

Splendor in Shady Canyon

Designer Allison Olmstead Creates An Eclectic Mix Inspired By A Couple's Different Tastes

TEXT BY LYNN MORGAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREY CRAWFORD AND FARHAD SAMARI



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The designer, Allison Olmstead, poses in the foyer of the Shady Canyon home, beneath a wrought iron and glass chandelier by Paul Ferrante.




PHOTOGRAPH BY GREY CRAWFORD



The "Volute" dining room table is from Therien Design Studio in West Hollywood, as are the leather upholstered armchairs. The chandelier is wrought iron, Lucite and 22 karat gold gilt from Paul Ferrante. The wing chair is upholstered in Ultra-suede from Dennis & Leen. The painting is an in-house creation from Allison Olmstead Design.



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Another view of the living room. The wall tapestry is 8' x 10' and French from the late 19th century, Aga John. The lattice chair is one of a pair from Therien. The antique Asian altar table and red lacquer trunk are from Suzanne Hollis. The coffee table, a converted Nepalese daybed, is also from Suzanne Hollis.

The clients came to her with contradictory tastes. “He likes traditional, country French, and her dream home is a sleek steel and glass Modernist house overlooking the sea,” recalls designer Allison Olmstead. “The couple desired a family house without sacrificing adult sophistication.” Her mission, when she signed on as interior designer, was to reconcile their divergent visions and needs.

Olmstead was given a prepared canvas. The house, designed by Beverly Hills architect William Hablinski, of Hablinski-Manion, was under construction when she was hired.

The homesite rests in the exclusive village community of Shady Canyon in Irvine.

“I was commissioned after most of the architectural detailing was already in place,” describes the principal of Newport Beach-based Allison Olmstead Design. The French inspired house was built by Rob Glass of Glass Construction Corporation. At 8,000 square feet, the house is richly detailed with reclaimed wood floors, antique doors and ceiling beams imported from France, carefully selected by Hablinski and Rob Glass, who are known for meticulous use of materials and detail. The seasoned woods became Olmstead’s inspiration for the warm, earthy palette she used throughout the house. “The interior design is not what you might expect from the architecture,” she says.



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With comfort and practicality as the main objective, the sectional sofa in the family room is covered in butter colored corduroy to match the Ultrasuede upholstered walls. The ottoman is a piece from JF Chen in zebra skin. The two chairs are classic William Haines design, updated with leopard print leather from Pacific Hide & Leather, in the PDC. The painting, inspired by Robert Motherwell, was executed by Olmstead's in-house artist, specifically for this room.



PHOTOGRAPH BY GREY CRAWFORD



“...it’s a highly eclectic, international vision, and it exudes luxury”

—Allison Olmstead

A simple, wrought iron and glass chandelier illuminates the limestone walls and floors in the foyer, establishing an Old World flavor for a newly constructed house. Inside, Olmstead placed an antique Chinese Khotan rug next to a sofa she designed in dusty green mohair, inspired by Egypt and the Mediterranean, with deep, scrolled arms and a Greek key border. She added another exotic touch with a low, red lacquer coffee table and a zebra striped pillow, both from JF Chen.

Animal prints pop up in surprising places throughout the house, offering a playful counterpoint to the formal antiques and art. “I like adding unexpected pops of color in a muted room,” she says. The living room features a zebra striped ottoman also from JF Chen, placed in front of an Ultrasuede sofa from Room & Board. “I like mixing elements in my designs, using custom made pieces and antiques and furniture from exclusive showrooms and suffusing them with things from more accessible resources. If you select only showroom quality pieces, then the end result looks just like that: a showroom. I want to create real, livable spaces.”

Olmstead added a black leather, Mies van der Rohe inspired chaise from Design Within Reach, adorned with a luxurious throw from Hermès and a pair of club chairs, upholstered in beige kidskin from Therien in West Hollywood. Whitewashed barstool chairs were reupholstered in black and white. “It was originally an antique rug from Aga John,” Allison says. “I cut it up and used it for the seats.”

The painting over the fireplace, like many in the house, was commissioned for the project and executed by the design firm’s in-house artist. The artifacts on the mantle are more pieces of exotica: a Chinese hatbox and an Africa vessel, antiques stores along Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles. It is also where Olmstead found the pair of eighteenth century demi-lune tables she placed in the entry, from Suzanne Hollis, a favorite resource for antiques.

One wall is graced with an important eight by ten foot French tapestry, circa 1880, which hangs above a rustic antique Chinese altar table and a red lacquer trunk, which adds another of Olmstead’s beloved pops of color to the room. The walnut lattice lounge chair, upholstered in kidskin, is from Therien. Olmstead cleverly used a Nepalese daybed as a coffee table, whereupon she displayed the clients’ collection of antique lacquer boxes.

The family room is more relaxed, featuring a sectional sofa covered in sturdy, wide-wale corduroy that matches the Ultrasuede-upholstered walls. It is strewn with an assortment of inviting throw pillows in ethnic patterns from Room & Board and a pale green chenille throw from J. Robert Scott. A pair of slipper chairs with Chippendale legs is a William Haines design, custom covered in leather from Pacific Hide & Leather. On the wall above, Olmstead placed another custom created piece of art: “This one was inspired by Motherwell,” she says. “I wanted a bold, graphic piece that would play off of the African graphics on the pillows and the zebra skin ottoman.”

BELOW A reproduction antique Agra rug from Aga John in the Pacific Design Center was Olmstead's first purchase for the living room. The bar area features antique wooden doors with glass shelves and a black marble countertop. Olmstead placed an 18th century mirror behind the bar. The sofa is Ultrasuede, from Room & Board; the chaise is a classic Mies van der Rohe from Design Within Reach, in black leather, adorned with a throw from Hermès. The cabinet is 18th century Austrian from Suzanne Hollis in Pasadena, and it conceals a flat-screen television and other electronics. The armchair is from Therien in West Hollywood.



PHOTOGRAPH BY FARHAD SAMARI

The dining room is dramatic. A massive, seven foot square painting establishes its tone. "Once again, it was created in-house," the designer says. "I wanted something very special and monumental for this space. It is inspired by Richard Diebenkorn's work, and reflects the colors I used in the room." The table is "Volute," from Therien Design Studio, and the walnut armchairs, also from Therien, are upholstered in "Equestrian Candlelight" leather. A wingback, fireside chair from Dennis & Leen stands nearby, draped in another Hermès throw.


The room is lit by a wrought iron chandelier with unexpected details in Lucite and gilt. "I loved this chandelier as soon as I found it," Olmstead states enthusiastically. "It is classic, contemporary and rustic, all at the same time! It incorporates all of the design elements of the house into one object."

The guest bedroom exhibits the same sophistication as the rest of the house, beginning with the lush Oriental rug Olmstead found. "I love this rug!" she laughs. "It was a lucky discovery; it is a very old Oushak. It's Turkish. Oushak's are among my favorite rugs: Very earthy and rustic, but rich and

sophisticated at the same time. This one inspired the color palette of the entire room: steel blue and nutmeg."

The bed is simple but impressive: A canopied four poster in brushed steel, covered in striped silk that echoes the colors of the rug and the flowing, custom made silk window treatments. At its foot, Olmstead placed a Chinese fret table in black and gilt from Niermann Weeks.

"These clients gave me a lot of creative freedom," Olmstead admits. "They are adventurous, sophisticated people, and they trusted me to create a home that reflected all they appreciate."

She gave her clients a home that is as worldly and well traveled as they are themselves. "There are a lot of exotic touches in my design," says Olmstead. "I used a lot of animal prints and global pieces mixed with antiques and contemporary art to give the home a feeling of timelessness; it's a highly eclectic, international vision, and it exudes luxury. Every detail of every space matters—color, pattern, texture—all had to be inviting. I looked at each room as a three-dimensional work of art." 



PHOTOGRAPH BY GREY CRAWFORD



The guest room is a luxurious retreat, featuring a sybaritic four poster, canopied bed, covered in striped silk from Niermann Weeks. The window treatments were custom made by Olmstead Design with the embroidered silk fabric that was purchased from Diamond Foam in Los Angeles. The extravagant Oushak rug from Turkey inspired the color palette for the entire room. The "Andre" armchair is one of a pair Olmstead found at Crate & Barrel. "We mixed very expensive pieces with those more accessible. I like interiors that are gorgeous, but achievable," says Olmstead.