

The division between the two structures, covered over and clad in walnut courtesy of Dan Luna Exceptional Woodworking, became the new home's entryway. A rug from Lawrence of La Brea, a Windsor chair discovered at Sumner and a custom brass flush mount confirm the feeling of welcome.



Window treatments created from Perennials fabric soften the light coming through the living room windows. An antique rug from Marc Phillips Rugs is topped by a sofa from MLK Studio covered in Rose Tarlow fabric and a floor lamp from Atelier Vime. The arresting Danish cabinetmaker chair in the foreground was found on 1stDibs.



# Right at Home

Studio Gutow's collected, cool style helps a Laguna Beach family feel right at home

by **ABIGAIL STONE** photography by **MICHAEL GIFFORD** styling by **LISA ROWE**



Hector Finch's Double Rise and Fall hangs over a custom dining table. The chairs were discovered at Formations. A custom banquette is plump with cushions created from Schumacher linen.



ABOVE: A Lacanche stove is supported by custom white oak kitchen cabinetry that—as is the case with the rest of the home's cabinetry—was designed by Studio Gutow and crafted by Dan Luna Exceptional Woodworking. BELOW: The rug is from Lawrence of La Brea. The vintage slatted-wood bar stools were designed by Arthur Umanoff. The kitchen's ceramic collection is by Makoto Kagoshima.

The pandemic changed our idea of a great home. Spare, monochromatic spaces that could be mistaken for museums have given way to homes plush with color and pattern that radiate life, with all of its imperfections. The new definition of a great home encompasses patina. It celebrates imperfection. It's about ease. It's layered and welcoming. And it's what drives the work of Studio Gutow, as exemplified by this home in Laguna Beach's Emerald Bay.

"I think what you'll see is that our signature style focuses on making every space feel comfortable and lived in," says Lisa Berman. "And collected," adds her colleague, Melissa Rohani. "Like it's not going to be just one note, you know?" In fact, it was during their first full-house collaboration—on this home belonging to Rohani and her husband—that the duo honed their partnership and their philosophy.

Built in the 1930s, the cottage had belonged to Warren Buffett's family. They'd remodeled it over the years to accommodate their changing needs, effacing its charm and beauty. But Rohani saw its potential and felt it would be ideal for the disparate needs of her blended family of toddlers and twenty-somethings. "Lots of homes here are very rectangular," Rohani notes. "This one wasn't."

But there was a lot of work to be done to create a home that synced with Rohani and Berman's ideals. They tore down the sheetrock that hid the home's beautiful tongue-and-groove ceiling. It was originally two distinct structures. Berman and Rohani unified them: one became the main house; the other showcases a suite that welcomes guests and "the big kids." They captured that space in between for the new home's entryway.





Enveloped in walnut, with a dimensional tray ceiling punctuated by an aged brass fixture, “it pulled everything together,” says Berman. “It immediately feels welcoming.” It also serves to coax the newly enclosed courtyard into the daily life of the home.

An awkward veranda that wrapped halfway around the house was enclosed, expanding the home’s new living room. It acts in concert with the dining room and the kitchen to turn that half of the house into a large entertaining space. A new tongue-and-groove ceiling that seamlessly matches the original and new walnut floors unify the interior into one coherent whole. The floor’s slight undulations (a consequence from being hand-laid) and cracks between the ceiling boards are intentional. “It’s meant to look as if it’s all been there since the house was built,” says Berman.

Structural reasons prohibited the removal of a half wall that separates the living area from the dining room. “We took something that was annoying at first and made it useful,” says Rohani. “To us, those challenges create the charm.” Adds Berman: “Instead

of starting with the perfect blank slate, it becomes: How do we turn a problem into something really interesting and respect it?” A long banquette, plump with pillows and tucked into the niche it creates, confirms the home’s cozy vibe.

A trio of white oak cabinets in the living room hide a fully stocked beverage station, complete with a sink and a wine fridge. “So you don’t have to walk around to the kitchen to get what you need,” says Rohani. “It’s all there.” Their design is echoed in the kitchen where a standalone piece of furniture opens to the pantry. A quartet of their sleek cousins can also be found in the family room: one hides a beverage station; another Rohani’s husband’s office. Hidden by pocket doors, his workstation disappears when the workday’s done.

“We were very granular about how we wanted the space to feel,” says Berman. “Every detail was labored over. Our craftspeople were chosen because they understood our vision.” To complement the meticulous backdrop they’d created, they filled the home with furniture and accessories of equal caliber.

**LEFT:** In the powder room, a hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper with a fish motif is paired with a Gubi mirror and plumbing fixtures from Waterworks. **RIGHT:** A sofa from Verellen, swaddled in a striped green linen, a rug found at Woven and library lights from Obsolete make the family room cozy.

The family room doubles as Rohani’s husband’s office. Built-in walnut cabinetry, created by Dan Luna Exceptional Woodworking, hides his desk behind doors that pocket away when the workday is done.





LEFT: Il Colore Venetian plaster walls surround the primary bedroom, which sprawls across the top floor. Burlwood nightstands and a vintage upholstered door panel is hung as art over the bed. RIGHT: Two vanities, a freestanding tub and a walk-in shower completely encased in marble, with its floor scored for safety, pack luxury into the primary bathroom.





Stone flooring from Exquisite Surfaces connects the courtyard with the entryway. The wicker coffee tables are from Hollywood at Home by Peter Dunham. The sofa is from RH.

"We do a ton of vintage furniture because most of it is handmade. That resonates with us," says Rohani. "Plus, with small children, everything needs to be comfortable and well made and durable so it doesn't get ruined in the first week." Wooden pieces are made from solid wood, not veneers. Many pieces were found on 1stDibs. Los Angeles' antique emporiums proved invaluable: There are pieces from Lucca Antiques, Nickey Kehoe and Obsolete and rugs from Lawrence of La Brea, Marc Phillips and Woven. The powder room's mesmerizing turquoise fish mural is a hand-painted wallcovering

from De Gournay. The kitchen's stove is a custom model from Lacanche. Fixtures were found at Waterworks; there are lights from Apparatus and Hector Finch. That standard was also carried through to the children's rooms. "We want things that grow," says Rohani. "We don't like furniture that gets thrown away."

After the project was complete, Rohani answered the phone to the sound of Berman bawling. "I was crying because I loved what we did together so much," Berman explains. This house was made with love. And it shows.



**ABOVE:** Wayne Pate + Studio Four NYC Trois Blooms wallpaper, the Harriett Spindle Bed in natural pine stain from the Beautiful Bed Company and a nightstand from Nickey Kehoe complete the little girl's bedroom. **BELOW:** Blush and copper tones continue in the girl's bathroom.