

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

Mark Boone

A 1920s Los Angeles Cottage Captures the Designer's Imagination

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In certain neighborhoods of Los Angeles the decades between the two world wars saw an efflorescence of what in the language of architecture and real estate is commonly known as good building stock. It can be especially good in the area around Hancock Park, where even the more modest streets offer what designer Mark Boone

calls "houses of quality, houses of character, houses of the kind I had hoped one day to live in."

The day came last August for Boone, president of the design firm London Boone (as well as of Mimi London, the showroom and furniture businesses), where he began working with Mimi London 12 years ago. He had been looking for a house for three years when he found the 1924 English-style cottage that embraced the sunlight and the air—and had good bones to boot.

Boone, a native of Virginia, who studied interior design at Virginia Tech, was drawn to the gardens and lawns in the neighborhood, its sense of community and its friendliness to pedestrians. But it was the house that sold him. At 1,600 square feet, it is not a large structure—"I don't need large," he says. "I'm too busy dealing with other people's houses to spend a lot of time maintaining my own"—but it had a grace and a sense of openness that captured his imagination. Its ceilings were high, its windows long and elegant. There were good floors, a handsome fireplace, a garden with a terrace big enough to feel like an additional room. He bought it.

"The comedy of this house for me is the way it was advertised by the realtor as turnkey," Boone recalls. "Naturally, doing what I do, I thought otherwise." What was turnkey for the seller was, for this particular buyer, a rehabilitation and design project that Boone pulled off in a remarkable 12 weeks.

He began by reorienting the entrance: Rather than approach the front door by a direct path that bisected the front lawn, Boone decided to enclose the street-facing garden with a hedge and create a gate to one side. Visitors now enter the property obliquely, which gives the house a sense of mystery. He replaced the roof and remade the garden, and then he set to work on the interiors. Inside, he replastered all the walls, rewired the house, replaced the kitchen and bath and

reconfigured the study, which had originally been the house's third bedroom.

"Mimi taught me so much about generosity and scale of design," Boone observes. "Her work tends to be large-scale, comfortable, easy—drop-shouldered,' as she likes to say. I come from a more formal, sit-up-straight background—Mimi got me to loosen my collar. There's an organic quality to her interiors; mine probably have more of a traditional architectural flavor. Both views come together in the house."

As a collector of contemporary art and antique furniture, Boone favors a white canvas against which to marry these disparate sensibilities. His trademark hue is chalk white, which he used for the walls everywhere in the house except for the study, a cozier room, where he used a true khaki. He likens the furniture and art he set against so disciplined a shell to "old friends who have become part of my life over the years."

In the living room, Boone has brought together a Chinese wedding cabinet and pair of low tables, a French settee and a pair of Cole Porter chairs that were once featured in the Mimi London showroom. A console table and a pair of cane-back armchairs that belonged to London's parents stand against one wall; several pieces by Jean St. Pierre, a California artist whose work he was introduced to by another mentor, Douglas Murray, are on display in the room. "St. Pierre's stuff is thought-provoking, spare, intellectual and open to various interpretations," Boone says. "Douglas taught me about exploiting your sensibility, about space, about living well. Even with limited means he lived more stylishly than many of our wealthy clients." Boone's version of stylish living has a kind of flexibility built into it that is very California, in its way. His furniture is light so that it can be moved around to accommodate large groups of friends, whom he encourages to stop by. It can be formal—like the 18th-century

Venetian console table in the dining room that he inherited from Murray—and it can be uninhibited, like the suite of wicker furniture in the study that he bought in North Carolina, while visiting a cousin. (He found the sofa and two chairs on a tobacco plantation, where it had been the owner's parents' first set of parlor furniture: He even had the original 1910 receipt.)

Boone also manages to combine the personal, the professional and the practical. His dining room, for instance, features a set of Orkney Island chairs that he has adapted for the Mimi London showroom. These reproductions are enlarged in scale from the originals but completely hand-braided and hand-lashed, as in the 18th century. Drawn up to a French wine-tasting table, they seem at once contemporary and timeless, individual oases that are both private and convivial, rather like Boone's newly lightened, newly hedged, newly focused Hancock Park house.





