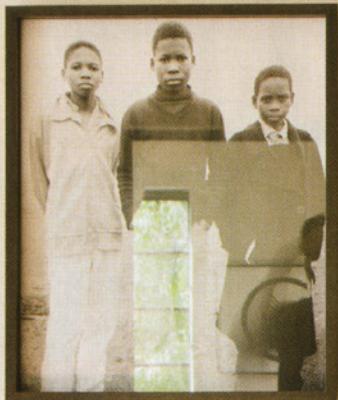


BIG IDEAS

→ 2012



EMBRACING
THE JAPANESE
AESTHETIC
OF WABI-SABI:
IMPERFECT,
WEATHERED,
ORGANIC

the New Modern



Interior design by PAMELA SHAMSHIRI for COMMUNE Interview by CHRISTINE PITTEL Photographs by AMY NEUNSINGER

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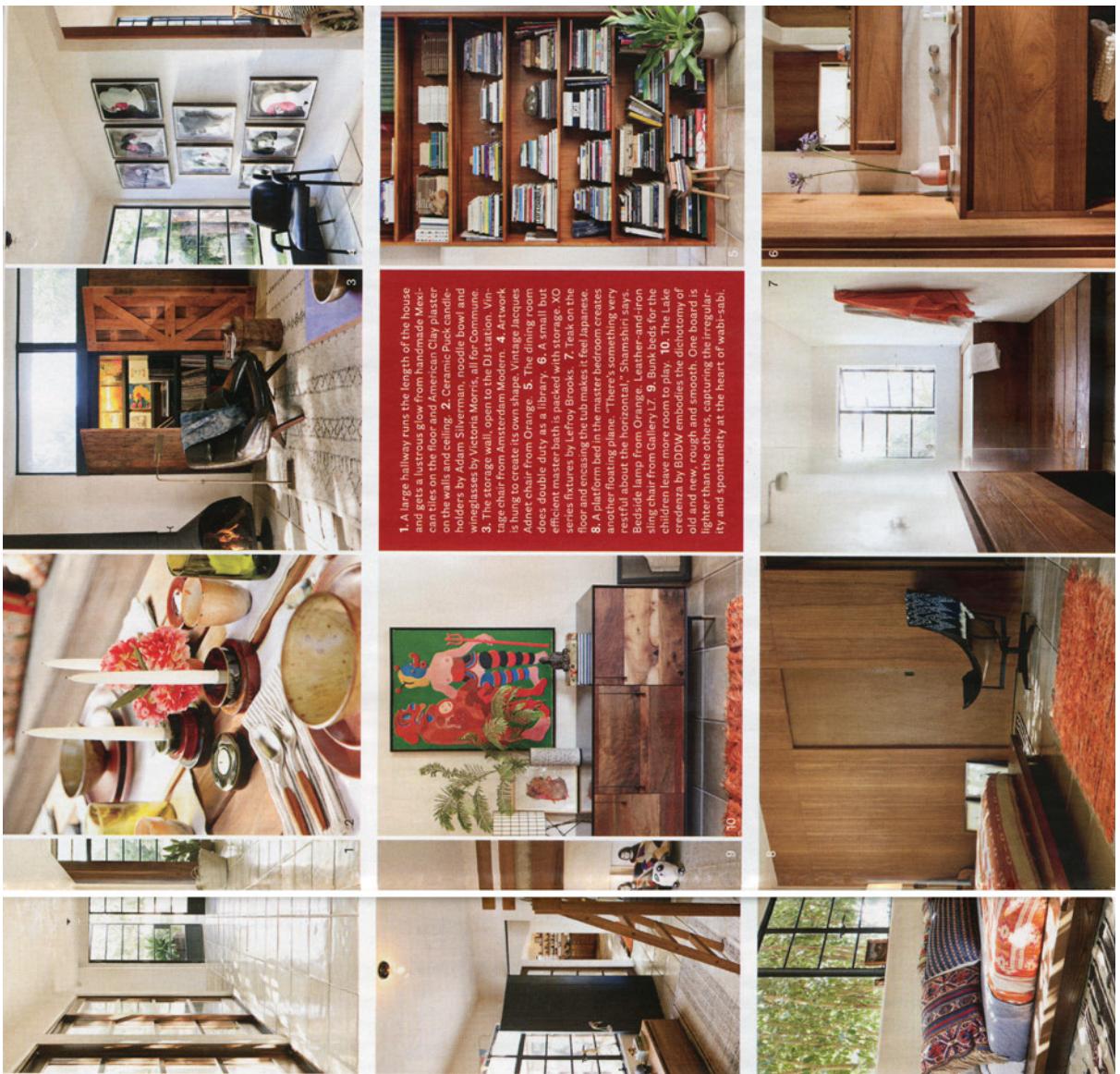


A beloved dining table was resized by its maker, Alma Allen, to fit the dining room in this Los Angeles house. "It's been with them forever, which we love," says designer Pamela Shamshiri. Hans Wegner's Wishbone chairs pick up on the Asian sensibility. Hanging lantern from Lawson-Fenning. Vintage patchwork rug from Lawrence of La Brea.

OPPOSITE: In the entry, a graphic ladder original to the 1931 house leads up to the roof. Vintage Van Keppel & Green bench from Ten 10 gallery. Moroccan rug from Amadi Carpets.

The proportions of the house were so good to start with that all the designers had to do was simplify to bring them out. A generous sofa piled with repurposed kilim pillows gathers people together in the living room. Hidden behind the reclaimed redwood doors on the left is a wall of storage that includes a TV and stereo components, a home office, and children's toys. The custom walnut-and-brass wall unit was inspired by Charlotte Perriand. Macramé Slab light by Robert Lewis for Commune. Custom travertine coffee table from Ten 10 gallery. Vintage Moroccan rug from Ahadi Carpets.





1. A large hallway runs the length of the house and gets a lustrous glow from handmade Mexican tiles on the floor and American Clay plaster on the walls and ceiling. **2.** Ceramic Puck candle holders by Adam Silverman, Rococo bowl and wing glasses by Victor Morris, all for Commune. **3.** The storage wall, open to the Dis station. Vintage chair from Amsterdam Modern. **4.** Artwork is hung to create its own shape. Vintage Jacques Adnet chair from Orange. **5.** The dining room does double duty as a library. It's a small but efficient master bath is packed with storage. **6.** XO series fixtures by Jeffroy Brooks. **7.** Teak on the floor and encasing the tub makes it feel Japanese. **8.** A platform bed in the master bedroom creates another floating plane. "There's something very restful about the horizontal," Shamshin says. Beside lamp from Orange. Leather-and-iron sling chair from Gallery. **9.** Bunk beds for the children leave more room to play. **10.** The Lake credenza by BDDW embodies the dichotomy of old and new, rough and smooth. One board is lighter than the others, capturing the irregularity and spontaneity at the heart of wabi-sabi.

CHRISTINE PITTEL: This house has a quiet beauty. PAMELA SHAMSHIN: That's a good way to describe it. We really limited the palette. Everything is very natural. All the materials are organic. The original owner built in 1931 was Japanese, and the house definitely feels very Japanese to me—the way it's built in a U shape around an inner courtyard. **The sliding doors make me think of shoji screens.**

For those, we looked at a lot of Japanese references and chose to do them out of wood. The metal windows and doors were already here. Everything we added is salvaged and repurposed. In the living room, we used reclaimed redwood for the storage wall. I had gone to the salvage yard, and I wasn't looking for redwood in particular, but I just loved that piece of wood, how it had aged. There were a lot of markings on it.

That sounds so wabi-sabi. House Beautiful did a famous issue about Japanese art and design back in 1960 that explored that whole concept.

We brought up "wabi-sabi" at the time during the construction. This corner is very wabi-sabi. That piece of wood, yes, it's very wabi-sabi. Oh no, no, no. Let's leave the wall like this.

What does "wabi-sabi" mean to you?

Embracing imperfection. And seeing the touch of the human hand. One thing we talked about early on was Japanese farmhouses and trying to have more of a rustic existence in the city. When you bring weathered wood into a room, it gives you more of that feeling. We talked about patina and how the house and the wood would age. All the materials are a bit worn. Each of the cement tiles on the floor is a little different. There was a moment of panic when they came in, but then we realized they were exactly what we wanted—handmade and unsealed, with no off-gassing epoxy finish. And all the walls are covered in clay.

Clay? Do you mean stucco?

No, it's actually a thin layer of clay plaster. And it does something amazing to the light. We were trying to achieve the kind of light you get with a Noguchi lantern. I read about American Clay products in the newspaper, and we did a test and loved the way it looked. The walls are luminous. I think the quality of sound in the house is really nice because of it, too.

There's not much furniture in the living room. It's as if you combined all the usual pieces into one huge sofa that looks like it could sleep six.

It could! And it's really comfortable because it's almost all down and it's covered in bedding—mattress—an off-black duvet fabric done with vegetable dyes, so right off the roll it looks as if it has already faded a bit. You can kind of see the brown coming through.

What's the idea behind that floating shelf over the breakfast bar in the kitchen?

The way the pictures are hung on the dining room wall feels almost haphazard.

I love the word "haphazard." That's what we always go for at Commune, because we don't want places to feel so decorated that you lose the spontaneity and the folly of things.

Is the wood on one of the doors of that bedroom cabinet much lighter than the others?

That piece is interesting because the body is so smooth and refined, and then it has these really rough, reclaimed dots. It's so wabi-sabi, and that's what we loved about it. The wood feels like it brings its history with it instead of covering it all up under plastic or paint. That cabinet has a soulfulness that you miss with something new and unused.

But some people can't bear to see a scratch.

A scratch is the evidence that there's a person nearby. I have a thing with all the polyurethane and sealants. It's great to remove them and just have things age naturally and get worn in the way they're meant to, and not prevent the process.

You've taken a sharp edge off modernism.

Modernism can be harsh and unnatural. Get pieces where you have the sense of the person who made it. That makes it more special. It will age well and live with you and become part of your collected life. You don't throw it out next year. And you're calm and relaxed, because everything feels right and nothing is too precious. I like that in spaces. It makes our clients feel like they can grow with their houses and add to it. Everything is unfinished. The wood continues to age. The floor changes every day. There's something incomplete and yet complete about it.

That kind of describes life, doesn't it?

I guess it does. You always want to allow room for growth and change.

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VIDEO
SCAN THIS
IMAGE FOR
WABI-SABI
MOMENTS



Blackman Cruz chairs are drawn up to a fireplace, which adds warmth to the dining area. Table from Ten 10 gallery. **OPPOSITE:** "I had just bought a Schindler house, and I was looking at his cabinetry and Japanese cabinetry when we designed the kitchen," Shamshiri says. Notches and simple strips of wood take the place of hardware on the doors. They opened up the kitchen to the dining room—where the kids can sit at the breakfast bar on vintage Eames chairs from JF Chen—and the hallway, where guests can gather around the island. Viking range. Honed slate countertops from Creative Environments.



In the master bedroom, vintage textiles add deep, rich colors and a soft patina that feels warm and relaxing. Side tables from Emmerson Troop. **OPPOSITE:** The interior courtyard is visible from almost every room and makes a medium-size house feel much more spacious. Rocks and stones suggest a Japanese garden. Amphitheater-style steps provide extra seating when the owners are having a party. Exterior sconces by Robert Lewis for Commune. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

