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Under the California Sun

A Mediterranean-Inspired Oasis Blooms in Los Angeles

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You have less than a year to decorate an 18,000-square-foot Tuscan-style villa. Please add a screening room, a screening room lounge and, while you're at it, a billiards room. Nervous? "I chewed my nails," admits Mark Boone, the Los Angeles–based interior designer who recently completed such a mission. "They didn't want to furnish it piecemeal, and it was a little overwhelming to do one big production. But it was also one of the most exciting projects I've done."

It helped that Boone knows the clients well. "They're like family," he says. Over the last dozen years he and his partner, Mimi London, of London Boone, have worked on the couple's French-style residence in San Francisco, their country house in Sonoma (see *Architectural Digest*, September 1993) and their contemporary getaway in Palm Springs. It helped, too, that he considers them exceptionally "realistic, decisive, clear and focused." And it didn't hurt that their new house, on Los Angeles's Westside, had the romance of a Medici palazzo. "The gates sweep open, and there's an allée of olive trees, and you're transported," says Boone.

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Only four years old, the house has deep porticoes and loggias, and the generous use of tile, brick and rubblestone distinguishes the exterior. Inside, soaring ceilings are vaulted or coffered, walls are finished with Venetian plaster, floors are made of wood and reclaimed French stone. But when Boone began the project, the place was cavernously bare. To provide the couple with a place to stay when they were in town during the design process, Boone started with the guesthouse—an airy second-story apartment accessed from the main house by an arched bridge over the motor court. He designed it to simulate "a suite at the Hotel Bel-Air," with a sunny terrace and a pastel palette inside.

In the main house, Boone started from the ground up. "By the time I was hired, I was already off and running, looking for museum-quality antique rugs for the house. We came back here with probably 10 rugs for every room and had a whole day of yea and nay." Each selection served as a jumping-off point for that room's colors. The golden hues of a 19th-century Ushak set the tone for the living room; another Ushak suggested a slate-blue palette for the family room; a hand-hooked rug brought the verdant energy of the garden into the dining room. A strain of soft terra-cotta helped link the rooms and amplify the Tuscan spirit.

Approachable is the word often used by Boone and the clients to describe the design. "I told Mark we didn't want the Ritz in Paris, we wanted the Bristol," says the husband. "My test for every room is, Is there a place where I can lie down and read a book?" Comfort for gatherings large and small was critical, and Boone strove for flexibility: A pair of round Italian-inspired tables in the dining room expand from five feet across to seven feet across, and seating arrangements in the living room are easily reconfigured.

The first piece he acquired was a honey-colored 18th-century Italian inlaid chest for the living room that, like most of the antiques, is elegant without being ponderous. "It's an Italian house, and modern furniture wouldn't work," says Boone. "What does work is the combination of antiques and modern art. They have a big collection, and we played chess with the pieces, seeing what worked where." A vibrant de Kooning highlights the entrance hall; large black-and-white canvases by Sol LeWitt and Ellsworth Kelly anchor the family room; antic bronze figures by William Kentridge animate the living room and dining room mantels. All of these rooms open to the gardens that envelop the house, and the splash of fountains and the scent of roses also help ward off stuffiness.

The entertainment-oriented rooms that Boone built around an existing wine cellar were intended as "fun spaces." He designed the screening room (his first) to recall "an old-fashioned movie house from the '20s or '30s," with a barrel-vaulted gold-leafed ceiling, traditional theater seating and deep-fringed stage curtains. Nick and Nora Charles inspired the lounge off the screening room, and one can easily picture the Thin Man duo amid the damask-upholstered walls and Déco furnishings. The billiards room feels more like a classic gentlemen's club, with carved plaster ceiling tiles and snooker chairs. These rooms get a lot of use, but then the whole house is well utilized—by grandchildren, nieces and nephews, too. "It's more of a family house than a big-time party house," says the husband. Still, his wife adds, "it's also great just with the two of us. It's a reflection of Mark's ability that we never feel like we're being swallowed up."









