

Return

Engagement

A 1930s Los Angeles house with a storied show-business past receives a chic restoration courtesy of the design firm Commune

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Dinah and Bill Ruch enlisted Pamela Shamshiri of the interior design firm Commune to restore and update their 1935 Los Angeles house, formerly the site of legendary Hollywood parties. In the living room, a painting by the filmmaker Jean Negulesco is displayed on a wall of antiqued mirror. The windows are dressed with a Ralph Lauren Home crewelwork fabric, and the iron accent tables are from Holly Hunt. For details see Sources.



Clockwise from far left: The living room, refurbished to reflect its 1940s William Haines design, features a sectional sofa upholstered in mohair, and a Tony Duquette table lamp (one of a pair); the cocktail table and ottoman, the latter clad in an Old World Weavers fabric, are both by Formations. Landscape designer Matthew Brown created the parterre. Vintage chairs and chaise longue line the pool.

When Dinah and Bill Ruch purchased their residence in Los Angeles's Coldwater Canyon two years ago, they had no idea that a rich tapestry of Hollywood history had unfolded there. "We saw pictures of the house, and I said, 'Let's get in the car and buy it,'" recalls Bill, a retired entrepreneur. "We loved the indoor-outdoor feeling and Spanish Colonial details like the terra-cotta roof." His wife, who serves as board president for L.A.'s Levitt Quinn Family Law Center, adds, "We honestly didn't know anything about the previous owners. It was the lush landscape and the courtyard fountain that sealed the deal."

Hollywood may be littered with pedigreed properties, but few are as steeped in delicious Tinseltown lore as this home (previously featured in the June 1978 issue of *AD*). Built in 1935, it later belonged to Charles K. Feldman and Jean Howard. Feldman, a powerful talent agent, managed the careers of Lauren Bacall, Howard Hawks, John Wayne, and other industry titans, while also producing such noteworthy movies as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Seven Year Itch*. Howard, a famous beauty and former Ziegfeld girl, came to L.A. as an aspiring actress and rose to prominence as a legendary hostess and a photographer of the entertainment world.

The pair bought the house in 1942, and following a renovation by silent-film star turned decorator William Haines, a pioneer of Hollywood Regency style, it became the backdrop for fabled parties, assignations, and assorted debaucheries. Humphrey Bogart, Marlene Dietrich, and Greta Garbo were among their frequent guests. Elia Kazan and Marilyn Monroe carried on an affair in one of the bedrooms while Arthur Miller typed away by the pool, plotting his own seduction of the screen siren. In 1960, when John F. Kennedy arrived for the Democratic National Convention, Feldman and Howard hosted a soirée to introduce the future president to the cream of the

movie business. Details of that evening are sketchy, but by most accounts a good time was had by all.

After the Ruchs acquired the home, they called on a longtime family friend, Pamela Shamshiri of the L.A. interior design firm Commune, to revive the place. It was Shamshiri who unearthed the property's storied past, which the couple eagerly embraced. "Bill and Dinah really wanted to bring the house back to its roots," she explains. "I had to figure out how to do something that was fundamentally Spanish Colonial in style but still acknowledged the Billy Haines interiors, which included incredible custom pieces by Tony Duquette." →

Clockwise from near right: Decorative painter Nic Valle ornamented Dinah's study with a trellis motif; the desk and upholstered chair are by Restoration Hardware, and the table lamp is from JF Chen. The kitchen cabinetry is painted in Benjamin Moore's Enchanted Forest; the range is by Wolf, and the sink fittings are by Perrin & Rowe. In the breakfast area, a light fixture by Waldo's Designs hangs above an Alma Allen walnut table and a suite of 19th-century Spanish dining chairs; the Belgian iron side table and the pair of armchairs are from Lucca Antiques.



The 5,000-square-foot, four-bedroom structure had retained only vestigial traces of its Spanish Colonial and Hollywood Regency heritage. "It was a mishmash," Shamshiri says. "All the walls were painted white, every room had a different floor, and there was a strange French-style kitchen."

Fulfilling an important client directive, she combined three poky cooking and pantry areas into a single expansive kitchen. It now features two islands, green-painted cabinets (some with copper-mesh fronts), and a fluted hood. To accentuate the Spanish character, she incorporated dark-stained Douglas-fir ceiling beams, a strategy also employed in the main hallway.

References to the historic Haines scheme become more overt in the living and dining areas, where Shamshiri relied on archival photographs and commissioned on-site excavations to determine the original wall colors. In the living room, returned to a deep sage-green, she kept Haines's expanse of antiqued-mirror panels around the fireplace, as well as his banquette-seating configuration and built-in bookshelves—though she added a discreet television enclosure. A portrait by the filmmaker Jean Negulesco is displayed prominently above the carved mantel, while vintage Duquette table lamps in the shape of Buddha heads now flank the room's double doors, setting the tone for the glamorous yet inviting space.

Shamshiri created a curving copper-top bar for the compact sitting room, where sparkling conversation still flows as freely as the cocktails and cigarettes once did. She even installed a piano in the same spot where Judy Garland serenaded Richard Burton—a moment captured in a Howard photograph that hangs nearby, on a plaster wall stenciled by decorative artist Nic Valle in a pattern of faded black florets. "The Ruchs entertain all the time, so it made sense to keep that bubbly spirit alive," Shamshiri says.

Working within the existing footprint, the designer reconfigured the master suite to provide separate his-and-her studies—the latter embellished with a trellis mural by Valle. Shamshiri also gave

the couple a luxurious new master bath, outfitted with Moroccan tiles by Ann Sacks, a freestanding tub, and Italian reverse-painted glass sconces that once graced the tearoom at London's Fortnum & Mason department store.

Outdoors, Shamshiri and her clients agreed to do only cosmetic upgrades, leaving the pool and courtyard intact to preserve their palpable sense of Hollywood history. They also left two guest rooms off the kitchen—one of which may or may not have been the site of a presidential tryst—largely as they found them. "Pam really taught us to appreciate everything that had gone on in this house," Bill says. "Frankly, I love the idea that my den was the original den of iniquity." □



Clockwise from left: The walls of the sitting room were stenciled by Valle; the barstools are vintage French, and the framed snapshot, which depicts the same interior, was taken by one of the home's previous owners, the photographer and legendary hostess Jean Howard. The hallway's Arts and Crafts bench is from Blackman Cruz. Walls finished in a vibrant *marmorino* plaster add punch to the dining room; the crystal chandelier and faux coral branches are from JF Chen, and the sconces are by Formations.



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From left: The master suite is furnished with a George Smith button-tufted bench in an Osborne & Little fabric; the embroidered bolster pillow on the bed is from Hollywood at Home, the curtains are made of a Lee Jofa linen, and the carpet is by Tai Ping. Ann Sacks tiles distinguish the master bath, where a pair of Lefroy Brooks console sinks flank a Waterworks tub; the fittings are also all by Lefroy Brooks.



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