

Change Agent

Alison Palevsky prescribes color and texture to cure the white box

by **ABIGAIL STONE** photography by **SAM FROST**



The entryway showcases a collection of vintage round mirrors and oversize carved vintage African vases. The antique Malayer runner was discovered at Lawrence of La Brea.



The formal living room's grasscloth wallcovering was sourced from Phillip Jeffries. Apparatus's Lariat sconces illuminate a print by Rocky Schenck. The wingback chairs are from Lawson-Fenning.

Luxury spec homes continue to spring up all over the west side of L.A., multiplying like mushrooms after a rainstorm. Despite their ambitious goals—the massive rooms, endless white walls and aspirational finishes often add up to interiors that feel cold and cavernous. “It was just a big white box,” says interior designer Alison Palevsky, remembering her first impression of the home in Brentwood she shouldered for a couple and their three children. But the longtime clients had complete confidence in Palevsky’s abilities to transform it. “I’ve known them forever, even before they were married. This is actually our fourth collaboration together,” she says. “So could we make this feel like them: warm

and approachable? Yes, but I knew it would take some work—and a lot of layers.”

She started by stripping the house of its flourishes and finishes. “We took out almost every light fixture, replaced all of the hardware, ripped out the kitchen’s backsplashes and put in a fun tile,” says Palevsky. Emptied of its fittings, the house was a blank canvas for Palevsky’s plans. “The one thing the wife had said to me was, ‘Please give me color and pattern,’” she shares. “So naturally we painted and wallpapered the entire house.”

The mudroom’s oversize cabinetry was washed in a vivid cobalt blue. To give the family room star power, Palevsky chose a soft beige that blushes a peach-toned pink as the sun goes down. The living room and the dining room were united in their touch of formality by a tactile Phillip Jeffries wall covering. The primary

Hector Finch’s large Chiara Pendants in Grigio and custom counter stools from Thomas Hayes underscore the kitchen’s warm white palette. “The client is a big fan of Apparatus,” says Palevsky, who installed the company’s Trapeze 6 over a custom dining table that had been salvaged from the couple’s previous home.



A Phillip Jeffries grasscloth unites the dining room with the formal living room while Fabio Ltd.’s striking Angelo chandelier hangs over the custom dining table.





In the stairwell of the lower level, a custom table, reimagined as a place to play board games, is paired with a vintage game storage console and dining chairs found at Soho Home.



Palevsky reimagined the home's basement level as a swank entertainment salon courtesy of Benjamin Moore's Lafayette Green and a vintage bar imported from the client's previous home. A channel-tufted white swivel chair from Soho Home sits caddy-corner to a custom curved loveseat swathed in green velvet.

bedroom's harsh white was softened to a milky cream. So, too, was the kitchen. But it's downstairs, in the subterranean room that she recast as a swanky entertainment salon, where color really shows its aptitude for alteration. "We're going to repaint everything the greatest color green, and I mean everything. We're just going to embrace it," she remembers telling the couple. "And I love that they were willing to do it." Under Palevsky's tutelage, the hue, in a shade usually associated with dusty libraries, reveals its wild side. The ceiling and the adjoining powder room also joined in the festivities; the former was adorned in a Phillip Jeffries, wallcovering the latter in a whimsical Timorous Beasties wallpaper.

Against this refreshed backdrop, Palevsky superimposed lighting, furniture, accessories and art. "With each project we've done, we always incorporated pieces from their previous house so there's a nice progression that reflects how their taste, their needs and their story has evolved," she says. "The game is in figuring out which are the great pieces that we love and that we don't want to lose and then puzzling out how to work them into the new space." The antique bar that had been in their previous home was a natural fit for that rich green entertainment space. So were its barstools. A pair of Thomas Hayes armchairs tamed the sensuality of the family room's come-hither color while a pair of reupholstered swivel chairs take up residence behind the couch. In the breakfast area, a round table, custom created for a previous home, was the perfect foil for the Apparatus light fixture the wife had her heart set on. A coffee table and a side table—discovered on 1stDibs—anchor the living room.



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The deft placement of furniture helps resize the immense rooms. “It’s about creating vignettes to bring things down to a human scale,” Palevsky notes. Years of experience—coupled with her acute observations of how people interact with their environment—have honed her knowledge of space planning to an art. “It’s not often that you’re entertaining big groups,” she says. “But even when you do, they naturally break out into smaller clusters. So you really want to think in terms of areas that accommodate five or six people, because that’s about the limit for the number that naturally come together in a conversation.” She harnessed the power of multiple configurations to turn that striking green room into the centerpiece of the couple’s social life. “In a city where entertaining at home is the default, we like to think we created this inviting lounge that everyone just wants to hang out in all night.”

Her philosophy winds its way throughout the house. The husband’s request for a place to watch TV that wasn’t the bed manifests as a cozy seating area that adds intimacy to the primary bedroom. A sprawling channel-tufted ottoman and a vintage rug does the same for the primary bathroom. In the family room, the laid-back vibe implied by the pair of sturdy oversize coffee tables, the plump sectional crowded with cushions and a plush Moroccan rug balances the air of Hollywood glamour jump-started by the room’s color and confirmed by the

undulating custom console table and the room’s vibrant art. “Art is so important, especially in a house this large and stark,” says Palevsky, who worked with curator Sophia Penske to source the pieces for the home. “Especially now that they’re collecting across mediums in addition to photography, the artworks’ depth and texture really helps to add another layer.” The result—an exquisite harmony between devastatingly sophisticated and astonishingly livable—is Palevsky’s signature.

“This is not a showhouse. They live in these rooms and they live hard,” she says. “There are three kids and a bunch of dogs and people coming in and out all of the time.” That holds true even for the home’s more formal spaces, like the stately dining room, with its large round mirror, silvered grasscloth and long table, or the moody living room, with its wingback chairs and its plethora of masculine-influenced patterns. “These rooms can’t feel precious or intimidating. They have to really work,” she emphasizes; she employed commercial grade or pretreated fabrics to ensure the host and hostess can relax. “They want people to walk in and feel good and not worry.” No question about it, Palevsky understands what makes a house a home and fills it accordingly—with energy and music and animals and people and memories and life.



A triptych from artist Jason Trotter, a Miles Aldridge chromogenic print and a custom console that undulates behind the sofa settle a glamorous aura over the inviting family room. The Thomas Hayes armchairs were from the clients’ previous home.



In the primary bedroom, a seating area grounded by vintage mid-century furniture—including an Arturo Pani coffee table, a Peter Hvidt & Orla Mølgaard-Nielsen armchair and Tripod side tables—fulfills the husband’s request for a place to watch TV before bed. Persian Garden, Natasha Baradaran’s latest textile collection, was the source for the drapery fabric.



A channel-tufted ottoman from Muskoka Living commandeers the center of the primary bathroom.