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Preserving Paradise

BY KATHERINE NELSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ELLIS

Once a hideaway for Hollywood royalty, this Palm Springs home now houses an expert in hospitable design.

THIS CLASSIC POST-AND-BEAM PALM SPRINGS HOME IS ALL ABOUT OUTDOOR LIVING. OPENING TO THE POOL, THE MASTER BEDROOM FEATURES CLEAN LINES AND A MODERN MIX OF FURNISHINGS.



BUILT IN 1957 BY MODERNIST ARCHITECT JOHN PORTER CLARK, THIS CLASSIC Palm Springs post and beam home came with a Hollywood star studded pedigree. William Holden and his lover Audrey Hepburn lived here, and Tippi Hedren began her big cat sanctuary in the backyard. But by the time Rodrigo Vargas and his partner Erik Storey purchased the 4,000 square-foot, three-bedroom home in 2012, the faded glory was ready for its close-up on "Sunset Boulevard". "It was a complete disaster," says Vargas, a designer and principal of the hospitality firm Rodrigo Vargas Design, which works with hotel brands such as St. Regis, Hyatt and Starwood. "Post-and-beam structures can sometimes be delicate, and in the desert weather they really need to be cared for."

Several challenges faced the new owners, the roof was collapsing and none of the interior systems, which dated from the 1950s,

functioned. The glass-walled structure was also unexpectedly dim, with dark brown finishes covering the beams and ceiling. Yet Vargas and Storey, who works in the entertainment industry, found much to redeem the property. Located on a one-acre lot that formed the cornerstone of the neighborhood, the home retained its original footprint as well as several period details such as the tongue and groove ceiling and platform fireplace. The U-shape building flanked a massive yard, embracing the landscape and surrounding mountains. "We are in the city five days per week and really love the fact that this home is all about outdoor living," Vargas says. "Here you can be in a T-shirt and flip-flops 12 months of the year."

The first order of business: a complete gut job. Built with redwood, the home was then reinforced with steel supports, and all the systems including electrical and HVAC were replaced. "We started

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THE ORIGINAL PLATFORM FIREPLACE, WHICH WAS RESTORED, ANCHORS THE LIVING ROOM. **OPPOSITE PAGE (COUNTER CLOCKWISE):** IN DAUGHTER PILAR'S ROOM, ICONIC DESIGNS INCLUDE ARNE JACOBSEN'S EGG CHAIR AND A TABLE BY EERO SAARINEN, THE FRAMED ALPHABETS ARE VINTAGE HERMES SCARVES. A LIGHT BY BEC BRITTON ANCHORS THE DINING NOOK IN THE KITCHEN. THE DINING CHAIRS ARE VINTAGE AND THE BARSTOOLS ARE BY BASSAMFELLOWS. AN OUTDOOR GRILL IS LOCATED ON A COZY PATIO BETWEEN THE MAIN HOUSE AND A GUEST CASITA.





THE MASTER BATHROOM OPENS TO A GROVE OF LIME TREES. THE FOLDING STOOL IS A MID-CENTURY DANISH DESIGN FOR CARL HANSEN. RIGHT: RESCUED GREYHOUND CAMILLA MAKES HERSELF COMFORTABLE IN THE MASTER BEDROOM. THE FRAMED ARTWORKS ARE BY RICHARD SERRA AND THE BLACK SCULPTURE IS BY ISAMU NOGUCHI.

work, cleaning and stripping away years and years of bad decisions," Vargas says. Saving the historical integrity of the building was vital, but not the only driving force of the renovation. "Preserving the property was extremely important to us. But we also wanted to live comfortably and have amenities," Vargas says.

The entire construction process took 2 years and included the installation of new walls, flooring and 47 custom pivot windows and doors. The original ceiling was stripped, repaired and repainted. Two guest cottages, called "casitas," were gutted and renovated. The pool was completely rebuilt in its original footprint, with the subtle addition of a tanning leg, and the entire landscape was redone from scratch.

For the new palette, Vargas and Storey chose a brilliant all-white. "As a designer I look at color and materials all day," Vargas says. "The simplicity of the finishes here really allows my eye to rest, and it emphasizes the outdoors - it's hard to compete with the beauty of nature." A single white Belgian linen wallcovering, bleached maple wood finish and white carrara marble floor flow throughout the rooms, uniting the interior, which opens entirely to the yard. "It's almost like there's no division between indoors and out," Vargas says. One of the few items disrupting the palette is a dramatic pivoting bronze front door, which Vargas designed with a linear pattern to echo the lines of the house. The designer selected sleek kitchen cabinetry by Snaidero, continuing the prevailing shade.

Furnishings are a curated mix of clean-line modern pieces, vintage finds and African touches. "The African piece collection started because William Holden had many African pieces in this home as well," Vargas says.

As the renovation progressed so did life. Three years ago, Vargas and Storey became parents to a young daughter, Pilar. "We planted a lime orchard so we would always have margaritas by the pool," Vargas says. "Now we love playing with toys all day by the pool instead."



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