

Beachy Keen

Wendy Word reimagines the coastal interior as a colorful and playful space

by **ABIGAIL STONE** photography by **KARYN MILLET**



With its neutral brick and smooth stucco exterior, metal windows and custom steel doors, the home demonstrates the appeal of California's coastal contemporary style.



Apparatus Studio's Synapse pendants glow above Lawson-Fenning's sculptural Prospect coffee table and artwork by Jason Trotter. The side tables were discovered at Lucca Antiques.



Lit by the sunshine that streams through its banding of windows, oversized pendants from Urban Electric Co., sturdy counter stools from Thomas Hayes, a La Cornue range and culinary wall, Waterworks fittings and shimmering Clé tiles turn a workhorse space into a welcoming one.

Zellige tiles found at Ann Sacks bring the hues of sand and sea inside. Sconces from Apparatus illuminate fittings and a mirror from Waterworks. The vanity is from Furniture Guild.



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hile the beach communities of Southern California are often lumped together in the mind of the world, a closer look reveals their distinctions. “Manhattan Beach is a place unlike any other in California,” says interior designer Wendy Word, citing its strong community bonds, its global influences and its small-town feel.

The oceanside village began life as a quiet summer retreat for the residents of L.A., its scant two miles of coastline dotted with primitive wooden beach shanties devoid of electricity. As it evolved and expanded, new construction flipped the standard floor plan found in most local

homes, hoisting the main rooms toward the sky to catch a glimpse of the water and creating the reverse template—living up, bedrooms down—that has now become the defining characteristic of the area’s homes. Even those located in neighborhoods that showcase larger lots, like this sprawling two-story estate in the Hill Section, often yield to this particular custom. “You’re expecting all the main rooms to be on the first floor,” says Word. “But they’re not.”

“Even though it was a big house, it lacked flow,” Word recalls, remembering her first impression of the original structure. “It felt splintered and dark and it looked inward; we needed to create a continuum of spaces that made sense and related to one another.” While its sprawling square footage offered the option of defaulting to a traditional layout, the choice was made to embrace the local quirk to highlight the site’s breathtaking views. Working with Laney Architects and Matt Morris Development,



Quercus & Co.’s Morph wallpaper underlines the jovial mood set by Apparatus Studio’s Lariat Pendant. The Loc chairs were discovered at Stahl + Band.



A bathtub from Kallista sits atop New Ravenna's Calacatta Gold Mosaic tile. The room's brass fittings were found at Waterworks. The CHP pendant is from Urban Electric Co.



The glow of Apparatus Studio's Cloud Light is the ideal partner for the medley of sunset hues that wash over the primary bedroom. The leather and oak four-poster bed, Dedar bouclé armchairs and ottomans are custom.

Word and her colleague Megan Acuna made the decision to take the house down to the studs. The home's Cape Cod vibes, including its clapboard siding and its white-framed windows, were scrapped, replaced by a home that, with its neutral brick and smooth stucco facade, metal windows and custom steel doors and generous, modern interiors finished with the barest whisper of molding, demonstrates California's coastal contemporary style.

"We reconfigured everything to capture the magnificent light and the breathtaking vision of the water that are this area's main draws," says Word. "The experience of those sight lines is pretty unique to our little enclave, so we wanted to magnify their beauty, especially in the public rooms that sprawl across the top." Even the rooms without a view are oriented outward toward the exterior. "It was all about welcoming in the outdoors and that feeling of openness and space," Acuna explains. "We achieved that not only through how the rooms interacted with each other and how they related to the exterior but also in the materials, finishes, furniture and accessories that we chose."

"The clients needed guidance on how to reimagine the flow of the home for their daily life," says Word. "But also for the kind of extensive, regular entertaining that they wanted to do." The kitchen, moved to the front of the top floor, commandeers a shimmering vision of the water. Orbiting around it are the children's playroom, the dining room, the living room and an outdoor deck. The bedrooms were pushed to the corners of the ground level. Word and Acuna convinced the clients to install a full kitchen with a custom teak island in the pool's pavilion; equipped with a television, a comfortable seating area and heat lamps, it's the centerpiece of the family's outdoor life. "While they always intended

to spend time outdoors, they've been surprised by how much they use it," says Word, smiling.

Rather than default to the cliché of white slipcovered sofas and sisal rugs, Word and Acuna created a new language of moody metals, graphic patterns, rich textures, elegant materials and beach-glass colors, amplified by whimsical light fixtures. "Because the house is so open, the spaces need to connect with one another and tell a comprehensive story while also providing a unique experience," says Word. "So color and pattern and texture are modulated from room to room." The dining room, where Quercus & Co.'s Morph wallpaper underlines the jovial mood set by Apparatus Studio's Lariat Pendant looping over a round table surrounded by Stahl + Band's Loc chairs, enunciates one aspect of the home's playful vernacular. The living room, where Apparatus Studio's blackened brass Synapse pendants hover like moons above Lawson-Fenning's sculptural Prospect coffee table and reflective artwork by Jason Trotter, articulates the sweep of its tactile sophistication.

"We wanted them to have the option of using the house in different ways," says Word. That round dining table boosts the conviviality of a sit-down dinner; guests can easily move around it during a large event. The kitchen, with its brass accents, shimmering Clé tiles and large Urban Electric Co. pendants, is a natural backdrop to family gatherings; its La Cornue range and culinary wall, Waterworks fittings and substantial work surfaces embrace a catering team. The custom bunk bed in the daughter's room is sleepover ready. "Interior design is about learning to read between the lines to give your clients what they didn't even know they needed," says Word. Here it's the best of the beach, brought home.



A range of pinks that feel drawn from the inside of a seashell—in a light from Urban Electric Co., an Anthropologie rug and drapery fabric from Quercus & Co.—dance around the daughter's room.