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Architectural Artistry

Harrison Design Associates Creates
Livable Works Of Art

BY ANN LINGLE



Multiple terraces highlight different views to take advantage of California's temperate climate.



"ARCHITECTURE IN GENERAL IS frozen music," said German philosopher Friedrich von Schelling. That being the case, the architects at Harrison Design Associates have been maestros since 1991. The firm's principals, Bill Harrison, Tony Spann, and Greg Palmer, approach all projects, no matter how small or grand, as singular melodic works of art reflecting the goals and desires of their clients. "Clients come to us with their needs, and from that, we make objective art," says Harrison. "We have designed residential projects as large as 70,000 square feet, and as small as a stone English Cotswold cottage at 1,200 square feet." They are currently designing a boutique hotel, bringing a stone church from Buffalo, New York, to Atlanta, and restoring historic properties in Santa Barbara. "We've even done doghouses and playhouses for children's charities," he says, laughing.

An example of this commitment to create the perfect house for a particular client is a 25,000 square foot Palladian Revival villa on more than an acre in Bel-Air, California. The entry is unpretentious, with a winding private driveway leading to a walled arrival court flanked by one hundred-year-old olive trees. "The drive up is understated. Our clients are very sophisticated and they didn't want to overwhelm," says Robert Tretsch, Harrison Design principal on this project. The entrance façade, pilasters and front door are a Palladian derivative, proportioned in the classical Tuscan order. The house has minimal architectural ornamentation with a muted palette that allows furnishings, antiques, art and expansive views to become focal points. The Italianate exterior features include stained wood brackets, a clay tile roof, copper half-round gutters and stained mahogany windows and doors, and steel-trowel rendered stucco. "The siting of this



TOP The library features stained walnut paneling. ABOVE In the Italianate kitchen with its beamed ceiling, old wooden freezer doors conceal the pantry. TOP RIGHT The loggia has Venetian plastered walls and European stone floors. RIGHT All rooms have expansive views of either the gardens, the city or the ocean. FAR RIGHT The woman's bath has a white Calcutta gold marble floor and shower and a large groin vault ceiling with a skylight in the middle.



house maximizes all the views," describes Tretsch. "There are 180 degree views of Century City and the Pacific Ocean. From the master bedroom and loggia there are city views, while the breakfast terrace has an ocean view."

Craftsmen were hired to make the interiors special through the use of Venetian plaster in public spaces and antique European stone flooring in the main gallery, vestibule, salon and ballroom. There are also handscraped wood floors and timber beams. All the cabinetry in the house is custom, with the library made special through stained walnut paneling. "The large mirror frame from the original mansion on the site is engraved into the library," says Tretsch, "while the wood freezer door from that house is now repurposed as a pantry door."

The entry hall features a half-dome lit from above, something rarely done, because of the complex level of craftsmanship required. "From the entry the visitor is pulled through the house," explains Harrison. "At first, the viewer looks up at the rotunda. After that, a procession of spaces expands and contracts, pulling one through the house. For example, the grand salon elongates, while the loggia hugs with its views." The lower level is set up for entertaining, with doors opening out to the pool and cabana. There are multiple outdoor terraces highlighting different views. The large, level, rear lawn is designed for outdoor living, a desirable amenity in the hills of Southern California.

All in all, Harrison Design Associates, with offices in Atlanta as well as Beverly Hills and Santa Barbara, designed the best possible house to fill their clients' needs. "Our goal is to create not only great architecture, but also to excel in service," says Tretsch. With all that in mind, this architectural project has succeeded with an artfully orchestrated crescendo. Bravo! ☐