

One of the owners is an artist: his studio has an easel-style lift-up desk, a modern-day cabinet of curiosities filled with objects that inspire him, and serene views through the treetops of the estate.

# Fun House

One of the oldest mansions in L.A. has been given a *fantastical makeover* complete with *trompe-l'oeil* murals, taxidermy unicorns and an *indoor forest*...

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The central seat in the sitting room is built around a centrepiece made from rock-crystal flowers on steel stems, above a hanging chrome chandelier. The drape running beneath the ceiling is part fabric, part plaster and part mural

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series of wonders' is how the American interior designer Timothy Corrigan defines this elaborate renovation of a 1920s house in Los Angeles. And, considering the thought, invention and extraordinary attention to detail that has gone into its creation, it's an apt description.

The owners are a real-estate developer and his partner, and the project has been, for them, a labour of love 10 years in the making. The house was built by the well-known American architect Gordon Kaufmann in the Mediterranean Revival style and, as a historic landmark, was subject to tight planning restrictions, so much so they went through a five-year process with an architect before they could even consider the decoration.

Once their plans were approved, they wanted their home to break the mould in the area in terms of its interiors, and Corrigan, a designer with a reputation for working on high-end, classical houses, whose clientele runs a starry gamut from Madonna to Middle Eastern royalty, was the perfect choice. "They said to me, 'Here we are in one of the most creative cities in the world, yet so few homes are done with any real creativity,'" recalls Corrigan. "The Californian style tends to be a little bland, not that imaginative. They wanted this house to be all about creativity and to push boundaries in unusual ways."

What followed was another five-year journey that would exceed the expectations of both owners and designer. Other than a few antiques dotted throughout the rooms, everything in the house is bespoke, from the show-stopping centrepiece seat in the sitting room, from which sprouts a bouquet of hand-carved rock-crystal flowers, to the custom fabrics, innovative wallcoverings and spectacular light fittings found throughout. "I think it would be safe to say that we sourced from every single continent," says Corrigan. "It was really a question of, 'What's the craziest thing we can do that's still going to be interesting and fun, that plays with the senses – and how can we do that while retaining a level of taste?'"

The sitting room – which has a stage at one end, ready for when one of the owners' celebrity friends feels moved to break into a performance – is an example of the extent of the

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attention paid to each element of this house. When a 1920s fireplace surrounded by wooden panelling that originated from an English country house was found to be not quite high enough to fill a wall of the room, Corrigan had to think of a solution to fill the gap between the panelling and the ceiling. His response was to take inspiration

from the Catalan muralist Josep Maria Sert, also active during the 1920s, and known for his *trompe-l'œil* murals framed by images of drapes.

A drape motif now encircles the room just below the ceiling: a trick of the eye that is part turquoise striped satin, part plaster moulded and painted to resemble the fabric, and part mural hand-painted on to the wall. A specialist who had restored Sert's work in Europe was flown over to paint the walls here, which have been silver-leafed and also decorated with *trompe-l'œil* murals. Similarly, the bespoke chandeliers look like classic cut crystal, but are in fact made of chrome. "It's a traditional thing but done in an unusual way, with a twist," says Corrigan.

Elsewhere, each room in the house has been designed along a theme. The plumage of the stuffed peacock that holds court in the formal dining room is echoed in the cobalt-blue lacquer of the walls, peacock upholstery of the 18th-century dining chairs and gilded ceiling. The breakfast room is sheathed in real leaves, soaked in glycerin, attached to a fabric backing and made into curtains and a covering for the ceiling, while the hall has the look of an enchanted forest, complete with

a pair of unicorns made by the Parisian taxidermists Deyrolle, their horns crossing as if engaged in a swordfight.

It may have taken 10 years of work before the owners could move in, but the chances are they're not done with it yet. The house originally stood on an estate of 22 acres, one of the oldest in L.A., complete with orchards and riding rings, which had gradually been sold off over the years. Ever since they bought it, they have been in the process of buying back the land, piece by piece, and now have a vineyard, amphitheatre and two swimming pools. "I wouldn't be surprised if they decided to continue bringing it back to its original size," says Corrigan. "It's been quite a process so far." □





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A view of the house from one of the two swimming pools in the grounds. The property was built by acclaimed American architect Golden Kaufman in the Mediterranean Revival style.

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