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Hollywood House

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In Beverly Hills, architect Linda Brettler strips away a Spanish Revival house's polyglot renovations. More private moments of splendour are encountered in the bathrooms, where extensive tiling pays homage to Los Angeles' erstwhile status as the centre of American pottery.



Above image: The addition of a small room encourages activity between the private rooms and courtyard

Text: David Sokol

Photography: Jim Simmons

Project: **Hollywood House**

Location: **California, US**

Design: **Linda Brettler**

Los Angeles living – open to nature, fluid in plan and available to many – has become synonymous with the Case Study Houses. Yet before *Arts & Architecture* magazine's John Entenza began his seminal experiment in postwar California modernism, scores of Spanish Revival homes embodied very similar principles. These early-20th century vernacular and architect-designed residences engage the landscape and boast gracious interiors, and they were made at sizes and finishes to suit all kinds of Angelenos. They just did so without walls of glass, and with a hierarchy of rooms that reflected the presence of staff.



<http://www.australiandesignreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/hollywood-house1.jpg>

Entertainment heavyweights are one type of Los Angeles homeowner that has gravitated toward the Spanish Revival style, most notably actors from Rudolph Valentino to Diane Keaton. Its acolytes also include behind-the-scenes greats like Leonard B Stern (writer and producer of such classics as *The Honeymooners* and *Get Smart*) and, now, *Wolf of Wall Street* writer Terence Winter and *Dallas Buyers Club* producer Rachel Winter, who renovated Stern's 560-square metre Beverly Hills house with architect Linda Brettler.

Brettler is a long-time friend of the Winters; her husband, *Mad Men* creator Matthew Weiner, worked with Terence Winter on *The Sopranos*. More important, the Los Angeles native was the inevitable choice for the renovation project, thanks to her keen grasp of local historic fabric. Brettler has boundless appreciation for Spanish Revival homes' artisanal details, though she also tempers her praise with understanding that old plans require updating for a more casual approach to rearing family and entertaining friends. Nor does she mince words about

contemporary interventions gone awry.



The original barrel vaulted ceiling remained extant despite previous renovations having removed many details

As an object lesson in just such unsympathetic renovation, Stern's house stood apart. Since its construction in 1929, seven permits had been filed to expand or change the building. Where there was originally one upstairs bedroom, the Winters and Brettler found three. A mansard roof loomed over the backyard pool. Elevations changed willy-nilly.

“The house was in this strangely bastardised state,” Brettler says, while noting that original features, such as a barrel-vaulted living room, a wall of bookcases in the dining room, and the much appreciated ironwork and tiling were extant. “You could see there was potential to bring it back to its roots, without being historicist about it.”



Tiles, antiques and feature lighting transform the bathroom experience

To do so, Brettler reframed portions of the roof, in particular the one-storey wing most egregiously sporting the mansard roof. It now contains a second-storey office with a pair of windows framed like the balcony of a Hancock Park house that Brettler had spotted while jogging. In another example of subtracting and adding, interior split elevations were eliminated; such moves transformed the den’s L-shaped section into a more uniform ceiling, and yielded an ensuite bath for the original, 3.7-metre tall guest room. Meanwhile, a new half-wall was erected in front of the house, to encourage interaction between the public rooms and a courtyard garden.

“It was tricky meshing spaces together,” Brettler says of the interior plan that she and the Winters inherited from Stern. The threshold between the dining room and kitchen measured a servant-concealing one metre wide, for example. And instead of having a direct relationship, the kitchen and adjacent den were separated by hallways and doors.



Polished floors throughout typify the Spanish Revival aesthetic, while a single beam with corbels frames the kitchen space

As a specialist in the Spanish Revival genre, Brettler employed several signatures to solve these logjams. To open up the kitchen entrance to 4.8 metres wide, for example, “You can do a simple beam with corbels,” she says. “It is a gesture of setting off one space from another, but it has historical integrity.”

Integrity does not preclude pleasure. Indeed, Brettler focused on “those luxurious moments that made the house sing”. She replaced the white battens in the living room’s arched ceiling with stained alder coffers, and anchored a precast fireplace on its western wall. Visitors presume that the living room is a 1929 artefact. More private moments of splendour are encountered in the bathrooms, where extensive tiling pays homage to Los Angeles’ erstwhile status as a centre of American pottery.



Closest doors from The Pierre Hotel have been repurposed as a headboard

To impart glamour to the residence, Brettler also had a producing partner in Rachel Winter. "Rachel has an amazing eye, and the house completely expresses her aesthetic," she says. It represents sizable sweat equity, too: Winter scoured vintage dealers, such as famed local emporium Wertz Brothers Furniture, to populate the interiors. She also fanned through her own industry for resources, sourcing the living room's lavender paint from the production designer of HBO's *Grey Gardens*. Additional decorating highlights include Osborne and Little Summer Palace wallpaper, which meets the millwork in the dining room, and faux shagreen closet doors from The Pierre hotel that are now a headboard.

If Brettler edited the house to be more Case Study in its flow, then Winter gave it a shot of Hollywood Regency. Their contributions may not be Spanish Revival in name, but their redesign authentically channels the Los Angeles of 1929 while readying a storied home for its next generation of creative occupants.



Osborne and Little's Summer Palace wallpaper with Wertz Brothers sourced furniture