



MILLEU

WINTER 2014

WINTER WHITES
Homes & Gardens



A Los Angeles house in a movie-worthy locale needed a **NEW IDENTITY** — one that was **LARGER** and more **DRAMATIC**

INTERIOR DESIGN BY KELLY SCHANDEL
ARCHITECTURE BY ABBOUD MALAK

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character *CHANGE*

Left to right: The entry to a house on Los Angeles's fabled Mulholland Drive affords views of the San Fernando Valley. On the patio, four custom chairs surround a gnarled tree-trunk table, all by Design Around Objects.



In the living room, a pair of Christian Liaigre linen sofas surround a Christian Liaigre coffee table. The painting is by Michal Rovner, the sculpture by Arlene Shechet.

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oing for color means choosing white. White is more versatile than the boldest hue in the palette. For a color that supposedly represents a blank slate, white can fill any surface with meaning and power — perhaps more than any other shade. For Santa Monica-based designer Kelly Schandel, white, the lightest and brightest of hues, is the perfect color to reflect life's full spectrum.

It is an apt idea, for white contains all the wavelengths of the visible color spectrum. "White is uniquely able to evoke both the modern and the classical, and is also unequivocally the best background for art," says Schandel, who founded her firm, Thinkpure, in 2003.

That recognition is realized in this decidedly elegant, pared-down home perched on a famous ribbon of roadway that courses the crest of the Hollywood Hills, Mulholland Drive — a locale that has had more than one starring role in Hollywood films. For fifteen years, clients Eitan and Dina Gonen lived happily in their house, though it began as half the size it is now. As their family grew and the way they used the house changed, the couple saw the need to expand. "We wanted a larger kitchen for preparing and eating family meals and for entertaining," says Dina. "It all began with that realization."

Right: In the living room, a text-based artwork by Elaine Reichek hangs above a mounted bronze sculpture atop a round block table by Robert Bristow for Ralph Pucci.





The dining table, by Jerome Abel Seguin, not only accommodates the clients' frequent family dinners, but also serves as an organic bridge to the wooded landscape. The high-gloss lacquer console is custom-made by Luca Bonacina. Light drizzle chandelier is by Ochre.

To translate that desire to reality, the Gonens turned to Schandel, who, along with former Pepperdine University classmate and collaborator Abboud Malak, had designed the couple's real-estate development offices, as well as homes for their children. The goal, says Schandel, was always "to create a modern yet timeless space, elegant but not formal," one that was able to accommodate large Sunday dinners for children, grandchildren, cousins, and friends.

Schandel and Malak began by reconfiguring the traffic flow, working within the boundaries of the existing footprint and deciding on ways to alter the various elevations without wholly changing the look of the house. Once the plans were realized for the exterior architecture, along with the finishes and scale of the interiors, Schandel proceeded to decorate, artfully filling the airy envelope. Not that creating the sensation and appearance of actual space was easy, even with entire walls of glass that captured views of the canyon and expanses of the San Fernando Valley. The project's greatest challenge was to find a way to expand the home's original 2,500-square-foot space into something double that. It was particularly daunting given that the house is wedged between a steep hillside and a precipitous drop-off.

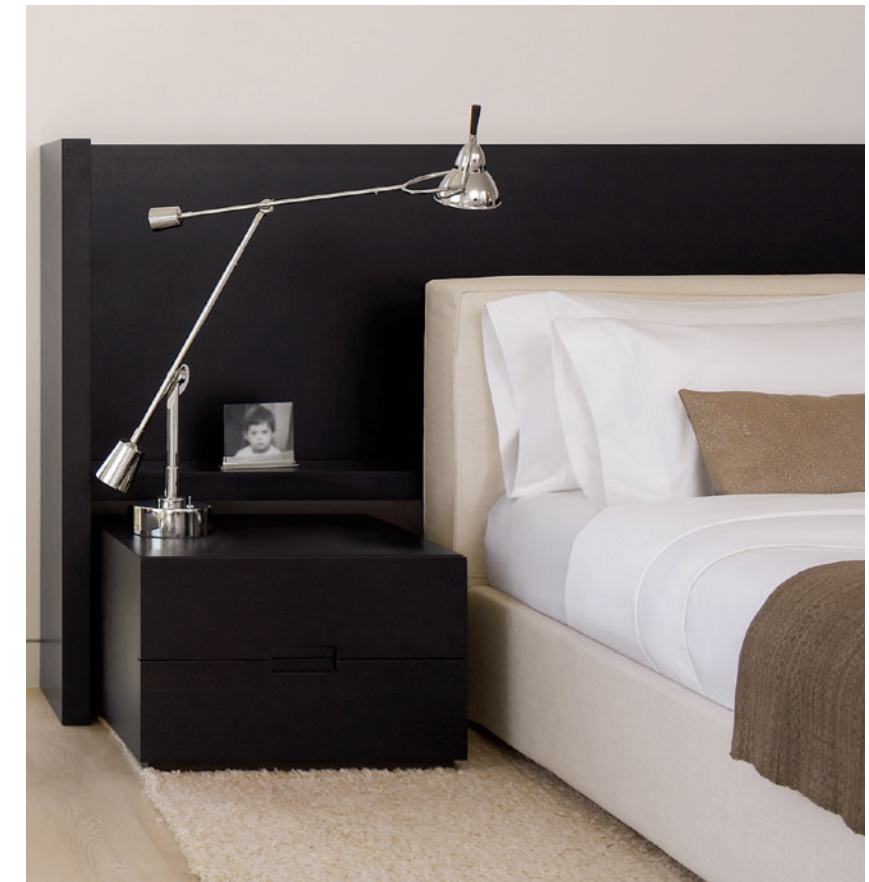
Helping to conjure more from less was Luca Bonacina, an Italian architect and friend of the Gonens. As an example of his devotion to the project, Bonacina not only fabricated the home's built-in cabinetry, but also came to Los Angeles to install it. "He's both architect and artist," says Schandel.

"For me, modern design is about keeping things uncomplicated, no clutter or unnecessary ornamentation, and I like to use neutral palettes, whites, grays, taupe, creams, with color conveyed in other touches," she says. And for her, it is not just the use of white that is important, but also the creation of white space. "When there's room around beautiful things, you appreciate them more," she says. "I take that philosophy to interior design."

In addition to aesthetic versatility, her penchant for white rests in the color's day-to-day practicality. White linens and textiles can be bleached. Stains that appear on white stone or related composites are easily removed with sandpaper and solvents. Scratches on white walls might be repaired with a Magic Eraser, "whereas with any other color, you'd have to repaint entirely," says Schandel. "I'm not a minimalist per se, but I'm definitely inspired by minimalist architecture," she says, citing the work of Claudio Silvestrin, David Chipperfield, and Joseph Dirand.

The need for a larger kitchen was a catalyst for the expansion of the house. White Carrara-marble countertops accentuate the wenge cabinetry by Luca Bonacina. Poliform barstools sit under the family island.





For their part, the Gonens' favorite space is not surprising given their emphasis on familial gatherings: the family room. "It's adjacent to the kitchen, and we spend most of our time between these two rooms," says Eitan.

For an aesthetic supposedly short on details, this modern house features a bounty of dramatic design moments. The living room seating focuses on a sculptural fireplace with deep rectangular niches, a virtual exercise in minimalist geometry. Elsewhere are mullion-less French doors that reveal themselves as tall panes of rectangular glass. The kitchen includes a large island with an ingeniously concealed seating niche and white-cushioned stools. Perhaps the most alluring spaces are two outdoor ones — a roofed deck just beyond the master bath and a patio with a fountain that issues a hypnotically contemplative sheet of water.

Eiten admits he and his wife gave firm, precise directions and stipulations for what they wanted their "new" house to accomplish. They had high expectations and confidence in what Schandel would do. "And yet the beauty of it all surprised us and still does," he says. The house lives up to its new role. ■

Above: The custom bed by Luca Bonacina in the master bedroom is surrounded by shades of cream and white. Left: The Duravit freestanding tub designed by Philippe Starck in the master bath appears to float on a floor of Jerusalem limestone. Interior and exterior floor-to-ceiling glass walls link the room to the outdoor terrace.