

SMOOTH OPERATION

Thankfully, LA designer Kirk Nix nips and tucks the gauche '70s-era touches from this sculptural gem to reveal a polished, gallant finish

TEXT: THOMAS CONNORS PHOTOGRAPHY: NATHAN KIRKMAN





"THERE WAS A DEEJAY'S PLATFORM IN THE LIVING ROOM FOR DISCO PARTIES"

You wouldn't know from the looks of it today, but not that long ago this muscularly crisp residence was, as designer Kirk Nix says, "a petunia in a rose garden." Built in 1972 above Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood Hills—where homes nowadays can fetch \$9 million—this ranch-style spread was a less than stellar property. Not only was the exterior in desperate need of a facelift, but the interior was stuck in a time warp, more *Saturday Night Fever* than *The Devil Wears Prada*.

The 4,400 square foot space now belongs to a 38-year-old developer, who asked Nix to transform this bachelor pad of the past into a welcoming retreat with a "cool" quotient that is thankfully understated and refined. "It was a true testament to the mid '70s," relates Nix, who supplanted the glam-era décor with a decorous sense of polish and finesse that still manages to whisper warmth. "There was a lot of bleached wood, the bathrooms were black tile with brass fixtures, and there was a deejay's platform in the living room for disco parties."

For the LA-based Nix—known for creating sumptuous traditional interiors for hospitality clients such as Disney, Fairmont Hotels and Donald Trump—the project was a refreshing change of pace. Not only was he working on a much smaller scale than usual (a single residence as opposed to the 1,100 guest rooms he fashioned for the Venetian in Las Vegas, for example), but drawing from a contemporary palette. And judging by the artful restraint he exercised here, one would think he'd never seen a curtain swag or tassel trim. "What we learned doing this house—and I know this sounds like a total cliché—is that less is more. The more we found ourselves decorating this house, the more it felt wrong. So we kept it as simple as we knew how. It was all about materials and architectural finishes."





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Typical to the era, glass and concrete construction framed the backbone of the building's modernist geometry, with Nix adding richness and depth to the interior by incorporating a walnut veneer, stained a coffee bean hue, throughout the two bedrooms. In the living room, an I-beam that had been painted white to fade into the background, now sports a dark bronze tone that celebrates the strength and industrial beauty of this structural element.

Deferring to the home's essential transparency (the abundance of glass takes advantage of the voluptuous views of the city and the ocean below), Nix wanted furnishings to be discreet enough to let the eye travel freely to the outdoors. In the living room, a sofa and ottomans from Henry Beguelin nestle on a chocolate-colored, cowhide shag rug. In the master bedroom, an oversize floor lamp, platform bed and crisp white armchair sit serenely amid a luxurious expanse of open space. A cantilevered limestone hearth appears to float when lit from below at night.









For the master bath, which was completely gutted, Nix designed a trough-like travertine sink, inspired by a similar basin he'd seen in Europe. The large round mirror above is set in a walnut frame. Like the bedroom hearth, the vanity seems to hover, making the space appear larger as the floor extends beneath it. The open shower stall is decorated with a vertical strip of pebbles grouted into the limestone wall. And, so as to provide a modicum of privacy, while avoiding window treatments, a band was sandblasted across the expanse of glass, virtually surrounding the room.

In the fine details, textures and intricate surfaces provide the visual variation to keep the place from seeming too austere. The powder room features a resin screen embedded with bamboo, and Nix embroidered the master bath and kitchen with mosaics of tiny, glittering tiles. In the dining room, he installed large panels of macassar ebony, arranging them in an alternate fashion so that the grain runs vertically in some and horizontally in others, creating an eye-catching dynamism.

Nix's experience creating swank hotel interiors certainly added to the ease with which he was able to enhance the livability of this once cold, white box. But, as evidenced here, Nix's gift is balancing the two extremes, providing a spa-like master bath, for example, while at the same time maintaining a domestic sense of proportions. The overscaled banquette in the sitting area of the master bedroom acknowledges that we all like to lie back and put up our feet when we watch TV. This is no bungalow by the beach. But it's not the Burj al Arab hotel in Dubai, either. It's a home. And it's just right ■ *Kirk Nix, KNA Interior Design, 8255 Beverly Boulevard, #225, Los Angeles, CA 323.944.0100*