

The Coast of UTOPIA

The entry to a home designed by Mark Cunningham in Los Angeles, with architecture by Weddle Gilmore and landscape design by Art Luna Studio. The exterior is painted in Baller White by Benjamin Moore; awnings by Sunbrella.

In a Los Angeles house with light and views worthy of Ed Ruscha—who once owned it—Mark Cunningham has created a serene family retreat for a fashion executive and her husband.

By LESLEY M.M. BLUME Photographs by MAX BURKHALTER

In the entry gallery, an 18th-century chest of drawers from Lee Stanton and chairs by Paolo Buffa face a pair of planters by Inner Gardens. The flooring is limestone herringbone by Artistic Tile.

The couple weren't looking to buy a house. They had a home already—several, in fact: an apartment in New York City, a house in the Hamptons, and a pied-à-terre they were renting in Beverly Hills. But when a house up the street from them in Los Angeles came onto the market in late 2020, they were told by friends that they had to see it.

They walked to the end of a cul-de-sac and stood in front of the house's high front gate. Their son jumped up and peered over it. "Oh my god!" he said. "This thing looks amazing."

When the family toured the property the next day, they found that it was indeed amazing: a modern but homey 1971 aerie with views across the Santa Monica Mountains and the Los Angeles basin and, on a good day, the glistening silver slick of the Pacific Ocean. It was flooded with the Southern California light that has drawn so many artists to the region. They later learned the house had once belonged to Ed Ruscha.

The couple bought it immediately, almost irresponsibly, says the wife, a fashion executive, and they quickly brought in architect Michael Gilmore of Weddle Gilmore and *Elle*

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—MARK CUNNINGHAM

Decor A-List interior designer Mark Cunningham, with whom she had worked at a fashion house for years. "Mark's one of my closest friends and is like an uncle to my children," she says; he also helped design her New York properties. Her directives were simple: The house and gardens had to feel welcoming; the stunning vistas must be showcased; there had to be a seamless flow between indoors and outdoors. "I kept coming back to the word *porousness*," she says. "I wanted ease and comfort and lightness. Mark just took it and ran with it."

Cunningham agreed right away that the property was special. "It was so high up on the hill, you just felt as if you were kind of floating up above everyone around you."

He prioritized subtle natural palettes and patterns, mirroring the layers and textures of the hills around the property. He also channeled the warmth and intimacy of modern California Mission style by layering prints throughout the home. Pale herringbone limestone covers the outdoor floors as well as the house's main gallery, emphasizing the natural flow throughout the entire space. Sculptural olive trees—selected by landscapers Art Luna Studio—canopy the home's terraces.▶



A chandelier by Ralph Lauren hangs over the oak dining table from Adam Lloyd Interiors. Chairs by Sika Design; botanical illustrations by Lena Scott Harris.



In the living room custom chairs and cocktail table and an oak armchair by Maison Regain sit by an antique iron plant stand from 1stDibs. In the far corner are a 19th-century Swedish table and custom chairs.



A view into the living room from the courtyard.



The pool deck's RH chaise longues are topped with cushions in a jacquard by Rose Tarlow for Perennials. Pool tiles from Mosaic House.



In a guestroom a canopy bed by RH is topped with a Peter Dunham coverlet and a vintage quilt. Curtain fabric by Sarah Vanrenen; artwork by Sam Francis.

Ultimately, the goal was to create an atmosphere that was “serene and kind of easy,” says Alex Gaston, design director at Mark Cunningham Inc. “The best details always whisper,” the owner says. But the dramatic landscape called for some drama inside, too: Cunningham drew on Hollywood Regency aesthetics in creating the house’s oversize entranceways, and he commissioned expansive doors and windows with steel exteriors and white oak interiors by Steelworks Etc.

The team also referenced local landmarks when reconfiguring the property. Two of the guest bedrooms, designed with the owners’ grown children in mind, are accessed by outside doors; each has its own bathroom and garden. “It’s a little bit like a mini-resort,” Cunningham says. “We imagined a fun little play on the Hotel Bel-Air bungalows,” the owner adds. The new cedar gates at the home’s driveway and courtyard entrances are an homage to ones at the historic Greystone Mansion, a couple of miles away.

Wherever possible, local materials and vendors were used. Books by Joan Didion and other California authors line

bookshelves in the bedrooms; art books about Ruscha and David Hockney fill the shelves of the olive-green library. Botanical artworks by California artist Lena Scott Harris cover several walls of the dining room. “Harris’s husband was a botanist, and when he died she drove thousands of miles up and down the coast, photographing wildflowers and then painting them to pay tribute to him,” says the owner.

The renovation took nearly two and a half years, which is not a staggering amount of time considering the scope of the redesign (the pool was pushed out and dropped two feet; the interiors were gutted and reconstructed). “The house started out special, and Mark and Mike’s work took it to a place we could not have imagined,” the owner says.

The Santa Ana winds bend the olive trees outside; the house’s hilltop position ensures that California’s unique natural forces are omnipresent. “From here, you watch the sunrises and the sunsets, and it can be humbling,” says the owner. “You get this sense of, this was here long before us and will be here long after.” ■



A pair of metal armchairs purchased at auction sit among a selection of plants, including Blue Glow agave, lamb’s ear, and Centranthus ruber Albus.