

ELLE DECOR

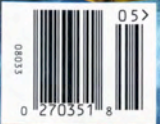
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The master bath of a Beverly Hills home designed by Commune Design.

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Decorator Ariel Ashe and her sister, Alexi, decided to go in together on a Connecticut country home. Never mind that Alexi's husband and young son are part of the package—luckily, she is married to talk-show host and comedian Seth Meyers, whose natural good humor keeps things light. By Lizzy Goodman

In the entrance courtyard of a 1927 Spanish Colonial Revival house in Beverly Hills designed by Steven Johanknecht of Commune Design, the Janus et Cie wicker furniture has cushions in an Opuzen fabric, the root side table is from JF Chen, and the wrought-iron sconce and chandeliers are original to the house. The vintage blanket is Navajo, and the terra-cotta floor tiles are by Malibu Ceramic Works.



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PRODUCED BY ROBERT RUFINO



WEST WORLD

On a Beverly Hills street with a star-studded past, Commune Design's Steven Johanknecht imbues a 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival with Hollywood glamour and Wild West motifs.



The family room's sofa in an Edelman leather and armchairs in a Kravet stripe are by Ralph Lauren Home. The other armchairs are by A. Rudin, the custom walnut cocktail table is by Commune Design, the sconces are by Paul Ferrante, the custom rug is by Amadi Carpets, and the Roman shades on the original leaded windows are in a Colefax and Fowler fabric. The Thomas C. Molesworth-inspired motifs on the ceiling beams and custom cabinetry were painted by artist Nic Valle, the ceiling is sheathed in a Ralph Lauren Home grass cloth, and the cowboy ink drawings are by Edward Borein.

In the living room, the sofas, in a Rogers & Goffigon fabric, and armchair, in a Goughia cotton-linen, are all by George Smith; the custom cocktail table is by Commune Design. The red lacquer-framed mirror is custom; the 1920s Spanish torchiere is from Revival Antiques in Pasadena; the curtains are of a Bruntschwig & Fils velvet, and the rug is by Christopher Farr. The walls are in Navajo White and the ceiling is in Bridgewater Tan, both by Benjamin Moore; the F. Grayson Sayre landscape over the mantel is in a frame by Arts and Crafts ceramics.



As a cofounder of Commune Design, the Los Angeles firm known for its savvy mixing of vintage chic with high-end handiwork, Steven Johanknecht might be expected to know his Neutras from his Navajo rugs. But ask him about this renovation of a 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival house in Beverly Hills, and Johanknecht—a former store designer for Barneys New York and design director for Studio Sofiel—starts enthusing about his latest obsession: Thomas C. Molesworth. “You’ve got to check him out,” he says. “He did all these interiors and furnishings in the cowboy style in the 1930s and ’40s. He designed lodges in Montana and Wyoming. His furniture was just incredible.”

What pushed Johanknecht down the rabbit hole of classic Western design were his cowboy style-aficionado clients, a couple for whom he has designed several homes, most recently one near the ocean in the Pacific Palisades section of L.A. “I have always been enchanted by the West,”

the wife says. “I buy cowboy art and plein air landscapes, old Western blankets, and furniture in that style. And my husband and I adore old Molesworth.”

A longtime friend of Johanknecht’s, she became one of his first clients after he founded Commune Design in 2004 with Roman Alonso and Pamela and Ramin Shamshiri (the siblings have since left to found their own firm, Studio Shamshiri). She had been looking for a home that felt more “old Los Angeles” when she discovered this one for sale on Roxbury Drive, a legendarily star-studded street whose former residents include Lucille Ball, who used to hand out Halloween candy from her front door here, and Jimmy Stewart, who grew sweet corn in his backyard. The exterior—carved-plaster facade, wood-spindle entry door, clay roof tiles, and leaded-glass windows—was charmingly intact. “Right away, we asked Steven to come in and bring the house back to its Spanish roots,” she says. “He is so good at

ABOVE: The custom dining table is by Cygal Art Deco, the Dessin Fournir chairs are in a Myung Jin mohair, and the 19th-century chandelier is original. The walls are in Benjamin Moore’s Dinner Party. BELOW: The foyer’s antique Spanish-style chest is the client’s own, the David Cressey lamp and ceramic horse are from JF Chen, the antler chandelier is from CBS Showroom, and the rug is by Christopher Farr.



BELOW: The master bed has a headboard in a Clarence House mohair and is topped with pillows in fabrics from Schumacher and Pierre Frey. The Formations bench is in a Fortuny wool flannel, the BDDW side tables support lamps by Hollywood at Home, the curtains are of a C&C Milano fabric, and the wool rug is from Patterson Flynn Martin. The ceiling is in Farrow & Ball's Pelt.



mixing. He brings his fashion background and uses color in such an unusual way.”

Inside, too, the house retained many of its original features, from hand-carved ceiling beams to wrought-iron chandeliers and arched doors. But previous renovations had altered the flow of the home, with some rooms chopped in two, and the 1920s tile flooring had been replaced with a patchwork of mismatched materials.

“We wanted to make it feel more holistic while still honoring its heritage,” the designer says.

A typical Commune project involves a deep dive into history. For this house, Johanknecht did extensive research into the Spanish Colonial Revival tradition in L.A., working with a tile company in Malibu to create authentic-looking octagonal terra-cotta pavers with decorative insets painted in custom motifs of white and blue. The new tilework begins in the entrance courtyard and continues through the kitchen and dining room and out to the patio in the back of the house. “One of the great things about California homes is that indoor/outdoor experience,” he says. “It was really important to me that everything feel connected.”

The home’s palette, which ranges from vibrant hues of pink and green to more dramatic shades, such as the dining room’s earthy red, was a balancing act. The wife is “a very happy person who loves color,” Johanknecht says. She chose the raspberry upholstery on the living room’s armchairs and the striking turquoise hue of the floor tiles in the master bath, which were inspired by the color of a piece of Bauer pottery she picked up at a flea market. Johanknecht countered with such choices as the deep plum—Farrow & Ball’s Pelt—on the beamed master bedroom ceiling. “I arched an eyebrow when he proposed that one,” the wife admits. “But I decided to trust him. And he was right: It looks cozy, as opposed to dark, as I’d feared.”

It is the very solidity of a Spanish Colonial-style house, the designer says, that makes it such a complex design challenge. “The gestures can be so big that it is easy for things to get lost,” he says. “I really had to pay attention to scale. There is not a lot of midcentury here, but I did incorporate craft, like the Stan Bitters ceramic pots at the entrance.”

In the end, Molesworth was the key. His cowboy motifs influenced numerous details throughout the house, from the family room’s hand-stenciled cabinetry and ceiling beams to the whipstitching on the sconce shades and the moccasin-like embroidery on a pair of armchairs. “We got exactly what we wanted and more,” says the client. ■



The limestone tub in the master bath has unlacquered-brass fittings by Waterworks. The armchair is by George Smith, the custom sconces are by Paul Ferrante, the 1960s Austrian ceiling lights are from Orange Los Angeles, and the sheepskin rug is from Grand Splendid. The custom tiles are by Malibu Ceramic Works, and the photograph is by John Michael Riva, Jr. For details, see Resources.