

# Architecting the Dream

Architect Christopher Brandon's wife is the muse for the dream home he created for their family

by **ABIGAIL STONE** photography by **MANOLO LANGIS**



**LEFT:** In the living room, a custom L-shaped couch and two club chairs from Lawson-Fenning, upholstered in Mezzo Charcoal discovered at Thomas Lavin, invite visitors to relax. **RIGHT:** In the entry, the rug is from Marc Phillips and the bench is a family heirloom.

In the powder room, the fixtures are by Waterworks and the sconces are by Apparatus.



A custom plaster hood hangs above a Lacanche range in the open kitchen.



LEFT: Portola Paints' Story Teller washes the built-ins in the guest room. "Since my office is nearby and I don't often work from home, we just did a couple of built-in desks in the guest room," says Brandon, "When they're older, the kids will be able to use them for homework." The chairs are from Gubi.



For an architect, the process of creating their own home is a unique opportunity to understand the job from the other side of the desk. "I was really lucky because I had done this before for other people," says Brandon Architect's Christopher Brandon. "But experiencing it myself has made me a much better designer. I can understand a lot more of the minutiae."

He and his wife had begun looking for land on which to erect a house for their family in 2017. "It was a goal to be able to do this for our children while they were young enough to appreciate it," he says, remembering his own childhood in Oregon where he had three quarters of an acre on which to roam. The lot he and his wife eventually found

in Costa Mesa, while not quite as expansive, is substantial for the area. While only 60 feet wide, it stretches back 300 feet. "We could keep the house neat and tidy in terms of footprint, keeping it really far forward and maximizing the use of the street, and then have a big backyard," he notes. That would not only provide a practice area for his sports-loving kids, but would ensure that the house would always be "entertainment-ready," which was important to his wife, Kaley, who serves as the vice president of the firm. "She likes to say that this design was a love letter to her."

A walk through the home confirms the validity of her theory. With a lot of family and friends living nearby, frequent hosting was at the forefront of her desires. "What she saw here was an opportunity to be able to entertain but keep it outside," says Brandon, who notes that it "makes cleanup easier." Keeping her requests uppermost in his mind, he specified an expansive kitchen and a dining room that fully opens to the exterior,

a sunken firepit with plenty of seating, an open-air bar and an outdoor dining space. A pool house—whose pocketing doors, ping-pong table, sprawling sectional and large TV turn it into a hangout pavilion for their children—also nods to her wishes.

His wife loves the landscapes of the wine countries of Napa Valley and the South of France. Those places are reflected in the home's muted color palette, its soothing sage-green landscaping, its steel-framed windows and doors, its varying-width white oak floors, and its use of worn brick and aged cedar. She doesn't like the look of technology so the speakers for the Savant smart home system are artfully concealed and the Sub-Zero refrigerator and freezer and the Wolf appliances are all hidden behind cabinet fronts. And while the Lacanche range showcases cutting-edge features, its design and its color scheme—white with brass accents—offers a timeless look. Because arches are one of his wife's favorite architectural details, "I tried to give her as many as I could," says Brandon. Witness the shape of the French doors that lead to the primary bedroom's terrace, the alcove that frames the freestanding tub in the primary bathroom, the deep bricked archway just beyond the front entry that frames the view through the house and the slatted pantry doors in the kitchen. Even the garage doors display this elegant characteristic.

Interior designer Brooke Wagner, who has collaborated with Brandon on other projects, worked with Kaley Brandon on the home's furniture and accessories. "We really love her aesthetic," says Brandon. "Plus she's got kids just a little bit older than ours and we really loved the insight she shared with us." Wagner's work reinforces Brandon's vision. French blue, cream and soft grays, grounded by browns, blacks and whites, pick up on the home's Mediterranean influences. Comfort and durability—from the living room's large L-shaped couch and deep channel-tufted club chairs, to the kitchen's roomy leather stools, to the long dining table and sturdy chairs, to the solid outdoor furniture—underlines the home's feeling of welcome. "We didn't want guests or our kids to feel like they couldn't relax," says Brandon. "It's a house, not a museum." Dotted throughout are artworks created by family—Brandon's wife's grandmother is a painter, as is his late uncle—and pieces that speak to the couple's history, like the sketch Brandon drew for his wife early on in their relationship, which now hangs in their bedroom. "It's a mix of old and new and things in our lives that remind us of loved ones and cherished memories," says Brandon, "And I think the house is a true expression of the way I run my practice, too. Just trying to be thoughtful, pragmatic and sincere with trying to understand what my clients are looking for out of a home." Designed with love? Most definitely.



In the primary bedroom, an archway inset with steel-framed French doors opens to a deck that overlooks the backyard. Both the sofa and the bed are custom designs and the side chair is a family heirloom.

**THIS PAGE:** Brandon positioned the pool where it would sparkle in the sun for the majority of the year. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** With four olive trees overhead and loose gravel underfoot, the outdoor dining area is reminiscent of both Napa Valley and the South of France.

