

The *New* OLD HOUSE

While nothing about the house on the outside could change, the inside of this historic Craftsman in Santa Monica was brought into the twenty-first century

A century-old Craftsman-style house in Santa Monica was expanded, restored, and brought up to date. Previous spread: Benjamin Moore's Morning Dew establishes a neutral backdrop. A Lawson-Fenning sofa is upholstered with a Holland & Sherry fabric and trimmed with Manuel Canovas's Salsa Pise. The coffee table is from Thomas Hayes Studio. The pendant is Atelier de Troupe and the sconces are The Urban Electric Co. This page: The custom walnut dining table is grouped with chairs upholstered in an Edelman Cashmere Calf.





Opposite: Architect Tim Barber designed a breakfast nook banquette. Arne Jacobsen's Grand Prix chairs surround the custom table; the banquette is upholstered with a striped pattern from Carleton V Ltd. This page: A corner of the family room is defined by a Nickey Kehoe spindle-back armchair. Walls are painted with Benjamin Moore's Natural Elements and accented with Sydney Harbour's Icebreaker.



The master bedroom's Brugge bed, from Dmitriy & Co., is covered with a custom quilt by M. Callahan that references all of the room's hues. The bedding is Matouk and the light fixture is a Noguchi design.



This page: The husband's master bath, which melds with his dressing room, features a sliding mirror that conceals the window when in use. In addition to natural light, the space is illuminated by a Hector Finch pendant. Opposite: Some of the family room walls are defined by a textured Clarence House wallcovering. Architect Tim Barber designed the built-in desk and bookshelves.



THIS 1912 CRAFTSMAN-STYLE house on a broad, palm tree-lined street, blocks from the ocean in Santa Monica, is invested now with so much life that the architect responsible for its renovation refers to it in human terms. “The clients love the way the house sees the yard,” says architect Tim Barber, “and they’re also really happy about how the house entertains.”

After the architectural work that Barber did on the house, in consort with interior designer Frances Merrill—expanding it by nearly double, transforming interior moldings and details, creating built-ins—the residence has assumed a new personality. It seems these walls *can* talk.

The couple who own the home are successful television writers, used to creating compelling storylines. According to Barber, who helped them find this house after a two-year shopping expedition, the couple, with three children, discerned a new plot for the residence, which was derelict when they purchased it. But because it was a landmarked property, the scope of what could change visually, especially on the exterior, was limited. With Barber’s and Merrill’s visions, the clients saw how the old house could become a new one, without compromising its original identity.

“The clients gave us a really thorough briefing at the very beginning of the project,” says Merrill. “I love clients who are that specific in their wants.” Apart from the kinds of furnishings, colors, and amenities they trusted Merrill and Barber to bring to the home, the couple also had more philosophical desires, too. “They wanted a home invested with some elegance, but that would also be family friendly,” says Merrill. Barber echoes that sentiment by adding, “They love the idea of a new old house, one that takes advantage of the California climate and light and that completely accommodates the way people raise children today.”

When conceiving the interiors, Merrill listened closely to the wife, who kept referencing her childhood’s family farm and house in Vermont. Yet, the homeowner had become a devoted resident of the beachfront town of Santa Monica, where she and her children love to walk to the ocean amid rustling palms. Merrill began by selecting one of the prevalent hues to be used throughout, a shade of pale green from Sydney Harbour Paints known as Icebreaker. “I used that color very early on in the kitchen and the husband immediately loved it,” recalls Merrill, “and soon

everyone in the family gravitated to it.” She describes the shade as bright but not jarring, energetic while also calming, a reference to something traditional while also acknowledging the present. It’s a color that evokes New England as much as it does Southern California.

“There are a thousand details we attended to,” says Barber, “and the homeowners complimented us on the way we were able to take an old house and make it surprisingly contemporary.” He and Merrill created a built-in banquette for a breakfast nook; they took down weathered decorative ceiling beams in the dining room and restored them. A built-in bench was fashioned beneath a wide window in the dining room, and a vaulted tray ceiling was configured for the smallish master bedroom to enhance its scale visually.

One of the subtlest but most ingenious details Barber accomplished was in the husband’s bath. There, because the house’s landmark designation prevented exterior windows from being moved or changed, Barber designed a sliding mirror over the sink. When fully open, it functions as a shaving mirror; when closed, the multipaned window is visible again from the inside. “Architects never feel that they get it all right; that’s just part of our makeup. But I think we did get them the house they wanted.”

Merrill was sensitive to the idea of preserving and reusing many of the homeowners’ existing furniture from their previous home. Treasured leather chairs, for instance, in the living room, were reupholstered and given pride of place in the room as focal points. “This made them feel at home right away because some things were familiar, both to them and their children,” says Merrill.

Merrill admits that prior to her work designing these rooms, Craftsman was not a favorite style of hers. When not articulated well or with grace, the style’s heavy woodwork can feel oppressive and dark. “It was a challenge and a pleasure to try to figure out how to freshen a traditional style of architecture,” says Merrill. “One of the things we, at the firm, loved about these clients is that as a family they love traditional. They have the idea that this is a house they will really live in for a long time.” ■

To honor the house’s Craftsman architecture, interior designer Frances Merrill sought out furnishings that reflected handcraftsmanship.

“The exterior of a historic landmarked house informs much about how inside spaces develop.”

—Frances Merrill

