

ARCHITECTURE / **STUART SILK, STUART SILK ARCHITECTS**
INTERIOR DESIGN / **JOELLE C. NESEN, MAISON INC.**
HOME BUILDER / **NATE VAN MALSEN, WEST COAST BUILDERS, EARTHWORK & LANDSCAPING INC.**
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / **ANNE ATTINGER, ATTINGER LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE**



For a Rancho Mirage home, architect Stuart Silk drew inspiration for the entry gates—executed by Jaeger Metal Fab & Concept—from those that flanked the front door of the former Desi Arnaz-Lucille Ball house nearby.

Think *Mad Men* characters transported to Rancho Mirage, sipping martinis and old-fashioneds and passing the deviled eggs. That’s essentially the direction the homeowners gave architect Stuart Silk and designer Joelle C. Nesen as the duo set out to transform the couple’s vacation home. “We want this to feel elegant, like that old-school style of living, where you want to put on something nice and sit down at four o’clock for a cocktail,” Nesen recalls the clients saying.

Yet the design team and the homeowners knew it would take some doing to reshape the 1963 abode into a place where a latter-day Don and Betty Draper might feel at home. “It was just really old and tired and the rooms were all wrong—the master suite was cavernous,” says the husband. And despite a 1984 remodel and a few midcentury details they eventually recreated, such as the decorative brickwork, he adds, “Everything was falling apart. It needed to be gutted.”

So, Silk, working with project manager David Marchetti, began by tackling the structure. “We ended up using about two-thirds of the foundation,” says Marchetti. The new building, which boasts many midcentury features and materials—a flat roof, vast expanses of glass, light woods, terrazzo floors and decorative work, including gates and a room screen Silk designed—completely transformed the home. “Except for the pool cabana, it was unrecognizable,” says Marchetti. But while the desert modern groove comes across, the residence doesn’t feel stuck in period amber.



Builder Nate Van Malsen installed Arcadia windows and doors, from Indian Wells Glass and Mirror, throughout the home, opening it to the outdoors. Rather than the plain aluminum common to vintage desert modern homes, however, the design team used a bronze finish on the metal that satisfied the wife's desire for warmth in the material palette.



One reason is the contemporary spin on period materials. For example, dark bronze-colored steel framing replaces what, in that era, would have been aluminum or gray steel; beige brick is used in place of the customary white, and honey-colored stones blended into the terrazzo add warmth to what would have traditionally been mostly gray and white. Another contemporizing factor? The home doesn't take itself too seriously. "They kept telling us this was their vacation house, so they wanted it to be fun, with a lot of whimsy," recalls Marchetti. Adds Silk: "The wife's big requests were for a lot of color and surprise, beginning with the blue front door."

Inside the front door, Nesen, working with her associate and lead designer Morgan Thomas and her former associate Lucy Roland, ramped up the color factor with furnishings and finishes. Perhaps most striking is a kitchen wall tiled in a hue called yolk. The pattern, reminiscent of guitars, nods toward the instrument both the husband and wife play. Nesen also had to balance the husband's love

of contemporary design with the wife's penchant for a lighthearted take on the 1960s Palm Springs genre. "The architectural envelope is basically clean and modern," the designer says, in keeping with the husband's tastes, while, "The wife loves the pattern-on-pattern, granny-chic quality of old Palm Springs. Using that as a jumping off point, we wove together color and texture to create that playfulness."

Nesen appointed the rooms using a mix of vintage furniture—a Brutalist-style coffee table in the den, green '60s armchairs in a guest suite, a teak table in the living room, midcentury paintings in the master bedroom—with contemporary pieces that evoke the *Mad Men* era, plus custom creations, such as the living room sofa, inspired by William Haines and Edward Wormley. Floor coverings, too, evoke midcentury Palm Springs in ways both witty (a cheetah carpet in the family room, which Nesen says gives the room a "Givenchy-meets-*Out of Africa*" look) and restrained yet plush (white two-inch shag carpeting that Nesen calls "just delicious" in some of the bedrooms).

The living room exudes a 1960s "granny-chic," notes designer Joelle C. Nesen. It showcases two Jan Showers armchairs in a Jim Thompson Fabrics floral, a sofa that's a riff on William Haines and Edward Wormley designs and covered in a Kravet wool blend, and vintage pieces—a coffee table from 1stdibs and a teak side table from Look Modern in Portland. The carpet is a custom design through Kush Rugs in Portland.



This contrast made the project intriguing to builder Nate Van Malsen. “There were all sorts of great custom details,” he says, “like the large pivoting Accoya front door with inlaid brass and a hand-cast bronze handle; the steel trellises that filter the sun; the poured-in-place terrazzo; handmade Bisazza shower tile in all the baths; and a Hercules aloe tree in the front courtyard that is more than 100 years old.”

The modern-vintage theme continued outdoors, where landscape architect Anne Attinger created an atmosphere that “was all about fun and family, and a tribute to the Palm Springs area and its roots to the historical modern design movement.” The minimal hardscaping yielded mostly intimate patios close to the house—the exception being a patio at the pool. Beyond that, Attinger says, “It’s pretty unstructured, with no straight lines.” A small citrus grove with a sandbox at its edge, a pool that’s a short walk from the house, a butterfly garden by the kitchen, a Zen garden off the master suite, and a cactus garden near the husband’s office all invite outdoor experience and provide constant surprise.

“We wanted it to be eclectic and not too serious,” says the husband of the home’s intent. With that in mind, says Nesen, “We had fun with it!” That much is clear. ■

Above: Potted succulents in the kitchen top a Pentel Surfaces quartz slab counter from De Jager’s. Adonai Concepts & Design fabricated the custom cabinetry.

Opposite: Bright Popham Design tiles enliven a wall in the kitchen. Under a vintage Murano glass chandelier from Salvatore Ferrante in York, Pennsylvania, is a custom table surrounded by chairs from Design Within Reach. Stools from Lawson-Fenning pull up to the island, and behind is a Wolf range and a Vent-A-Hood hood liner.



Nesen paired the clients' existing Jonathan Adler sofa and chair in the den with a vintage coffee table from 1stdibs and a leather chair from Dwell Studio; beneath the arrangement is a Stark carpet. A work by Portland artist Whitney Nye behind the sofa is flanked by Mr. Brown London sconces.

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Above: Landscape architect Anne Attinger crafted a series of compelling features across the home's grounds, including a raised entry planting area facing the breakfast patio. The focal point is a transplanted Mediterranean fan palm that came with the property. The dining table and chairs and the sofa on the adjacent patio are all from Janus et Cie.

Right: Team Pool Construction created the pool and spa in simple forms that harken back to midcentury designs. The area, which has a backdrop of existing mature olive trees, is removed from the house and accessed via flagstones. "It became a destination, a place to leave behind any other worries and just enjoy the outdoors," says Attinger.



A steel trough inspired by a similar water feature at the Sunnylands visitor's center grounds the Zen-like garden off the master bedroom. The lush trees—mango, olive and carob—were existing, as was the St. Francis statue. Attinger says she supplemented the look with "soft mass plantings with intentional voids to balance one another."

An airy guest room has its own midcentury flair. Nesen topped the custom, Brutalist-style bedside table with a vintage Murano lamp. Completing the look is a lush shag carpet by Carter International.



Below, left: Silk designed the custom slab vanity and mirror in the powder room; the latter reflects a skylight overhead. Adding interest to the space are paintings by Whitney Nye and a stool from Teak Warehouse.

Below, right: The design and color of the powder room's vintage Italian glass teardrop pendants evoke a 1960s feel; the distinctive wall tile is by Heath Ceramics.



In the master bedroom, a Global Views settee covered in Schumacher fabric sits at the foot of the bed. The chair by the windows is from ABC Carpet & Home in New York; the hanging pendant is from Design Within Reach.



The master bath showcases a custom vanity with Kohler sinks from Ferguson set into Pentel Surfaces quartz countertops; it floats above terrazzo floors fabricated by Architectural Concrete Innovations. The shower wall is composed of Bisazza glass mosaic tile, and the vintage-style sconces are from Visual Comfort & Co.