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**SPECIAL
GARDEN REPORT**
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ABOVE: The library of a Santa Monica house designed by Michael S. Smith.
RIGHT: The loggia of a 13th-century castle in northern Italy.



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THE GOLDEN AGE

A top Hollywood film executive and his wife enlist interior designer Michael S. Smith to craft a new Mediterranean-style house in Santa Monica that has deep Spanish roots

TEXT BY JULIA REED · PHOTOGRAPHY BY BJÖRN WALLANDER
PRODUCED BY ROBERT RUFINO



In the living room of a Santa Monica, California, home designed by Michael S. Smith, with architecture by Oscar Shamamian of Ferguson & Shamamian, the custom-made sofa is upholstered in a Chapas Textiles fabric; the Baroque Italian carved-walnut armchairs were found at Sotheby's, and the cocktail table is by Mattia Bonetti; mirrors by Eve Kaplan hang above 17th-century tortoise-shell and ebony cabinets that came from the estate of Spanish designer Duarte Pinto Coelho; the painting is by Michael Goldberg, and the 19th-century Persian rug is from Doris Leslie Blau. See Resources.



W

hen the owners of a 1924 Spanish Revival house in Santa Monica, California, decided to remodel their kitchen after 17 years, they got a bit of a shock—it turned out that the house in which they'd raised their family had never been remotely shockproof. "Our children were grown, so we thought we might refashion the kitchen," explains the woman of the house. "Once we started, we found out the whole place was made of hollow clay tile; there was no rebar. The house we adored was certain to collapse in the next earthquake."

Thus began "quite a journey," she says, but one in which the couple—he works in the movie industry, she raises money for public education—decided to revel. "The day we found out we had to tear the whole thing down, we actually got really excited. It meant that we would have the opportunity to work with Michael and Oscar on a top-to-bottom project."

Michael is designer Michael S. Smith, who had decorated the original house, as well as two vacation places for the couple—and who is, she says, "like family at this point." Oscar is architect Oscar Shamamian of the New York firm Ferguson & Shamamian, who frequently collaborates with Smith and built the couple's house on Martha's Vineyard, which they cherish.

What all three parties agreed on was that they wanted to honor the Mediterranean roots of the original house. "My husband and I are both from the East Coast," she explains. "But from the moment I arrived in Los Angeles 30 years ago, I found something so warm and embracing about the city's Spanish architecture."

As luck would have it, just before they realized they'd have to rebuild the house, the couple had visited Spain for the first time. "I loved it—I loved the vibe, the music, the food, the colors, everything," she recalls. "We went to Madrid and then took a train to Seville and Córdoba. When I got back, I was more energized than ever."

Around the same time, Duarte Pinto Coelho, born in Portugal and widely heralded as Spain's first "real"



Chairs by Jasper surround a custom-made antique-wood dining table, the 19th-century gilt-wood mirror was found at Christie's, and the painting is by Jules Olitski; the walls and ceiling were hand-painted by Maria Trimbelt using a crackle-varnish finish over Farrow & Ball's Stony Ground, and the antique Persian rug is from Mansour. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** Lanterns by Soane hang from an oak-paneled ceiling in the gallery; the floor is paved with terra-cotta tiles by Exquisite Surfaces. In the sitting room, the clients' sofa was reupholstered in a fabric by Jasper, and the Napoleon III-style bergere is covered in a Rogers & Goffigon fabric; the Anglo-Indian inlaid games table is from the 19th century, and the rush matting is by Stark. See Resources.



Chaise longues by David Sutherland and a sofa by the Wicker Works beside the pool.
BELOW, FROM LEFT: The kitchen stools are by BDDW, the pendant lights are by Paul Ferrante, and the ceiling fixtures are by Charles Edwards; the range is BlueStar, the refrigerator is Sub-Zero, and the custom-made cabinetry is painted in Farrow & Ball's Old White. Custom-made leather-paneled bookcases flank a Portuguese Revival table in the library; the stool is from Bourgeois Bohème, and the 1950s chandelier is French. See Resources.



The husband's office features a pair of mid-century armchairs by Carlos Giganto upholstered in an Edelman suede, the Khotan rug is from Mansour, and the staircase's Hispano-Moresque tiles are by Solar Antique Tiles. See Resources.



interior designer, passed away. When Christie's announced it would hold an auction of the contents of Pinto Coelho's influential houses in Madrid and Trujillo, Smith made a beeline to the sale. "The auction triggered a lot," Smith says. "I'd long been a fan of his houses, especially the one in Trujillo, which is where the conquistadors were from. The idea was that you have this Spanish Revival house in this Spanish Colonial place, so you buy stuff from the source, bring it back, and make it even more romantic. It's a very nice narrative."

Among the pieces Smith bought at the auction are six full-length 17th-century portraits of Roman generals that he removed from their frames and set into panels in the dining room. The parcel-gilt and walnut dining-room chairs are more comfortable copies of a set from the sale (the originals serve as occasional chairs in the hallways). And two stunning late-17th-century ormolu-mounted tortoiseshell and ebony cabinets on stands grace the living room.

Other references to Pinto Coelho's houses include the profusion of blue-and-white porcelain, the healthy scattering of Indian inlaid tables, the Spanish tiles in the kitchen and powder room, and the encrusted, gilded mirrors. All have long been staples of Smith's own look, and, he says, are entirely in keeping with California's Spanish history: "Every child, myself included, was required to build Spanish mission houses out of sugar cubes in fourth-grade art class."

When the owners asked Smith and Shamamian to rebuild the house, Smith reports that both men were delighted. "It's this really great style with a real tradition, and we wanted to take another look at it," he says. "People don't build this kind of house anymore. I think it's because they're not grand or fancy enough, and the rooms are generally smaller and not as open and bright."

But that kind of intimacy is exactly what their client wanted. "Maybe it's my age, but I just don't want to live in giant spaces anymore," the wife says. "I love the coziness and smaller scale of the rooms," adding that it allows the layered detail and texture provided by the two designers (including the tooled-leather walls in the study) to be more fully appreciated.

Even after the house was completed, the Spanish connections and coincidences kept mounting. In 2013, Smith's longtime partner, James Costos, was appointed by President Obama to be America's ambassador to Spain. "It was an amazing coincidence," says the homeowner. "That wasn't even on the table when we were working on the house." But, she adds, since it was indeed finished, she and her husband were thrilled to host Costos's send-off party—in a thoroughly fitting setting. ■



The courtyard's painted-bronze furniture is by Niermann Weeks; the chair cushions are covered in a Rose Tarlow Melrose House fabric and the sofa cushions are in a Duralac fabric; the teak cocktail table is by Holly Hunt, the flooring is of reclaimed terra-cotta tiles, and the fireplace's 17th-century armorial cartouche was found at Bonhams. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** In the master bedroom, the four-poster, which once belonged to Dodie Rosekrans, and the antique console tables are Portuguese, the linens are by Sfera, and the circa-1900 Persian rug is from Doris Leslie Blau. Custom-made walnut cabinets and a 19th-century mahogany stand in the master bath. See Resources.