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VOGUE LIVING AUSTRALIA

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LA CONFIDENTIAL

IN STAR-STUDDED NICHOLS CANYON, AN ENTREPRENEUR DIRECTS THE REMAKE OF A MISUNDERSTOOD HOUSE, TRANSFORMING HOLLYWOOD KITSCH INTO MID-CENTURY COOL
PHOTOGRAPHER: RICHARD POWERS WRITER: ALISON SINGH GEE



DENTIAL

To achieve the warm feel of a ski chalet, reclaimed wood has been used inside and out in this home in the Hollywood Hills. In the living room, OPPOSITE PAGE, the lamp is custom-made by Downpour and the couch is custom-covered in leather from Edehman Leathers. The log bench by the pool house, THIS PAGE, was made by Alma Allen for Commune.

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Owner Derek Mattison commissioned this water wall sculpture, right, by ceramic artist Stan Bitters. "Commissioning functional art is more expensive, but you end up with original pieces and not just stuff you've bought at a store." The custom chaise by Commune, next to the sculpture, is upholstered in Rough 'n Rowdy in Basalt and the cushions are Rowdy Stripe in Pelican, both by Perennials. The 'Asturias' reclining chaise and side table are by Carlos Motta for Espasso. OPPOSITE PAGE: In the living room, a 1940s red sci-fi prop from Blackman Cruz sits on the coffee table by Alma Allen for Commune. The Piero Lissoni sofa is upholstered in 'Barry Linen' and the painting is Untitled by John Barbour.



"COMMUNE IS NUTS AND I LIKED THAT.
I KNEW TOGETHER WE COULD CREATE
A HOUSE I WASN'T EXPECTING"





MARKETING ENTREPRENEUR DEREK Mattison grew up in a McMansion in Detroit where wall-to-wall carpeting and venetian blinds were considered *de rigueur*. "Even in college, I knew there had to be something better on the style spectrum," says Mattison, who, as an antidote to Midwestern unhipness, put himself on a steady diet of *Dwell* and *Wallpaper* magazines. So, in 2008, when he bought an unconventional house designed in the 1960s by California architects Buff & Hensman, perched in groovy Nichols Canyon in the Hollywood Hills, he knew his family, all back in Michigan, wouldn't "get it". "I told all my friends back home that I bought a house but it wouldn't make sense to them," he says. "I didn't even show my parents pictures of it; I couldn't describe to them what the house was or why I paid what I did for it. It just didn't translate."

But the house certainly spoke to Mattison – despite the questionable renovations that previous owners (including Hollywood film producer Jerry Bruckheimer) had inflicted. The once-elegant post-and-beam house was covered in multicoloured slate tiles – "It looked like it was built with duct tape," says Mattison – the floor had been covered with four layers of flooring (reducing the floor-to-ceiling height by around 10 centimetres), an upstairs closet addition had halved the once-dramatic double-height foyer, and gaudy stone lions guarded the front door.

The patio was a whole other visual circus, with a fire pit that had so many flames shooting out, it looked like a blockbuster special effect. Worst of all, the house felt closed-in and misunderstood – it had lost that essential (and always coveted) indoor-outdoor flow. "I thought to myself that if somebody put time into this house, it could be really cool," says Mattison. And, with that declaration, he embarked on a multimillion-dollar renovation and design process to return the 610-square-metre house to its original earthy elegance – then take it into the new century. "Torture! I had multiple mini-panic attacks along the way," he recalls.

OPPOSITE: The kitchen cabinetry and tap are by Boffi and the beams and trim are painted in a custom-blended Benjamin Moore colour. **ABOVE:** The living room viewed from the entrance. A custom-made Robert Lewis chandelier hangs above the stairs, while under the stairs is a vintage geometric bar cart from JF Chen.

HE RESEARCHED THE COST OF A TEAK-COVERED HOUSE AND PROMPTLY FREAKED OUT



After seeing several top LA architects, he chose Commune, the hip design collective behind the bohemian-cool Ace Hotel in Palm Springs. "All the other architects I talked to were great but I knew what kind of house I'd be getting with them. I didn't want the predictable 'Mid-Century House, Package Number Three,'" he says. "Commune is nuts and I liked that. I knew together we could create a house I wasn't expecting."

Yet when he approached Commune about the overhaul, the company's lead architect, Pamela Shamsbiri, initially said no. "I'm a huge fan of Buff & Hensman's work," she says. "But I felt like the building had strayed too far from its roots. Then Derek looked me in the eye and said, 'I promise you I will do it right and go the whole nine yards.' So I said okay."

Nine yards turned out to be 18 months of intense rebuilding and renovating. Shamsbiri initially suggested taking the house back to a stucco exterior with wood elements, but Mattison wanted even more of a rustic vibe – the kind of warm, woody feel you'd get at a ski chalet. He researched the cost of a teak-covered house and promptly freaked out. Looking for a more affordable solution, Mattison suggested something he'd seen in a chic Venice Beach restaurant – vintage wood reclaimed from a New Hampshire barn. "We liked it so much we decided to put it outside and everywhere," he says.

Once in place, the roughly textured wood suggested somewhere denser, more exotic than the southern California canyons – indeed, it summoned the South American rainforest and that evocation in turn inspired the interiors. Shamsbiri introduced Mattison to the Brazilian Modernists, including Rio de Janeiro architect and designer Sergio Rodrigues. "The scale felt right," says Shamsbiri. "It's a little heavier than American Modernism, which would have felt lost here."

THIS PICTURE: In the kitchen, seen from the outdoor dining room. BassamFellous walnut tractor stools sit at the stainless steel island. Beyond the kitchen is the outdoor living area and bar. ABOVE RIGHT: Derek Mattison refurbished his house with outdoor living in mind, with a pool pavilion and outdoor kitchen, barbecue, TV, bar and shower. "He sits outside for a big chunk of the year, swim and watch football on the outdoor screen."

THIS PICTURE: Poolside, with 'Asturias' reclining chaises and side tables by Carlos Motta for Espasso. BELOW: The master bedroom with 'Key Shadow' rug by Suzanne Sharp from the Rug Company, 1920s Swedish chair and 1970s print by Aubrey Penny.

Through Commune, Mattison also met California functional artists such as Stan Bitters (from whom he commissioned two bizarrely beautiful water wall sculptures), Alma Allen (the Joshua Tree-based wood sculptor, who built a dresser for the house and a "psychedelic" fire pit for the patio) and Robert Lewis, who created the entry's other-worldly, industrial-inspired lighting fixture. "When I turn all the other lights low, it looks like little stars in the house," says Mattison. "The best stuff in my house by far is the stuff I commissioned. I feel like the artists all loved my house and wanted to put their coolest things here."

Today, the house is a collection of thoughtfully directed rooms – each has the idiosyncratic touch of a master artist, or two master collaborators, which Shamshiri and Mattison turned out to be. But when asked to name his favourite rooms, Mattison doesn't hesitate: one is the outdoor dining area (and, no, there is no indoor dining room), where dinner party guests gather on a grey-lacquered picnic table and benches by the Dutch furniture-maker Piet Hein Eek, under a ceiling heater that warms the space instantly, and in front of one of Bitters's water walls. "Having dinner out there, next to the waterfall and with the music on – it's pretty outrageous," he says. Another favourite room is the kitchen, both sleek and warm with its high-tech Boffi stainless steel cabinets and a Commune-designed 7.3-metre walnut counter. "I don't cook but I micromanage my friends who cook really well," he says. "I always make the drinks."

The renovation returned the house almost exactly to its original blueprint. On the ground floor, a double-height foyer welcomes guests into a loft-like space, along with a double-height living room, a guest room and outdoor shower, a living room with two glass walls, the showcase kitchen, a powder room and the outdoor dining room. Upstairs, there's the master suite with a walk-in closet (all the better for showcasing his impressive wardrobe of jaunty sportswear), a bathroom with an oversized tub, a shower with his-and-her water jets and views of the exterior water wall by Stan Bitters, and a guest bedroom and bathroom.

The patio is now a collection of outdoor rooms that practically double the living space. Mattison sometimes invites 100 people over for drinks by the pool, as he, a keen amateur DJ, mixes tunes. The patio has a cabana-cum-TV room, an outdoor kitchen and barbecue, a deck with a fire pit, a pool with another water wall by Bitters, and spectacular canyon and city views. Up a flight of stairs, Mattison has built an upper-level home office and deck for yoga. "The pool, the house, the yoga deck – it really reflects who Derek is," says Shamshiri. "It suits his lifestyle and it feels like him, and that's really the task at hand."

While 18 months of renovating was at times utter agony – "Emotionally draining, for sure," says Mattison – the result is a Canyon Modern dream house. The best compliment he has had for the property? It came from ceramic artist Bitters after he drove down from Fresno to install his artwork by the pool. "I remember he looked around and said, 'Man, this isn't just a house. It's a happenin'.'" **VL**



is-walled corner of the living room, a Bottega Venetta lamp
t to a Vladimir Kagan 'Contour Chaise' in grey cashmere
Pucci with a reclaimed-kilim cushion by Commune.
nic' cowhide rug is by Grand Splendid.

