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THE FORMALITY OF THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE CASUALNESS OF SHINGLED EAST COAST HOMES MELD IN A NEWPORT BEACH HOUSE CREATING A FRESH TAKE ON CALIFORNIA STYLE.

WRITTEN BY JOANNE FURIO PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHIPPER HATTER

INTERIOR DESIGN Melinda Grubbs, Melinda Grubbs Interior Design

ARCHITECTURE Christian R. Light, C. J. Light Associates

HOME BUILDER Robert D. McCarthy, RDM General Contractors

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE Michael Dilley, MDZA Landscape Architecture

BEDROOMS 3 | BATHROOMS 5 | SQUARE FEET 6,300



Interior designer Melinda Grubbs created a gracious living area in a Newport Beach home with a quartet of custom chairs and a Dennis & Leen sofa. A carved limestone fireplace and custom moldings evoke a traditional feel, while draperies made with a Nobilis silk-satin lend a sense of formality.

When building a house, homeowners believe they are creating something new. What they are really designing, though, is a pastiche of all the places they have ever loved. That's what happened to a retired couple from California, who had spent 15 years on the East Coast, including the Washington, D.C., area, when the husband once worked in the White House. They admired the formality of the South and the White House environment, but they were also drawn to the informality of the shingled houses found in Cape Cod and the Hamptons. The location they had in mind, however, was approximately 3,000 miles from such places and a world apart: a waterfront parcel overlooking the harbor of Newport Beach.

To make sense of these disparate influences, the couple called on interior designer Melinda Grubbs. "The design really came from their desire to bring some of the grandeur of the White House to their own house, while keeping the friendliness of a Cape Cod," says Grubbs, who also introduced the couple to the scaled-up traditional style of architect Robert A.M. Stern. To help bring the vision to life, she recommended architect Christian R. Light, who has designed many shingle-style residences in the region. "The shingle style fits Southern California very well, especially in ocean environments," observes Light, who designed the structure to combine the cedar shingles, white trim and slate roof reflective of a classic East Coast home, and anchored it with a base made of stacked stone. "For the exterior, we used the best parts of the Cape Cod shingle style," notes Light, "then contemporized and detailed the house in our own unique vision."



In the dining area, Grubbs added custom silk shades to a light fixture from Linden Rose & Co. and suspended it above a custom-sized mahogany table by Rose Tarlow Melrose House. The dining chairs, sporting a custom finish, are by Niermann Weeks.



Inside, Grubbs underscored the East Coast influence with a slew of architectural details, which also help subtly define spaces within the open-plan great room. An arch separates the kitchen and dining areas, while an ebony border on the walnut floor visually delineates the living area. She capped the room by applying crown molding as the base of “a magnificent curved ceiling detail,” says Grubbs, who also surrounded a three-story free-floating circular staircase in the entry with white paneled walls that begin with the top-floor crown molding and drop down to the wine cellar. “Our original inspiration for the interior architectural detailing was Stern’s work along with many other images I’d collected over the years,” notes Grubbs. “All of the moldings and details were designed on a slightly larger scale and all were fabricated with blades that were custom-cut for this project.”

Across from the bar in the open-plan great room, a highboy by Charles Fradin is flanked by Dennis & Leen Dutchess wing chairs upholstered with McGuire linen. The antique prints of royal crests are from Antonio’s Bella Casa.



Custom cabinetry marks the open kitchen, which features marble countertops, a Viking cooktop and multi-level grid-patterned millwork on the ceiling. The French iron pendants are from Blake House. A Roman shade made with fabric from Janet Yonaty crowns the adjacent breakfast area.

When it came to furnishings, Grubbs chose classic styles with larger proportions to complement the scale of the interiors. She designed four armchairs for the living area of the great room and had a custom mahogany table made to accommodate up to 10 for the dining area. Dining chairs were custom-finished to marry the cream and golden colors—a California version of the wife’s penchant for yellow—of the living area with the cream and brick colors of the kitchen. The brick hue and touches of blue, found sprinkled throughout, were inspired by Colonial architecture. Adding to the formal feel of the design is the use of “very fine fabrics and drapery everywhere,” Grubbs says of the embroidered silk-satin and heavy linen lavishly detailed with plenty of passementerie.

The landscaping likewise reflects a mixing of the coasts. “It has a blend of East Coast traditional styles with some West Coast plant choices,” says landscape architect Michael Dilley, who planted East Coast favorites such as hydrangea, boxwood and birch along with warm-weather species including gardenias and stephanotis near the house’s more sheltered entry to protect them from the salt air of the harbor.



Architect Christian R. Light designed the structure to embrace East Coast elements including cedar shingles, white trim and a slate roof. Stone creates a solid base for the waterfront home, which was constructed by builder Robert D. McCarthy.



In the master bedroom, Grubbs created a romantic environment with a silver-leaf-accented bed and chinoiserie side table from Nancy Corzine. Water views are framed with draperies made with a Cowtan & Tout pale blue heavy linen with a cream silk-sueded appliqué.



A Candide burnished-nickel tub by Waterworks stands beneath a rock crystal chandelier by Dennis & Leen in the master bath. Draperies are made with embroidered linen from Cowtan & Tout with a seed pearl trim, and the floors are pure white limestone from Paris Ceramics.

The waterfront locale also required special attention when it came to the house's construction, as the owners requested a full basement level complete with a theater and wine cellar. "We had to have pumps running 24/7 to evacuate any water on the premises while the basement was being built," says builder Robert D. McCarthy, who worked with project manager Chris Lindsay and site superintendent Scott Morgan. Foot-thick foundation walls were double-waterproofed to keep such subterranean spaces dry.

"In the beginning it was a challenge to blend formality with the easy living of California," says Grubbs, "but I think we pulled it off." The homeowners couldn't agree more. "When you build a house, you make thousands of decisions and hope that it comes together in some way," says the husband. "This one went beyond our wildest dreams." **L**



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