



# Work of Art

BLENDING TRADITIONAL AND  
MODERN DESIGN, A LOS ANGELES  
INTERIOR DESIGNER AND  
ARCHITECT CUSTOMIZES A TUSCAN  
HOME FOR A COUPLE IN PALOS  
VERDES ESTATES WITH ARTWORK  
AND HINTS OF THEIR HERITAGE.

WRITTEN BY JENNIE NUNN | PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAUREN TAYLOR







Once their last child moved away to attend college, longtime Palos Verdes residents Rajiv and Archana Shah were ready for a fresh beginning in a new home. “We had lived in Palos Verdes for 20+ years and had no desire to leave,” explains Rajiv. “We enjoy the sense of community in Palos Verdes, the proximity to the ocean, the climate and the air quality.”

They found the ideal lot in Palos Verdes Estates containing a single-family residence built in 1957. It boasts expansive views of the Santa Monica Bay and Queen’s Necklace from Redondo Beach to Malibu. The couple knew they wanted to start anew and make it their own.

“It was old, and the floor plan was small. It made more sense from both a design and fiscal perspective to rebuild,” Rajiv says. “We wanted a contemporary home that would maximize the view. Because family is very important to us, it needed to feel like a family home. We envisioned casual elegance that was warm and welcoming to family and friends. Archana is an artist, which influenced our vision of creating a more neutral palette that would showcase the art and furnishings.”

The couple hired architect Douglas Leach and his eponymous Redondo Beach firm to design the 4,500-square-foot, Tuscan-style, 3-bedroom, 4½-bath abode. When the home was in the framing stage, they knew they needed help with the interiors to combine Archana’s oil-on-canvas paintings with antiques and sculptures culled from their travels to India. Their wish list included





an open floor plan, and modern furniture, lighting and accessories. At the recommendation of a friend, they tapped Los Angeles architect and interior designer May Sung, AIA, of SUBU Design Architecture.

"We appreciated May's unique ability to integrate the architecture with the interior design," says Rajiv, who also viewed May's portfolio on Houzz. "That is what convinced us she could make our vision for our home a reality."

May, who typically designs both architecture and interiors, was tasked with modernizing the existing space. She needed to blend Rajiv and Archana's styles and incorporate rich colors from their Indian heritage—such as red and saffron—as well as personal artwork and collected pieces. "I'm calling it 'PV-terranean' because stylistically Palos Verdes has developed a unique Mediterranean aesthetic," says May.

Some of the elements she added to the exterior include a mahogany wood door and modern lanterns. "Because it's so traditional on the outside, I said to them, 'Think about this as a European villa that you inherited [with a coffered ceiling and

beams in the kitchen], and it's evolving to today's time. We're still going to have a lot of traditional elements, but we'll pare it down so we're modernizing the interior. We can still play with a lot of drama in terms of fixtures and color,'" shares May.

Although the couple was scaling down for their current needs, they didn't want to compromise on sophistication or functionality. "They said, 'We are downsizing but upgrading,'" explains May. "They wanted a modern, lush interior where they would be able to use silk, velvet, mohair and luxury materials. They were drawn to European brands like Minotti [for the living room, primary bedroom and library furniture], Dedon exterior furniture and Bocci light fixtures."

In the living room, May outfitted the space with a custom stone fireplace mantle and surround by Impression in Torrance; an Andersen sectional sofa and Song coffee table from Minotti; a colorful oil-on-canvas painting by Archana; and a statue the couple purchased from a sculptor on one of their trips to India.

"Spirituality is important to us, and we wanted a place for a statue of Ganesha [a Hindu deity]

"I always believe you need to bring your client's personality and their story. There are a lot of subtleties in each room. It works together."











and Buddha,” says Rajiv. “We also wanted spaces to display Archana’s artwork,” which was a central component of the design.

“Her artwork rotates,” points out May, “and it’s almost like she’s painting for the house and creating art depending on the mood. I always believe you need to bring your client’s personality and their story. There are a lot of subtleties in each room. It works together.”

Moments of refined bling, personal touches and drama are woven throughout the home. In the dining room there’s a custom table with sculptural legs that Archana had made in India, a framed tapestry from India and light mocha-hued dining chairs by Minotti. The kitchen is home to a bronze mirror-wrapped hood, Aston counter stools by Minotti and a molten glass branch-like “16” chandelier by Bocci. The primary bedroom features a Creed bed and Leslie armchair by Minotti and a playful Bocci “87” pendant recalling squiggly noodles or stretched pasta.

But the space with deliberate wow factor is the powder room, with floor-to-ceiling antique mirrored tiles procured in India, a custom leather Nero Marquina vanity, and an “84” Bocci hand-blown glass pendant with copper mesh baskets that casts a rose-hued glow. “It’s very different than the other rooms in the house,” says May. “I always like the idea of the powder room as an element of surprise.”

The completed design—replete with a putting green, living wall and cozy but modern outdoor living room with a fireplace for nightly sunset viewing—has surpassed their expectations. “I love how much drama there is and how we were able to create their vision and maintain the integrity of the traditional elements,” adds May. “They love it, and they tell me their kids love it too. They actually think it’s cool now to come home.” ■

