

DAVID A. KEEPS: From the outside, this Santa Monica house says Mexican hacienda, but inside it speaks with a Merchant Ivory accent. Why?

DAVID DALTON: The house was built in the 1920s, when decorating was more English traditional. People had wicker furniture and antiques and collected pieces from around the world, which worked well with Mediterranean architecture. In this house, I felt I could go in any direction ethnically—Mexican tile, British Colonial furniture, Moroccan brass, Indian paisleys, Syrian bone-inlaid mirrors, Chinese urns turned into lamps—as long as things had a handmade quality or an aged patina. What did you like about the house?

It's not grand. The scale is human and the rooms are intimate, which is great for a couple with two kids. There's a sensuality to carved wood, wrought iron, arched doorways, and troweled plaster that is warm and attractive—it's a look that gets better with time and wear.

In what ways did you play that up?

I used lime-wash paint, which is as chalky and matte as you can get but still has luminosity and depth. And I wanted to enhance the period details of the place as much as possible. So I re-created the original beams in the living room throughout the house, which made the low-ceilinged master bedroom feel less compressed, like a charming tree house. And there were remnants of 1920s tile over the fireplace that inspired me to use hand-painted Talavera tiles around doorways and on stair risers.

And the kitchen is a fiesta of tile.

Instead of using white subway tile and Carrara marble, which is a common prescription today, there are seven different tiles in custom colors and sizes. Tilework is classic for a house of this era. We also opened the kitchen up into a great room, because these days families want to be connected. But you do have to craft such a large space in a smart way, with cozy areas, architectural details, and focal points like the tile, so it still looks interesting and feels intimate.



Do the owners do a lot of entertaining?

Yes, and they can do it indoors and out, formally and casually. The living room is neutral and cool with deep, comfortable upholstery and turquoise and pale-green florals. It's a quiet space for adults to gather. The dining room is quite large and really needed a big, round table, so we made it feel like a men's club with a warmer palette, stripes, and Indian patterns. Instead of dining and host chairs, I designed wing chairs you can really sink into and drink wine in all night long.

That is the most 'indoor' outdoor living room I've ever seen.

I designed outdoor furniture for 15 years, and now it's become possible to make luxurious open-air spaces with electronics, area rugs, and even skirted upholstered furniture. In this house, I didn't want things prissy. The room has a roof, so I could use wide-arm wicker chairs with built-in cup and magazine holders. They're based on ones FDR had on his presidential yacht, and they sit across from a TV, so they're great

ABOVE: Hand-painted Talavera tiles from Mission Tile West and a glass pendant from Global Views brighten the kitchen, whose centerpiece is a 12-foot-long walnut-top island. **OPPOSITE:** Dalton designed the base of the dining room table to echo the pattern of the leaded-glass windows. Custom wing chairs are covered in a Fabricut paisley in colors that complement a rug by Patterson Flynn Martin. Sideboard and mirror, Charles & Charles. Curtain fabric, Kathryn M. Ireland. Candle chandelier, Terra Nova Designs.

for watching movies and sports. The upholstery is Sunbrella, so the kids can sit on it in wet bathing suits and the dog can get right up on the sofa. The coffee table is an old Indonesian door. If a cigar fell out of the ashtray and scorched it, it wouldn't matter.

What was your approach to the upstairs terrace, which feels like a relaxation room at a resort spa?

It adjoins the master suite, so it's a casually furnished place for the parents to recharge. The bedroom has a subdued palette of icy blue, ocher, and ivory, which are picked up in the upholstery, terra-cotta floor, and corner kiva fireplace. One of the challenges of the space was the view of the house next door, so we created a version of a *jali* screen. In India and Morocco, they're used to filter light and heat; here it did a good job as a neighbor-be-gone window treatment.

Any other exterior decorating tips?

I love the scale and classicism of Michael Taylor's outdoor furniture and the lightweight look of Paola Lenti's modern pieces. It's important to consider materials for longevity, especially in uncovered spaces. Teak looks cool, but if you let it go, it gets creaky and splintery. Iron is good, but hot in the sun. Aluminum needs to be powder coated every five years and kept away from salt air. Bronze and marble are good, too, but heavy and expensive. All-weather wicker really does seem to hold up. For cushions, darker colors look great—and if you don't have furniture covers, you can just forget about white.

Outside, you really turned up the volume.

It's a party for the whole family, with a pool, a patio for barbecuing and margaritas, and plenty of places to hang out. The color scheme is like a Mexican serape—orange, red, blue, and yellow, together with the green of tropical landscaping thrown in. It's everything you want in a backyard, all sun-drenched and happy—like, 'Let's make some tacos and bust open a piñata.'

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