

# SPANISH TREASURE

A CAREFUL MIX OF  
FURNISHINGS AND ARTWORK  
FOR A LOS ANGELES HOME  
CREATES INTERIORS TO  
MATCH THE ABODE'S  
ARTFULLY RESTORED BONES.

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INTERIOR DESIGN / RYAN BROWN, BROWN DESIGN GROUP



Chalk it up as an occupational hazard, but it takes a lot to wow Ryan Brown. The designer has toured more properties of all periods and pedigrees than he can count. He has also logged about 20 addresses of his own during the past 20 years. But after taking one look at a Spanish Colonial Revival in the Los Feliz hills that his clients Alli and Shon Morgan were considering, he was, as he puts it, "blown away." Set on close to an acre overlooking Los Angeles, the home was built in 1929 by Harry Hayden Whiteley, who—while not as well known as Wallace Neff, Paul R. Williams or Stiles O. Clements—was responsible for a number of Mediterranean-inspired dwellings around town. Thanks to a painstaking restoration in 2004 by its previous owners, it needed no tweaking, not even a coat of paint.

While the Morgans were smitten, they also loved where they had been living, which happened to be Brown's onetime residence, a Spanish-style home nearby. The designer was bemused by the couple's dilemma. "I was like, 'Are you kidding me? You're debating staying in that house? I'm thrilled you like what I did over there, but the architecture of this home is incredible,'" he says, laughing. "If this isn't my favorite house in L.A., it's definitely in the top two or three. It's a really unique and special property."

The designer credits the home's previous owners for its pristine condition. "I usually can go into a house and pinpoint what's new and what's old," he says. "Here it's difficult to know if something is original or restored; it feels like the home was in a time capsule. The ironwork is absolutely incredible. I've never seen anything like it in L.A." The ornamental ironwork is only one of the

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Built in 1929 by architect Harry Hayden Whiteley, a Spanish Colonial Revival home in Los Angeles required no structural work. Owners Alli and Shon Morgan called on designer Ryan Brown to make it both a family home for them and their three children and suitable for large gatherings.



The entrance hall features ornate iron scrollwork and a vintage chandelier—all part of a meticulous restoration by the home's former owners. The faux-marble table is from Formations. Contemporary photographs follow the graceful curve of the stairway.

**Right:** Brown's concept for the home juxtaposes the couple's burgeoning contemporary art collection with a thoughtful mix of new and vintage furnishings. In the living room, an eye-catching abstract painting hangs above a console from Blackman Cruz.

**Opposite:** Crowned by a honeycomb-coffered ceiling, the family room is an inviting retreat, distinguished by a Tufenkian carpet. Draperies in a Mark Alexander fabric from Thomas Lavin frame a window with stained-glass insets. The Lawson-Fenning sofa is covered in fabric from Kneedler-Fauchère; the wing chair and coffee tables are from Lucca Antiques.







Vaults spring from decorative corbels in the living room, where a sofa and lounge chairs designed by Brown create a comfortable seating area. An oil painting injects a note of bold color in contrast to the warm neutrals of the space's furnishings. The vintage rug is from Amadi Carpets.







Another dramatic original ceiling and Mexican-tile floors define the formal dining room. Brown custom-built the table for the Morgans' previous residence. To get it into its new location, the 7-foot circular tabletop was turned on its side and rolled into its current spot.

spectacular details in the seven-bedroom, nine-bathroom residence. It also features a rotunda entry topped with stained glass, one-of-a-kind ceiling treatments throughout, and even a couple of Prohibition-era bars tucked behind bookcases with secret passageways for shuttling liquor from room to room. The trick was to design spaces that would neither compete with nor detract from those details.

Brown, whose projects typically require serious remodeling, was more than game to limit his focus to furnishings, artwork and décor. "This may be the only job I've done where I haven't manipulated the architecture or walls," the designer says. "But the scale and the proportion of the rooms are so perfect that you wouldn't need to open up any walls." Starting with a neutral palette—"I love white walls, and the color here was very close to the white we use over and over," Brown says—he combined antiques and pieces sourced from his favorite vendors in Los Angeles with furnishings of his own design. He also included items purchased on trips to Europe to create thoughtful, collected spaces. "People here have a tendency to mix and match things in the way they dress. It's casual, but it's still sophisticated; it's interesting, but it's welcoming," he explains. "That's what we try to do with interiors."

A few spaces proved more challenging. The clients requested that the media room not look like a theater, so Brown arranged the space so that everything can be oriented toward the screen, which descends in front of French doors leading to the backyard. Says Brown, "The fireplace there is completely original—it's set asymmetrically in the room and is also asymmetrical itself in design. It brought such interest to the space and kind of tipped it off that perfect axis if it were directly in the center and symmetrical on both sides." The kitchen, too,



**Opposite:** A lushly plated arbor composed of successive metal arches cuts a path through the home's grounds, which encompass nearly an acre. Toward the rear of the property, sited at the top of a rise, is the guesthouse, also a Spanish-inflected treasure.

**Below:** On the veranda, Brown paired an RH sofa with a Bunny Williams Home coffee table from Harbinger. The lounge chairs—dressed in Sunbrella fabric from Donghia—as well as the sconce and dining chairs are all from Formations; the dining table is from Inner Gardens.





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-RYAN BROWN

**Opposite:** Brown allowed the small breakfast nook's elaborately painted ceiling to take center stage. Keeping the rest of the décor simple, he designed an understated oak pedestal table and sleigh chairs. A large photo is displayed between the built-in cabinets.

**Below:** While the kitchen retains its meticulously restored period tilework, Brown added touches of his own to the ample room: a chandelier from Lucca Antiques and leather-seated barstools from Big Daddy's Antiques. Artwork from Natural Curiosities flank one of the windows.





proved something of a challenge, given its size and the tile covering the walls—and the ceiling. “It did feel a little cold, especially with all that tile,” Brown says. Layering in books, greenery and artwork softened the look, as did an antique chandelier the designer brought in.

With works by notable artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the couple’s burgeoning collection of modern and contemporary art and photography offers a striking counterpoint to the architecture and provides the eclectic mix they wanted—and adds notes of color. “The art satisfies Shon’s desire for color and for something bold,” Brown says. “But at the same time, the pieces aren’t overpowering.” From time to time, Brown nudged the Morgans out of

their respective comfort zones. “Ryan definitely has views, and he’s not afraid to express them,” says Shon. Pointing out the sculpture of a hand in the entrance hall, he adds, “It’s very interesting but not the sort of thing All would have chosen. Ryan very deftly said, ‘Let it sit there for a couple of weeks, and I’ll check back and see if you still don’t like it.’” Credit it to a designer’s sixth sense: The piece is still there.

With its thoughtful mix of art and furnishings, the Morgans residence is stylish and evocative. But, says Brown, “This house isn’t unapproachable or too refined; it’s all used every day. While the coffee table looks great, you can still kick your feet up on it.” It’s the mark of a true home. ■



**Left:** Across the pool, a freestanding fireplace creates a cozy focal point for a seating area defined by settees, ottomans and a coffee table from RH. The wall and hedge above ensure that the space is private.

**Opposite:** The pool area can be reached from above by another impressive original staircase or from the stylish media room below. Chaise lounges from RH join a Brown Jordan umbrella and tables from Malibu Market & Design.

