

for art's sake

Designer James Magni creates
a contemporary Beverly Hills home where the owners' collection
takes center stage

By Catherine Applefeld Olson
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIAN THOMAS JONES

OPPOSITE: *The view from the far end of the home's first gallery shows the dramatic scale of the limestone-floored space.*



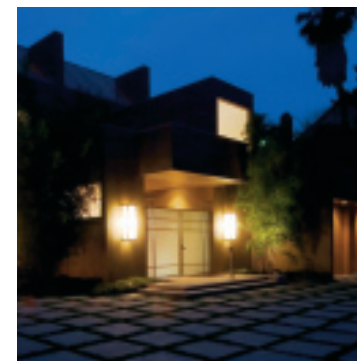


when longtime clients asked James Magni to create a Beverly Hills home to showcase their extensive art collection, the designer knew a delicate balancing act was in order.

The space demanded understated elegance to complement works by artists such as Ed Ruscha, Joel Shapiro, Cindy Sherman, Roy Lichtenstein, Barbara Kruger, and Jenny Holzer. It needed to exude equal grace when hosting either a 300-person reception—the wife is a trustee of Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art—or an intimate gathering.

“What’s interesting about this house is that it’s 13,500 square feet, but it’s really a one-bedroom house. It’s mostly public space,” Magni recalls. “This was really an exercise in how to take a contemporary home and bring in warm elements, and orchestrate that mixture in a very studied, academic way so that it doesn’t look too singular or forced.”

After editing out existing tiered-gardens and heavily layered interiors, Magni set about creating a series of clean-lined, museum-like reception halls conjoined by more intimate gathering rooms and grounded by historical pieces. Upon entrance, visitors find themselves in a 3,500-square-foot space that houses several large-scale works and serves as a main hall for entertaining.




OPPOSITE: *One of a trio of “seating vignettes” in the living room ably demonstrates the comingling of contemporary and historical pieces.*

THIS PAGE: *An immense grid of diminishing concrete aggregate squares frames the home’s facade. Magni designed the oversized stainless steel and glass sconces flanking the entry.*

MAKING AN ENTRANCE:

A floating limestone bridge over a koi pond and anchored by a water wall makes a dramatic entrance to the home. "The house always had a long entryway," Magni says. "The first thing we did was add that stair-step water wall."





VIEW FROM ABOVE:
*"I like furniture that
multifunctions." Magni designed
the cluster of white Calcutta
marble topped dining tables
whose stainless steel legs sit atop
concealed casters and can roll
together or apart to accommo-
date parties of
varying size.*

THIS PAGE: “It’s just so peaceful,” Magni says of the view from the intimate sitting area at reception. “All you see are black pebbles and a bamboo grove.”

FAR RIGHT TOP: The yellow accents of Roy Lichtenstein’s “The Den” add subtle brightness to the dining room.

FAR RIGHT BOTTOM: The view from the inside entry extends down the gallery hall out to a second water wall defining the pool deck. The pool is fronted by a Jenny Holzer bench.



“They wanted people to come into a gallery space,” says Magni of his clients, who were initially skeptical of his suggestion to introduce antiques as a way to reduce the rooms’ potentially cavernous feeling when devoid of guests.

“These people had always collected just modern and contemporary furniture. When I encouraged them to bring in some antiquities to warm up a house of this scale, one of their prerequisites was the pieces all needed to have some historical significance.”

A Han Dynasty vase and furniture, an Art Deco cabinet, and a set of chairs by Étienne Meunier, personal furniture designer to Louis XV, were among Magni’s many suggestions.

Nowhere is the plurality more apparent than in the living room, which Magni envisaged as three seating vignettes. The room houses a rare signed Lalique lamp, an 18-foot-long mahogany bronze table, a towering Joel Shapiro sculpture, and the very first of what was to become Magni’s new signature silk rug collection, a 40-foot floor covering in taupe with fine white lines positioned to match the limestone floor.

“I don’t ever want to come up with a style and just crank it out like a stamp. That’s boring to me,” Magni says. “I like moving between the architecture and the client. It’s all very specific.”

Firmly anchored in both the modern and the classic, the home is at once sophisticated, comfortable, and irrepressibly functional.

