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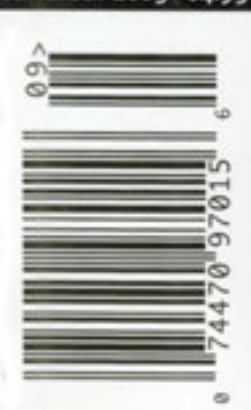
Mid-Century Masterpiece
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IT'S A MOD, MOD WORLD!

An interior decorator scraps the museum-approved sofas and proves that mid-century house rules were meant to be broken

BY ALEXANDRIA ABRAMIAN-MOTT PHOTOGRAPHY BY ART GRAY

When it came to restoring their 1969 post-and-beam Brentwood house, the owners, both architecture buffs, took the high road. The hilltop home, designed by mid-century architects Conrad Buff and Donald Hensman, required specialists of all stripes to save it from a bad case of the '80s. The redwood beams throughout were faux-painted back to glory after it was determined that sandblasting the white paint off would damage the wood. The atriums and gardens were replanted, and details throughout—the cement floor tiles, the stone hearth in the den, the swimming pool—were painstakingly restored. Even the kitchen was renovated under the consultation of a current architect with the Buff & Hensman firm.

By the time interior designer Sasha Emerson was hired to decorate the house, however, she found that even though the owners had executed a to-the-letter restoration, they weren't interested in taking any academic approaches to the design. Forget filling the home with Nelson lamps and Hans Wegner chairs; they wanted color and fun. "The decorating process had to be about adventure," says Emerson. "I felt that the house had a 1960s dreamy Asian feel, and I wanted it to feel clean and simple and California, and yet comfortable and quirky. I wanted the look to be true to the house."

Starting with what she calls "guiding objects"—bold pieces that would determine the direction of a room—Emerson began building around them. In the den or, as Emerson calls it, "the crazy purple room," that object was a 1960s velvet sofa that the clients loved. In the living room, the onyx fireplace and views of the pool dictated a palette of soft blues, greens and yellows. And in the den/breakfast room, a pair of chartreuse sofas led the way.

Emerson and the owners began hunting high and low for funky Murano-glass ashtrays, groovy lamps and furniture that would fulfill that "sixties-era Shanghai luxury hotel feel." They went everywhere from flea markets to Palm Springs boutiques to even—*gasp*—Ross. Mostly, however, Emerson relied on her eye to refinish vintage pieces in updated ways. Chairs were reupholstered, lampshades recovered, and almost every hard surface got a few coats of lacquer. CONTINUED...

The Buff & Hensman-designed pool was completely restored. All landscaping by Pamela Burton.






Left: The owners purchased the bird lamps in Hawaii. The 1960s end tables were lacquered yellow and have the original hardware. Purchased at Fat Chance, 323.930.1960. Above: In the entryway, a punch of teal provides a backdrop to a 1960s rattan side table that is lacquered black.

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And now, after a year of searching for mostly mid-century objects that aren't in every other post-and beam-home, the result is a house that stays true to its architecture and its owners. "This isn't a severe, purist vision of mid-century interiors," says Emerson. "The furniture is quirky and loud, and yet the experience of the house is all about warmth and serenity." 

Opposite: In the den, decorator Sasha Emerson relied on the purple sofa as a "guiding object." Rust-colored end tables designed by Emerson. Murano lamps with shades by Market Fantasy Lighting. **Above:** The onyx fireplace was a launching point for the living room, which is done in cool yellows, greens and blues. Monteverdi Young's 1959 brass lotus coffee table from Downtown. **Right:** In the family room, Regency custom lacquer dining table and French-style tall back chairs, c. 1960. A pair of Dunbar-style sofas and white marble coffee table, c. 1960, all purchased at Downtown, 310.652.7461.

