

## ***How to Design Your House Over Zoom***



Virtual platform The Expert, founded by 31-year-old Jake Arnold, connects consumers to mega A-list interior designers: 'E-design is normally so cheesy'

By Abigail Stone

**F**or some, lockdown was an endless parade of binge-watching and binge-eating. Not for **Jake Arnold**. The interior designer, 31, who made *THR*'s 2019 Top 20 designers list, managed to launch virtual platform The Expert ([theexpert.com](http://theexpert.com)) with entrepreneur **Leo Seigal** (co-founder of Represent).

The site directly connects interior designers with consumers for video consultation calls. It offers unprecedented access to a list of 100 names including Hollywood favorites **Martyn Lawrence Bullard**, **Jamie Bush**, **Joy Moyler**, **Kishani Perera**, DISC Interiors, Woodson & Rummerfield and **Brigette Romanek**. Arnold unveiled it in between working on projects for high-profile clients, including **John Legend** and **Chrissy Teigen**, **Aaron Paul**, **Rashida Jones** and **Dan Levy**, and perfecting collections for Parachute and Crate & Barrel, debuting in 2022.

“When designers heard Jake was attached, they wanted to get involved right away,” says Seigal, whose lightbulb moment was prompted by the many unread Instagram messages in Arnold’s account asking for decor advice.

“E-design is normally so cheesy,” Arnold points out. “I was really apprehensive because I thought there’s no way something effective can happen on one video chat.” But, he admits, “it turns out that everything that feels pretty standard to me is information the average consumer doesn’t have.”

Since going live in February, The Expert has fielded thousands of calls with clients worldwide, including *SNL*’s **Chloe Fineman**, who’s decorating her West Village home under the guidance of Australia-based **Tali Roth**. Prices, set by designers, range from \$400 to \$2,500 a session.”



From left: Jake Arnold on a videoconference call on The Expert platform; Co-founders Leo Seigal (left) and Arnold.

In March, The Expert raised \$3 million, with investors including WndrCo and **Gwyneth Paltrow**. Seigal credits the interest in the platform to Arnold’s arresting style. His understated, inviting spaces showcase elegant millwork and furnishings that resonate against saturated walls. “In California, you’re surrounded by light,” Arnold notes. “Sometimes you want to have somewhere in your house that is a little moody.” It’s an approach prompted by his childhood in London: “Growing up surrounded by beautiful architectural elements gave me an appreciation for depth and longevity.”

It’s this sensibility that lured MRC Live & Alternative vice chairman **Mike Mahan** and his wife, **Brooke**, a co-founder of the YouTube channel *WhatsUpMoms* and creator of the card game *Do You Know Me?* The couple engaged the full services of Arnold’s firm (before The Expert launched) to spruce up the Brentwood Park home they purchased in 2018. (MRC is a co-owner of *THR* through a joint venture with Penske Media titled PMRC.)

“Everything felt very cold,” says Arnold, recalling his first impression of the 13,558-square-foot home, built as a spec. “Normally, we would have done everything,” he adds. But instead of gutting the interiors — amid the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic — he focused on updating select details, including the fireplaces and the kitchen’s countertops and hardware.

Throughout, highly pigmented paints wash intimacy over the generous rooms. “The light in the house is good, plus they’d seen so many of my dark rooms, they felt confident going dark,” says Arnold. Vintage pieces and bold artwork partner with Arnold’s custom fabricated designs, from the dining room chairs to a voluptuous tufted bed. “I love that the house is so beautiful yet not precious,” says Brooke Mahan. “We use every single room.”