

ELLE UK DECORATION

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SURREAL WORLD

Why the weird & wonderful is influencing interiors

Expressive fabric, wallpaper & paints for creative homes

HOW TO BE BOLD

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WORDS PHOEBE FRANGOUL
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THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

Menswear fabrics such as denim, tweed and houndstooth inspired the makeover of a 1930s home, tailor-made for World of Wonder TV supremo Randy Barbato

Family room Connecting this space to the gardens outside the windows, walls are covered in Voysey/Trustworth Studios' 'Apothecary's Garden' wallpaper. The generous 'Turkish' sectional sofa by Commune for George Smith was upholstered in blue denim; a custom leather storage ottoman by Commune stands in the centre, with a 'Safari' chair by Helene Aumont to the left. The golden-toned 'Maize' rug is by Armadillo Rugs
Exterior The white-painted brick, clapboard, dark shutters and symmetrical façade are typical of colonial-revival architecture, which reached peak popularity in the 1930s. The front door is painted in 'Hague Blue' by Farrow & Ball in full gloss >



High in the Hollywood Hills, Griffith Observatory offers an unrivalled view of the stars, but it's a very different type of star who resides in this nearby home surrounded by nature and with spectacular vistas over downtown LA: Emmy-winning director and producer Randy Barbato. The co-founder of World of Wonder production company, known for *RuPaul's Drag Race*, as well as *Party Monster* and documentary *The Eyes of Tammy Faye*, lives with his two sons in a classic California colonial-revival house that was built in 1936 by Milton Black, an acclaimed architect who specialised in the moderne style. Seeking to honour the heritage of the building and its creator while making a fun and modern home for his family, Randy turned to Commune Design, led by Roman Alonso and Steven Johanknecht, for help and advice.

The LA-based studio is known for its easygoing, Californian style and ability to craft homes that reflect their owners' personalities. 'With his art collection and the furniture he likes, there's a freedom,' explains Steven of his client. 'He's got a great sense of humour, so it was always this play between being appropriate for the elegance of the house and making it feel relaxed and eclectic.' He and Roman decorated a few rooms before Covid hit, then renovated the kitchen

after the pandemic. 'That was the most dramatic transformation,' Steven says. A collection of smaller rooms were opened up to integrate a central island, a family lounge and a breakfast nook. 'It was important for us to make the functionality work for how a family lives today, but pick up on the vibe – a nod to the property's existing period details – so it felt like it could always have been that way.' Upstairs, the space was reconfigured to give the two boys their own equal-sized bedrooms and a bathroom each, working within the constraints of the footprint and preserving the original casement windows. They left the main rooms as they were, respecting the architect's original intentions.

When it came to decorating, inspiration sprung from an unlikely source: menswear. Tweed and herringbone are focal points of the lounge, tartan curtains feature in Randy's study and houndstooth decorates the dining chairs. It's stylish, unexpected and masculine. 'There's a lighthearted approach to weaving in these fabrics that felt appropriate for Randy,' notes Steven. Even the George Smith 'Turkish' sofa in the family room is wearing denim that was specially washed for that lived-in feel. 'It was important that the room looked great but the boys at the time were 14, and it needed to be durable

and not fussy,' he adds. The workwear-like textile is juxtaposed with Trustworth Studios' botanical 'Apothecary's Garden' wallpaper. 'It's those contrasts that are our signature. The end result, hopefully, is a home that doesn't feel decorated at a particular moment in time; it should age well.'

In the entrance hall, the dramatic clouds of Fornasetti's famous 'Nuvole' wallpaper billow across walls and ceiling. Even though it could never be called a 'neutral', Steven says this monochrome moment acts as a 'pause point' in the house. 'That intensity of the pattern is this central core that the other rooms play off.' Colour was also critical to the scheme, with the designer approaching the palette with a painter's eye, thinking about the experience of walking through the house and the relationship between spaces. From a fiery, poppy-red powder room to the deep-indigo snug that draws the eye into Randy's golden-toned bedroom, colour is used in confident washes to establish a mood and create a narrative.

Respectfully reshaped and filled with 'the stuff they love to live with', this home now reflects the energy of father and sons. 'The boys are very creative and so is Randy,' says Steven. 'There is a lot of spirit in the house.' communedesign.com

'There's a LIGHTHEARTED approach to WEAVING in these FABRICS. It needed to be DURABLE and not FUSSY'

Kitchen Steven and the Commune team opened up the space, installing an island and wrapping the room in Voysey/Trustworth Studios' colourful 'Apothecary's Garden' wallpaper, which speaks to the charm of the era of the house. The lower cabinetry is painted in 'Hague Blue', with the upper cupboards in 'Bone', both Farrow & Ball. The bar stools are by A Rudin
Breakfast nook A comfy custom banquette by A Rudin hugs a bespoke dining table by Dusk, alongside a pair of vintage Italian dining chairs. The 'String Lantern' pendant light is by Nickey Kehoe
Dining room Commune's 'Split Pedestal' dining table is surrounded by vintage dining chairs by Carlo de Carli. Overhead hangs a vintage chandelier by Lamperti. The walls are painted in 'Down Pipe' by Farrow & Ball and the 'Hex' rug is by Stark ▶



Living room Relaxed yet refined, the cosy lounge is furnished with a pair of 'Channeled' club chairs by Commune for George Smith, which face a 'Cousy' sofa by Vincent Van Duysen for Arflex across a live-edge walnut coffee table by De Jong & Co. The pair of ochre 'Arno' benches are by Holly Hunt and the rug is the 'Kaleidoscope' by Commune for Christopher Farr. The ceiling light is the 'LUDish' by Lumfardo. Walls are painted in 'Bone' by Farrow & Ball

Entrance hall 'That wallpaper was so great to take up onto the ceiling,' says Randy of the Fornasetti 'Nuvole' design for Cole & Son, which greets visitors on entering the home. The antique rug was sourced by Amadi Carpets

Hallway Painted in Farrow & Ball's 'Stiffkey Blue', this corridor leads to the boys' rooms. The ceiling is covered in 'Mozambique' grass cloth by Crezana Design, with 'S60 Architectural Collection' ceiling lights by Michael Anastassiades. The cherry-wood nook has bookshelves and a built-in daybed – 'The kids have friends sleep over there,' says Steven. Anni Albers' 'Child's Room' rug for Christopher Farr adds another dash of geometric colour, and the curtains are in Zak + Fox's 'Pampa' ➤



Bathroom The two boys' bathrooms were brand new, but subtle details, such as the rounded bullnose tiles from Mission Tile West, make them feel as if they have always been part of the original 1930s building. The vanity is painted in 'Pointing' and the walls in 'Bone', both Farrow & Ball. The wall sconces are RBW's 'Branch' design.

Window view Commanding extraordinary views over downtown Los Angeles, this original casement window in the main bedroom is framed by curtains in Rose Tarlow's 'Sheer Whisper', with a comfy seat upholstered in Chapas' 'New Delhi'. The cushions are from Adam Pogue.

Main bedroom Hartmann & Forbes' 'Aster Acre' grasscloth wallcovering brings texture to what Steven intended to be a calm room, while adding cosiness to the dramatic high ceilings. The custom bed by Gil Valenzuela and AJ Bernard, in the style of Gio Ponti, is dressed in a woven plaid throw by Marina Contro and a coverlet by Commune in Pierre Frey 'Angkor' and Una Malan 'Cotton Velvet'. The bench is upholstered in McLaurin & Piercy 'Stonington', and the picture over the bed is by Catherine Opie. The 'Bean' rug is by Commune for Christopher Farr. Walls are painted in 'Quincy Tan' by Benjamin Moore and the curtains are in Una Malan 'Cotton Velvet'.

See Stockists page for details 

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