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Super Structure, The 2003 Ultimate Home Tour, Part I

2003 Ultimate Home Tour, April 2003



"White, Middleton, Alpert, Cheng, Ellis, Oigli, Coming"

A home is not merely an assemblage of rooms. Rather, it is the consequence of a series of decisions made by you, your architect, your interior designer, and your landscape designer. "We are not constrained by any such deliberations when we assemble the rooms that comprise our Ultimate Home Tour." Each room was selected because it is outrageous, fantastic, or memorable. Each room makes a definitive statement, regardless of whether it was designed 100 years ago or yesterday. "An ultimate room is sometimes grandiose: The facade we chose is not for the fainthearted. Yet an ultimate room can also be intimate: The dining room resonates with gorgeous yet subtle details. " Many designers today are turning away from excess. Others demonstrate that it is still possible to create monumental architecture and grand rooms that remain tasteful and timeless. In either case, making a definitive statement—large or small—is what this year's Ultimate Home Tour is ultimately about.

Facade

"New Beaux Arts" is the term Richardson Robertson III applies to his architecture. It is his interpretation of the grand American buildings popular at the turn of the 20th century, and it is, he believes, a new language for today's estates. "Beaux Arts gives a sense of place and has a warmth and romance that people respond to—it speaks of heritage and history, of another time," Robertson says.

The brand-new 45,000-square-foot estate that he created in Holmby Hills, Calif., epitomizes his New Beaux Arts vocabulary. "The clients and I agreed that the theme was 'monumental,'" says the Texas native, who now has offices in Los Angeles and New York. "But scale is different from size—rooms can be grand and their size monumental, but they can still be human in scale." (See image above)

The facade of French cut limestone is 172 feet long. The motor court (134 feet wide and 100 feet deep) is paved with granite blocks that were brought over on ships from Europe as ballast and then were used to pave the streets of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The sculpted panels across the top of each window represent the function of that room: books for the library, utensils for the kitchen.

"I thought the owners wanted a Los Angeles landmark, that they wanted to make a splash in L.A.," Robertson says. "But it's an international landmark, and it is making an international splash."

Richardson Robertson III, 213.236.3200, www.robertsonpartners.net

Hall



From the outside, the villa in Laguna Beach, Calif., looks vaguely Mediterranean but offers few hints of what awaits inside. Like an Arabian Nights fantasy, the center hall dazzles with a sumptuous mix of marble floors, coffered ceiling, and wood panels with carved fretwork. (Click image to enlarge)

Juan Pablo Molyneux gave the Syrian owners a contemporary interpretation of Islamic design that works well in Southern California. "Syria is an amazing country—it's not remote geographically, but it seems to belong to another time," says the designer, who traveled there to research architectural details and fabrics and to scout out sources for making the filigree woodwork paneling and marble floors.

The plans for the woodwork were drawn up by Molyneux's office in New York and then sent to Damascus. Going to the source, he believes, gave the project an extra layer. "There's a spirit attached to the craftsmanship that even a well-traveled Californian couldn't reproduce."

When the end doors are open, the view of the expanse of Pacific Ocean floods in. Molyneux added a skylight and then placed discreet spotlights within the paneling. "The golden sunset makes everything in here sparkle," he notes. "Then, when the lights inside the paneling are turned on, it's like the sun coming back out again. At night it's an amazing effect."

Juan Pablo Molyneux, 212.628.0097

Den

"They are a young couple, and they wanted a different kind of den," says designer Michael Mafrici of Kenneth Alpert Associates. (Click image to enlarge)



"They had a preference for Asian art, so we built the room around that." The focus of the den in the Manhattan apartment is an eye-catching maple wall that looks as though it can be folded up like a piece of origami. "I think I got the idea one day in a meeting when I was playing with a piece of paper," says Mafrici. The wall unit, created by Steve Donadic Woodworking, adds a three-dimensional effect to a small, alluring space. Two rectangular niches hold full sets of mid-16th-century samurai warrior armor from Naga Antiques. Mafrici then brought in wicker and leather seating, and covered seat cushions, pillows, and even a pair of folding screens with a Clarence House print (a re-creation of a print used on the Normandie) that the couple adored. The cocktail table by Lorin Marsh is composed of gunmetal and brass with a black glass insert; the Saxony carpet is a progression of panels that fade from dark brown at one end of the room to camel. "The rest of the house is much more contemporary," says Mafrici. "Rather than do what all of their best friends were doing, the couple wanted to do something unique with their collection of Asian art."

Kenneth Alpert Associates, 212.535.0922, www.kennethalpert.com

Kitchen



When Fu-Tung Cheng was brought in to design a client's San Francisco penthouse, he had very little to work with. "There was a roof and floors, but no walls," says the Berkeley designer. "It was pretty raw." (Click image to enlarge)

His client wanted intimacy in the kitchen without sacrificing the openness of the space. Cheng started by giving her a choice of seating areas: a small surfboard table and bench by the windows, chairs around the center island. He then created a sense of drama with his own Tidan hood ("the Lamborghini of hoods," he says)—12 feet of handmade stainless steel canopy with lights, an exhaust fan, and a glass platform ("like wings") for hanging pots. Cheng, who has made his reputation with his sculptural concrete forms that look like stone, had the plum-colored island poured on-site; embedded in the concrete is chrysoprase, a semiprecious mineral from Australia. Even the two stainless steel sinks, one with a giant KWC Domo faucet, received intense attention to detail from Cheng's design/build team: The water drains in two directions toward the center. The cabinets were faced with bamboo. The appliances include two Gaggenau pizza ovens and a wok burner, two Sub-Zero refrigerators, and two Fisher & Paykel dishwashers.

The kitchen's finishing touches include a ceiling raked with plaster in two colors, one sponged off to give a soft, corduroy look; a floor of lightweight concrete given a terrazzo finish with diamond grinding pads; pieces of turquoise inlaid around the stove; and trapeze lighting over the sinks. Cheng fell in love with the crackle-glaze pottery of Berkeley ceramist Gary Holt and had him fire the crackle-glaze tile in white bisque for the sink backsplash. The roof that juts into the living room is an airframe of honeycombed aluminum sandwiched between fiberglass that is translucent but strong enough to walk on.

This was, Cheng says, "the ultimate tenant improvement."

Cheng Design and Cheng Products, 510.849.3272, www.chengdesign.com

Dining Room

The client requested a traditional dining room, but with a twist, and Charles Allem was happy to oblige. "It's very now, very edgy, very classic," says the interior designer. "I love to put opposites together that work." At the center of the room, he juxtaposed a Murano chandelier with a simple oak dining table. "That's the twist," he says. "The table is plain but contemporary. It isn't dainty." For the Bel-Air residence, Allem incorporated elements from eras past, such as 18th-century urns and a pair of 1930s wall sconces that frame a 1930s British painting. "If good pieces from every period are used, they will all connect," says the designer. (Click image to enlarge)



There is a hint of vintage Hollywood in the gray and white palette accented with glass, platinum, and Lucite, but the design is versatile enough to adapt to casual or formal dining. The striped wallcovering and Greek-key pattern on the backs of the chairs convey subtle elegance, and the room appeals to both sexes. "It's masculine," says Allem, "but also glamorous in a way that a woman in a Galliano gown would love sitting here." The table seats eight, and Allem stresses that a dining room has to do more than simply look good. "It works fabulously when you are using the room," he says. "It's not just a pretty picture." Allem, who splits his time between Los Angeles and New York, finds as much satisfaction in the installation as in the creative process. "My biggest high is being given the opportunity to design a project and then produce it."

Charles Allem Designs, 310.286.9605

Library



Escape through the silently rolling chamber doors from the commotion of New York City into a calming place of reading, relaxation, and entertainment. The cylindrical chamber leads down two steps into the luxurious lair designed by D'Acquino Monaco. Opposite the entry is a similar arched glass and walnut sliding door that opens into a dining area with a wet bar; when the owner, a best-selling author, is not using the space to write, it is where she and her husband entertain guests. "The architecture is complex," says Carl D'Acquino. "Because it was an odd shape, we actually created a symmetry that did not exist before." (Click image to enlarge)

Both the protruding chambers are encircled by doors of mahogany, which D'Acquino describes as "a very ambitious wood." The overall effect is of sophistication and elegance. "Every inch of this two-story apartment is custom-designed. The library is the largest space and is equal in size to the upstairs," he says. The library, which was once a basement storage room, was gutted and rebuilt to connect it with both the upstairs living room and bedroom and a private garden outside.

D'Acquino, Francine Monaco, and Paul Laird created a polished jewel box for the couple, who use the pied-à-terre about three days a week. The walls are paneled in Karelian birch, which is bound by walnut at the base and accented by bands of gold leaf at the crown. A Bessarabian rug from F.J. Hakimian is faced with silver and gold threads. The antiques are a high-sheen blend of 19th- and 20th-century French, Russian, and Italian pieces, including a pair of armchairs copied from originals at the Victoria and Albert Museum. A divan by Jules Leleu, originally designed for the Normandie, is an appropriate addition. "Many people see the library as a paneled room from the 1930s, the era of the great ocean liners," says D'Acquino.

D'Acquino Monaco Inc., 212.929.9787, www.daquinomonaco.com

Wine Cellar



When it was completed in the mid-1980s, Ken Behring's wine cellar featured the first curved walls and racks that Paul Wyatt had attempted. It was an engineering challenge for the owner of the Fine Wine Rack & Cellar Co., but one that Wyatt feels, set him on the path to his innovative approach to wine storage systems. (Click image to enlarge)

Wyatt, who started his business in San Francisco in 1980, was brought in during the framing of the house and given carte blanche by Behring (the former owner of the Seattle Seahawks and one of the founders of the Blackhawk Museum, to which he donated his car collection) to create the best wine cellar in northern California.

The 35,000-square-foot house is modeled after a Frank Lloyd Wright design. The cellar, which is kept at 50 degrees, measures 30 feet by 28 feet; encased in glass is the tasting room, effectively a room within a room. The luxurious furnishings were kept to a minimum. The marble-topped console holds Asian antiques. The round table is made of lacquered goatskin. "It looks like a pool of pink water," Wyatt says, "like looking into a pond and wanting to dip your hand in it." A vine motif was etched into the triple-pane glass panels.

The entire rack is double-deep—a second row of bottles sits behind the visible ones. Behring spent \$2 million stocking the 7,000-bottle cellar with Burgundies and Bordeaux. Today, Wyatt notes, the labels would all be New World.

The racks were made of redwood, which has become so expensive that Wyatt now uses Australian jarrah wood instead. Wyatt has avoided building diamond-shaped racks, and the San Francisco earthquake of 1989 reinforced that decision—none of his clients' collections was damaged. He is about to launch his latest series of racks, which will be built without nails.

"People call me an artist," says Wyatt, who is both the designer and manufacturer, "but I'm really an engineer."

Paul Wyatt, Fine Wine Rack & Cellar Co., 707.251.8463

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