on-hide bench offer warmth without fussiness, providing a taste of the confident design choices within.



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