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White Out!

A Santa Monica designer explains why white is no longer taboo for an Atherton abode.

By Andrew Myers | Portrait by Jen Siska
Photography by John Edward Linden

White contains all the wavelengths of visible light without absorption, so in layman's terms, it contains the entire color spectrum—witness a rainbow and you'll get the gist. The color evokes strong sentiment, too: In the West, it symbolizes innocence, purity, perfection and exactitude. The good guy always wore white, remember? Lauded by designers for its contrast and purity, white enjoys a colorful reputation as a design go-to.

Except in one area: rooms with high-kid traffic, like kitchens and breakfast nooks. Talk about white in this regard and most designers will see red.

"White is actually very kid-friendly," counters Santa Monica-based designer Kelly Schandel, throwing down the color gauntlet. "White towels? They can be bleached. And scratch a white wall, you can cover it with Magic Eraser. With a colored wall you'd have to repaint entirely," she explains, adding that stone and stonelike composites such as Corian are uberkid-friendly. "A stain on white Corian is solved with sandpaper and a little bleach."

Putting Schandel's white-bright thesis to the test is a 6,500-square-foot home in Atherton (29 miles south of San Francisco), purchased by two art-collecting attorneys—also the parents of two young boys. Built in 1938, the home had prewar charm, but it was also a bit boring. "Subdued, nondescript and outdated," says Schandel, a SoCal native who, after a year in New York working as a publicist for Calvin Klein, and following a four-year design partnership with fellow Pepperdine University alum Abboud Malak (now based in Dubai and with whom Schandel still collaborates), went solo in 2003 under the moniker Thinkpure. CONTINUED...



OPEN-AND-SHUT CASE

The sofas, vintage iron and pony ottomans in the open-air living room are all from Holly Hunt and the Christian Liaigre coffee table sits on the Mansour rug. The drapery by Elitis at Donghia complements the Minotti cabinet placed behind the sofa. All the architectural lighting and lighting design is by John Brubaker Architectural Lighting Consultants.



WHEN DUSK SETTLES
The Dedon outdoor seating was found at Janus et Cie and makes a cozy spot for this outdoor fireplace.

“In the Atherton house, that vision translated to an envelope of whites and pale hues that highlight texture and finish. Long, wide oak planks stained a subtle shade of milky gray compose the floors throughout most of the house.”



ROOM WITH A VIEW
The custom bed was upholstered in suede from Holly Hunt. The linens from Deborah Sharpe Linens lend a lovely backdrop for the Udo Nöger artwork from Ruth Bachofner Gallery hanging above the bed.

...CONTINUED “What the owners wanted was a counterpoint to their neighborhood’s traditional styles. Something practical but not too serious, with the kind of timeless elegance that’s warm and inviting,” explains Schandel.

In short, something modern—but not the clichéd modern of ubiquitous right angles; cold, hard, exclusively manmade materials; or utilitarian functionalism at luxury’s expense. Rather, they wanted Schandel’s kind of modernism: uncomplicated, free of clutter and without too much ornamentation. “I like neutral palettes, clean and simple lines on furnishings, and rich and luxurious textures like leathers, suedes and woven linens—all while bringing warmth with natural materials.”

It’s a definition that evolved over time for the designer. But it crystallized during her time at Calvin Klein, a period that serendipitously coincided with the opening of the brand’s 22,000-square-foot Madison Avenue flagship designed by famed British designer John Pawson, a master of minimalism known for his use of natural materials and transcendent light, as well as the launch of Calvin Klein Home.

“My eyes just opened,” remembers Schandel, who describes her own aesthetic as a combination of natural



materials juxtaposed with purity of architecture (in this case, by Timothy Chappelle at Arcanum Architecture) adorned with an eclectic mix of furniture and art—their sum yielding a serene yet down-to-earth luxury that she feels helps put life’s stresses and extremes in balance.

In the Atherton house, that vision translated to an envelope of whites and pale hues that highlight texture and finish. Long, wide oak planks stained a subtle shade of milky gray compose the floors throughout most of the house. Luminous Venetian plaster flanks the family room’s fireplace and is also on the walls of the master bedroom and bath, its slight striation playing with the smooth, cream-colored limestone on the floor and countertops.

To fill but not crowd these spaces, Schandel focused on furniture just as modern and considered: a Meier/Ferrer custom chrome-and-wood console table; mouth-blown Alison Berger pendant lights in the entryway; the dining room’s 10-foot-long walnut slab dining table by Hudson, which sits under a sculptural light fixture by David Weeks. There’s a freestanding Agape bathtub complemented by the curvaceous perch of ash wood in polished ebony in the master bath, as well as acres of custom cabinetry throughout the house by Luca Bonacina, a Milan-based artisan whom Schandel counts as her secret weapon. “Peerless,” she says in description of both the man and his work. And of course, she chose white Corian for the custom breakfast table in the nook off the family room and adjacent to the kitchen.

“It’s so durable and easy to clean,” says Schandel. The perfect combo when it comes to kid-friendly. ■



TO LIVE & DINE Clockwise from top left: The dining room table is an Acacia Slab with a polished steel base from Hudson Furniture, while the Harris chairs by Joseph Jeup were found at Holly Hunt. The light fixture is by David Weeks for Ralph Pucci and the high-gloss lacquer buffet and in-wall cabinet are a custom collaboration between Kelly Schandel and Luca Bonacina; interior designer Schandel, seated; “I love stone with a lot of white background for kitchens, like Calacatta marble,” says interior Schandel. “Here we used Borghini.”