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the next chapter

When her daughters grew up and moved out, Los Angeles decorator Sasha Emerson downsized to a traditional cottage—without sacrificing one lick of her funky flea-market chic.

written by SUSAN HEEGER | photographs by LISA ROMEREIN

EXIT



A jute basket from World Market, filled with colorful quilts, sits beneath a reclaimed-oak table. The trompe l'oeil wallpaper is from Anthropologie.

Stonington Gray
Benjamin Moore



Sasha Emerson reupholstered these armchairs in cotton ticking and fashioned the window shades from linen chintz. Tweaking those traditional fabrics? An ad for a French furniture store, bought at Vintage European Posters in Berkeley, and a resin elephant table from the 1960s.

BELOW Sasha Emerson (center) challenges pals Eric Gomez and Katie Wong to a game of bocce in the backyard.

RIGHT A painted-wood Moroccan table strikes an exotic note in the living room. Paul Smith suiting wool covers the low-slung 1940s chair; baby-blue velvet updates the 1960s Dunbar sofa. Emerson scored the flamboyant oil portrait at an estate sale.



A few years ago, Sasha Emerson found herself at a turning point. Two of her daughters had just left for college; the third, a teenager, already had one foot out the door. Wandering the halls of the family's sprawling Los Angeles home, situated in the wilds of Rustic Canyon, Emerson was struck by something disconcerting: For the first time in nearly 17 years, the place was quiet.

"A house can symbolize big changes in your heart," she says. The interior designer's heart was telling her to reboot and downsize—to an English-style cottage in L.A.'s stately Hancock Park neighborhood. With dark oak floors, French doors, and a gabled brick exterior, the cozy 1922 home couldn't have been more different from the expansive midcentury modern cube Emerson was leaving behind. And that's exactly what inspired her.

First, though, she needed to get rid of a lot of stuff. Faced with enough furniture to fill 4,500 square feet—yet only half that much space—Emerson enlisted friends to help edit her belongings. "It was fun," she remembers, "like trying on clothes. 'Should I leave off the scarf? Lose the jewelry?' I wanted less clutter, more precision." She then donated the excess and recast what remained to better suit her new old house. A set of 1950s Thonet dining chairs, once upholstered in sedate navy velvet, now wear a blooming zinnia print. Ticking stripes (*continued on page 91*)

Witching Hour
Benjamin Moore

bright idea!

Emerson had an electrician turn midcentury pendant lamps into a chandelier by wiring them to a single ceiling plate.



Framed sections of 1960s wallpaper lend country charm to the dining room, furnished with a salvaged school-library table, a Michaelian & Kohlberg rug, and midcentury Thonet chairs clad in floral fabric. Emerson discovered the 1930s ceramic-bull doorstop at the Rose Bowl Flea Market.



**bright
idea!**

Matching wood frames transform food-themed ephemera (labels, grocery ads, and menus) into a polished collection.

Coventry Gray
Benjamin Moore



A bit of Pop-Art attitude prevents Sasha Emerson's decor from reading too traditional.

THIS PAGE Emerson framed a 1960s supermarket ad as a cheeky homage to Andy Warhol's soup can. The ceramic canisters are from the same period.

OPPOSITE PAGE Orange mohair revives a vintage maple stool in the kitchen, where Carrara marble upgrades Ikea cabinets. Task lighting comes in the form of suspended Edison bulbs, covered with Victorian wire shades. The cast-aluminum fox wine cooler was designed by Arthur Court.

A supersize sampler, by Dutch artist Reed van Brunschot, greets guests in the living room. Emerson created the window shades by having an 1890s botanical print transferred onto linen. She found the 1960s card catalog at a flea market; the linen wing chair is from Cisco Home.

Whisper
Dunn-Edwards



bright idea!

Voila Gallery prints antique botanical and zoological posters onto fabric. To choose from their 100-plus designs, e-mail katrien@voilagallery.com.

Emerson mixed pedigreed pieces alongside those purchased for pennies.



LEFT Mismatched woven chairs and a teak table set the scene for meals in the backyard entertaining area.

BELOW In the guest room, both the raffia headboard and the floral bedding came from West Elm. Nickey Kehoe makes the silk-and-linen pillow. Emerson nabbed the caned rocker, still wearing its 1960s paint, at a junk shop.



(continued from page 86) covered other seats. And pastel-glass pendant lights, which had marched down her former hallway in a single-file line, came together as a striking chandelier.

"I began this project in an unusually reflective state of mind," says Emerson, who drew upon memories of the 1850s Massachusetts farmhouse where she'd spent childhood summers. Hence, the patchwork quilts, woven baskets, and a pair of framed wallpaper panels that depict pastoral scenes in a folksy style reminiscent of Grandma Moses. But in addition to that New England farmhouse, the designer also grew up in a 1960s Manhattan high-rise. So a bit of Pop-Art attitude prevents the decor from reading too traditional. One bedroom's bentwood rocker is painted bright green, while photo-realistic wallpaper fools the eye into thinking that books have been stacked floor to ceiling in the laundry room.

Emerson admits to ripping off Andy Warhol, by framing old grocery-store ads for canned goods. "I hang them like museum art, though they're not worth much," she explains with a laugh. Such confident curation—of pedigreed pieces alongside those purchased for pennies—underscores a wealth of wit. In downsizing, this almost-empty-nester may have ceded some square footage, but she's not given up one bit of her freewheeling sense of humor. "Predictability gets boring," Emerson declares. "With every change, I still like to surprise myself." ♦