

A MIDCENTURY MAKEOVER

Thanks to a thorough remodel and addition, a fresh chapter begins for this untouched 1957 Studio City abode.

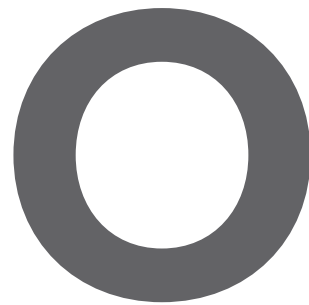
WRITTEN BY ABIGAIL STONE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LISA ROMERÉIN



Architecture: David Thompson, Assembledge+ **Interior Design:** Susan Mitnick, Susan Mitnick Design Studio, and Lisa Strong, Lisa Strong Design
Home Builder: Eric Dobkin, Dobkin Construction **Landscape Architecture:** Michael Fiore, Fiore Landscape Design



To set the stage from the second you set foot on this renovated midcentury modern home's rolling grounds, landscape architect Michael Fiore created an asymmetric pathway of cast-in-concrete stones. "We wanted it to meander but we didn't want any curving shapes," he notes.



ur perception of the past is often inaccurate. Consider this house nestled in the foothills of Studio City's Fryman Canyon. It presents itself as a well-preserved midcentury modern home showcasing the era's

distinctive architectural innovations. Yet many of the features on display—its expansive glass windows and unbroken sight lines, seamless transitions from the indoors out, even the flow of the rooms—are *not* original. Instead, they're part of an exhaustive yet highly sensitive remodel and addition designed by architect David Thompson and executed by custom home builder Eric Dobkin.

In many ways, the existing abode was still a true time capsule. "The homeowners bought it from the family who had built it, and it hadn't been touched since 1957," remembers Thompson, noting what a rarity it is to find a midcentury residence unaffected by renovations, additions or other tweaks. Not that it didn't need them. "It was open compared to a traditional floor plan, but it didn't function the way homes do now," the architect explains. The small kitchen seemed misplaced and tucked away, the rooms dark and congested, and the descending property wasn't smoothly connected to the house. Plus, its curb appeal was overshadowed by a bleak concrete motor court. But spotting its potential wasn't difficult. "The home had great modernist details, a beautiful backyard—it was full of possibility," says the wife. "It just needed a tremendous amount of work," adds her husband.

Thompson and his team have a key philosophy: To always look for ways of extending living spaces to the very edges of a property. "Our ethos is about tying everything together so that you're actively engaging with the whole lot, indoors and out," the architect states. To accomplish that here, he extended and shifted the axis of the wing housing the primary bedroom, which used to awkwardly extend out over a tier of the property. What was an empty space below now encompasses a home office, guest bedroom and gym, all integrated into the hillside. He also broadened the home's floor plan to accommodate for a larger, more centrally located kitchen and a family room, and shielded the residence with a privacy wall.

Dobkin, a frequent collaborator of Thompson's, took the house down to the studs to bring these plans to life. Achieving the midcentury-style floor-

to-ceiling windows and doors envisioned by the architect required some ingenuity, from structural shifts to the introduction of steel reinforcements. But those construction gymnastics were worth it. "From the moment you step through the gate, you see all the way through to the back and side yards, getting this amazing experience of connectivity and transparency," Thompson enthuses.

As for the exterior, landscape architect Michael Fiore was tapped to sculpt the property's rolling lawn into a stepped design underscoring the home's angularity. Adding native oak and olive trees also brought the house in line with the neighborhood's lush foliage. "The beauty of this area is in all its mature trees," he observes.

To complement the home's new emphasis on the outdoors, designer Lisa Strong—who had worked with the couple on their previous residence—relied on well-made, clean-lined furniture and accessories. "I counseled them, 'buy few but buy good,' because I believe in investing in the high-quality stuff that holds up," she says. Strong sketched the home's built-ins and cabinetry, from the kitchen and bathroom to the family room and closets. She also chose its finishes, including the soothing rift-sawn oak flooring. "I advise clients to build the best box they can possibly afford—gorgeous materials, floors, windows, tiles, stones—the things you won't go back to," she notes, "because you tend to never remodel a house twice." With the basics in place, the family moved in. "Then they took a break," Strong explains. "The homeowners wanted to make sure they actually knew how they were going to use this house."

When that time came, designer Susan Mitnick, a family friend who'd also worked on previous projects with Thompson and Dobkin, stepped in for a second phase of layering in furniture, texture and color. She completed certain spaces like the powder room and bar, added some star pieces and put her own spin on the space. "I think of what I do as adding the jewelry," she explains, noting that her goal was to seamlessly enrich the stunning fundamentals Strong had laid. "My work brought weight and tone to this home's lightness." The homeowners concur: "Lisa is an incredible technician with a great eye for cabinetry and layout, and then Susan's aesthetic really animated these spaces," says the husband. "And the spirit of the original home still exists," he adds. "I pinch myself every morning that we get to live here." ■



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The family room shines thanks to the attention of its two interior designers: Susan Mitnick layered in swivel chairs from Twentieth, a wooden RH coffee table and a Mehraban rug to complement a custom sectional sourced by Lisa Strong. The black-and-white photo is by Judith Pfaff.



Above: Once boomerang-shaped, the now-rectangular pool designed and installed by Atlas Swimming Pool Company reinforces the home's geometric lines. An alabaster sculpture from Berbere Imports and Dedon lanterns punctuate the space.

Opposite: A delicate Lindsey Adelman porcelain lighting fixture, a wood dining table and eight original wishbone chairs by Hans Wegner are all among the owners' treasured pieces.





Above: Strong procured a soft wool rug from Mehraban to counter the hard finishes she'd chosen for the primary bathroom, including an Ann Sacks wall tile and Chenille White limestone flooring. The freestanding tub is by Jason International.

Left: In the primary bedroom, a rift-sawn oak bed and its accompanying night tables, all designed by Strong, are balanced by a delicate vintage chaise Mitnick discovered at Big Daddy's Antiques. Behind the bed, Strong placed floor-to-ceiling panels of JB Martin mohair velvet.



Fiore teamed with builder Eric Dobkin to design the home's welcoming fire pit and seating area, which occupy the landing between the pool level and lower lawn. The custom charcoal cushions and navy pillows feature Sunbrella fabrics, accented with additional pillows in Élitis' Lontano pattern.