

Something Old, Something New

INTERIOR DESIGNER CYNTHIA BENNETT COMBINES ANTIQUES, REPRODUCTIONS AND AUTHENTIC DETAILS TO RESTORE A SPANISH REVIVAL HOME THAT WORKS FOR A 21ST-CENTURY COUPLE.

BY JESSICA HAMLIN

FOR JOHN AND KATHERINE WOLF, TURNING THEIR 1929 SPANISH REVIVAL HOME IN SAN MARINO INTO THE PALACE THEY ENVISIONED INVOLVED A DELICATE DANCE: THEY WANTED TO BRING THE TWO-STORY RESIDENCE INTO THE 21ST CENTURY, WITH SUCH BLESSINGS OF CONTEMPORARY LIVING AS A GREAT KITCHEN, BUT THEY DIDN'T WANT THE RESTORATION TO COMPROMISE THE INTEGRITY OF THE ORIGINAL STYLE.

The Wolfs had been drawn to the home's sunken living room, great courtyard and other hallmarks of Spanish Colonial style that had been popular in the Southwest for a few decades after World War I, and they believed the project called for a design professional fluent in that architectural language. Enter Cynthia Bennett, a historic restoration specialist whose rooms for the Pasadena Showcase House of Design in previous years had caught the couple's eye. The Pasadena interior designer says she has worked on at least 25 Spanish Revival homes in her 27-year career, but this project was special: It was the first for which she was hired to restore every room.

Bennett's design for the sunken living room sets the tone for the home. "Usually for the color scheme, we start with the rug," she says. "These rugs are actually Indian, and the patterns are not particularly Spanish, but they look Spanish." The designer used a palette of tan, red, dark blue, green and marigold — typical Spanish colors which are picked up by the rugs in the living and dining rooms and around the home. Two tan high-backed Knolle sofas topped with tasseled pillows studded with nail heads provide a regal feel to the living room. Bennett paired the new pieces with two pairs of antique chairs; one set with an oak base has intricate carvings that beg to be admired.

Bennett and her daughter, Carolien Fehmers, scouted out both antiques and reproductions at area shops, as the designer sought to strike a balance between beauty and comfort. "I found some antique sofas, but it is not easy to find upholstered pieces that are comfortable," says Bennett, who worked closely with the homeowners on design choices. "Sometimes it's better to buy antiques if you can find them, because you get better quality." A standout among the Wolfs' antiques is a small desk called a *varguenos*. The desk, in the sprawling family room off the kitchen, opens to

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An antique sugar grinder serves as a side table in the family room, which is anchored by a coffee table with wrought-iron detailing under glass designed by Cynthia Bennett and crafted by Arte de Mexico.



Knoll sofas topped with tasseled pillows create an inviting seating area in the living room; (below) a Spanish Revival table dominates the dining room.

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reveal many small drawers with wrought-iron handles and detailing. “It’s like a mini secretary desk — a true California antique,” Bennett says.

Bennett mixed in antiques from different cultures — Asian, Irish and English — which, she says, meshed nicely because they are also embellished with wood carvings. The resourceful designer also turned the old into something new by cutting down the legs of an antique wood dining table to create a coffee table. “In the early 1900s, they didn’t have coffee tables,” Bennett notes. Spanish-style accessories — a colorful candlestick discovered by Katherine Wolf and a small ornate box inlaid with mother of pearl and ebony — add even more interest to the tabletop.

But when it came to the kitchen, the Wolfs embraced the contemporary aesthetic of a large open room that opens onto a space for family living. Bennett helped them transform the old kitchen and laundry room into one large room with an island and adjacent bathroom. High-end modern touches include a Sub-zero refrigerator and Wolf Range, which come in handy for entertaining, particularly when the Wolfs’ three grandchildren come to visit. New electrical wiring, a sound system and flat-screen televisions are other useful additions that coexist comfortably alongside the Spanish charm.

Indeed, design elements in the kitchen remain true to the traditional aesthetic: Colorful Spanish-style tiles adorn the backsplash. Patterned tiles are also used to lush effect in the home’s three bathrooms, as well as on the exterior, above the front door. “All of the tile was researched,” says Bennett. “They were patterns from that period, either still being made or we had them made.”



Bennett’s eye for detail extended to painted stenciling on the steps, inspired by a design from the indoor pool of Hearst Castle in Cambria. Also stenciled are the beams in the family room, with scrollwork inspired by Caltech’s Athenaeum. Other Spanish design details include arched windows at the top of the stairs, deliberately created with wavy imperfections to evoke a century-old look. “We used an extra piece of lead at each intersection to arc the points,” says Tico Tech owner Rafael Calvo, who collaborated on the windows with his wife, Janet. “What I like, especially looking at them from the second floor, is there is an arch in the top of the chimney [seen through the window] that is almost identical, so it almost repeats the window shape.”

For the Wolfs, moving into the San Marino home involved scaling down, but it also meant the realization of a long-held dream. “I’ve always been intrigued by Spanish homes,” says Katherine Wolf. “It was smaller, but it was nice to make something wonderful from something small.” **AM**