



OUTSIDE THE BOX

EYRC ARCHITECTS AND AUDREY ALBERTS DESIGN CREATE A MODERN BEVERLY HILLS HOUSE THAT DRAMATICALLY OPENS UP TO ITS SETTING



By Stacie Stukin / Photography by Matthew Millman

All over Los Angeles, big-box houses are popping up on modest lots, upsetting the precarious balance of neighborhood character and inevitable change. Yet architects like Steven Ehrlich, the founding partner of the firm Ehrlich Yanai Rhee Chaney (EYRC), who has been designing residences in Los Angeles for decades, believe that smaller houses that employ good design can abate the nuisance. "There's a sensitive way to build new homes that's respectful of the neighborhood and mindful of scale and mass," says Ehrlich. "These things really matter when you're trying to unlock the potential of a site."



Takashi Yanai (left) and Steven Ehrlich, of EYRC architects, worked with designer Audrey Alberts to create a contemporary composition in Beverly Hills.

On a 6,000-square-foot lot in Beverly Hills, south of Wilshire Boulevard, Takashi Yanai, EYRC partner and residential studio director, unlocked that potential when he designed a house of just over 3,000 square feet. “We could have gone higher and wider, but we wanted to capture as much space as possible without sacrificing privacy,” he explains. “Besides, so much of the beauty of Los Angeles is being able to use the outdoors as living space.”

Yanai’s first request? He asked his clients—a young couple building their first home—to write separate letters outlining their goals and needs for the house. The resulting consensus dictated a focus on light, simplicity and materiality while integrating the benefits of technology to create an oasis for city living. The house is situated on a block populated by 1940s Spanish homes, and when he designed the front facade, Yanai took into consideration the fabric of the neighborhood. “It’s clearly a contemporary house,” he notes, “but we didn’t want it to look like a crazy UFO had landed on the block.” So he kept the scale commensurate with the surrounding structures and chose materials—stucco, concrete and wood—that reference the tradition of Spanish houses. Using white and gray stucco, Yanai created a minimal, sculptural composition.



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Inside the front gate, a small courtyard landscaped by GS Landscape Architecture Studio not only harkens back to Spanish architecture, it signals a sense of arrival and offers a summary statement for the whole house. A soothing water feature surrounded by scented geraniums, Japanese maple and a Brisbane box tree creates a jewel-like private space that softens the austerity of the architecture, which is composed of glass, unpainted board-formed concrete and cedar siding.

“We wanted to create a series of choreographed experiences,” says Yanai. Inside the house, the dance between modernity and warm comfort is played out with contrasting materials, which is especially apparent in the main living area. A sculptural staircase, hung with a contemporary chandelier by Shakuff, anchors one end of the space, while black American-walnut paneling and casework is artfully integrated into a board-formed concrete wall. But perhaps the boldest statement is the floor-to-ceiling glass pocket-doors that open the living and dining areas entirely to the back yard. “It isn’t a huge yard, but psychologically we gain a lot of space because the glass makes the interiors and yard feel much bigger,” Yanai explains. “We also eliminated the need for a lot of outdoor seating, because when the doors are open, the dining and living areas literally become outdoor space.”

When it came to interior design, the couple engaged Audrey Alberts, known for her crisp contemporary style. Alberts was thrilled to work with the couple, having designed a home for the wife’s mother years earlier. “We’re known for using rather minimal materials, and we really lean toward modern projects, so this was a very good fit for us,” she says. “This is a little gem of a house. The architecture is thoughtful, sensible and functions beautifully.”





The clients started with a clean slate and chose timeless pieces like vintage Barcelona chairs, a B & B Italia sofa from Diva and a graphic Christopher Farr rug for the living room. A Christian Liaigre floor lamp from Thomas Lavin, Maxalto side tables and a DDC cocktail table give the room an understated contemporary profile, while elements like a black glass vessel from Micucci add grace notes. "Their design decisions were considered for the long term, and they'll keep these pieces for a long time," says Alberts. Those classic pieces also provide a complementary backdrop for the couple's growing modern art collection, including a series of Los Angeles architectural photographs by Jim McHugh that are exhibited throughout the house.





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The dining area was a priority for the couple, who entertain often, pulling bottles from a wine cellar designed by Cellar Masters. A Branching Bubble chandelier from Modern Artifax sheds warm light over a Fontana marble dining table from DDC, whose hidden leaf allows it to easily accommodate parties of 20 or more. The Brando dining chairs are from Blueprint, and for casual family meals, Vapor counter stools from CB2 surround a Ceasarstone-topped island.

Upstairs, Yanai situated a workout room and home office at the front of the house, giving the spaces a wide swath of windows that overlook the street. Two bedrooms with en-suite baths were designed for the couple’s growing family. The master suite features expansive sliding glass doors that open to views across treetops to the distant glittering cityscape. The bed frame, side tables and table lamps are from Soluzioni. The clients also asked for his and hers dressing rooms and marble-clad baths, which (though not an efficient use of space) offer another level of luxury.

Myriad bespoke elements throughout the house recall the powerful simplicity of Japanese architecture, providing moments for reflection and aesthetic display. “The functionality is amazing, but there’s also something really calming about this house,” says the wife. “Everything ties together so neatly in a comfortable design that’s perfect for today’s way of living.” ■