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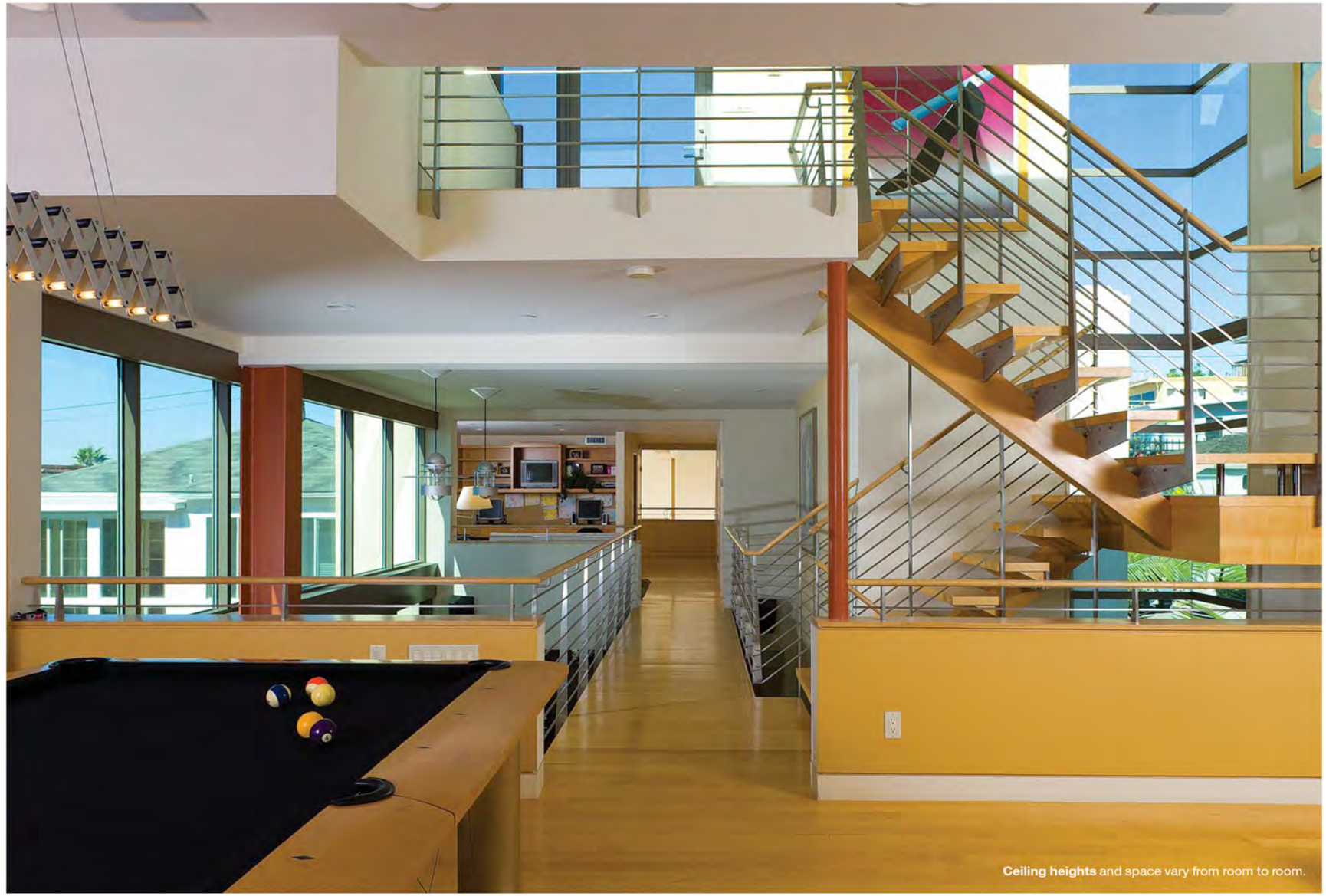
HOLLYWOOD MEETS MANHATTAN BEACH

The home once sheltered Hollywood's elite stars, including Errol Flynn.

At the height of Hollywood's Golden Age, art deco style encapsulated the frivolity and daring of the era's well-heeled. Design evolved from a mix of inspired sources: the urban skyscraper, Cubist paintings, and modular style. If the elaborate costumes of Russian ballet did indeed influence the period's décor, then the rich fabrics of Egypt and the Far East complemented it. Accessories were theatrical and the colors dramatic. It was a time of satin and chenille, when metallic and mirrors, figure lamps and pendant lights figured prominently. This period of building supplied a geometric setting for the truly independent and represented a singularly stylistic vernacular.

Enjoying near perfect weather year-round, Manhattan Beach is a seaside retreat of the highest order. Several luxury estates border the southern end of Santa Monica Bay, and here, "living the dream" is avidly practiced. It is also where Kevin Shields calls home. Owner of a real estate investment company, Shields's passion for property drew him to one of the more unique buildings in the area. As part of a negotiated movie contract drawn up in 1934, the Shields residence once sheltered Hollywood's elite stars, and at least one of its more notable carousers: Errol Flynn.

Returning the structure to its original state took a three-year restoration process, which included removing prior renovations from previous owners. "I was intimately involved with the design concept and interiors," Shields says. "I wanted to make sure that the house was properly integrated into the community of Manhattan Beach." At 4,200-square feet, the home has three levels: the ground floor accommodates the living and dining rooms, kitchen and wine area; the mid-level features a billiards room, two bedrooms and a playroom; and the third level, a custom built addition, hosts the master suite. As a father of two, functionality and utility naturally governed some of Shields's design decisions, but also with regard to aesthetic and historical concerns.



Ceiling heights and space vary from room to room.

Top, above the living room fireplace hangs an original but refurbished deco glass window.

Bottom, all the fireplace surrounds were custom designed for the space.

Retaining the property's original integrity was critical. To execute the renovations, Shields assembled an expert team of craftsmen. Chief among them were noted architect Michael Lee, general contractor Tim Peterson and interior designer Melissa Rigazio. Together, their collaborative talents fostered a sophisticated alchemy that successfully handled the project from inception to completion. Working in close proximity was imperative in order to address the home's technical issues and mechanical situations. "Mike is brilliant from an artistic standpoint," Shields says, "and Tim is a great technical builder with just remarkable vision." With the highest standards of construction in mind, the final product demonstrates wall-to-wall quality. Aesthetically, the team's cohesive vision reveals a strong commitment to urbanity, structure and historic preservation, and functional, period-inspired furnishings for the modern dweller.

For matters of interior art and object, Shields consulted Rigazio, who joined the project during demolition, after the home's preliminary schematic design had been generated then refined. Prior to working in residential design, Rigazio applied her talents in the commercial sector. Coincidentally, she had been to the Shields property on social occasions and developed an immediate affinity for it. "I truly loved the house from the first time I saw it," she says. "It had real character and stood

The ground floor includes the living and dining rooms, kitchen and wine area.

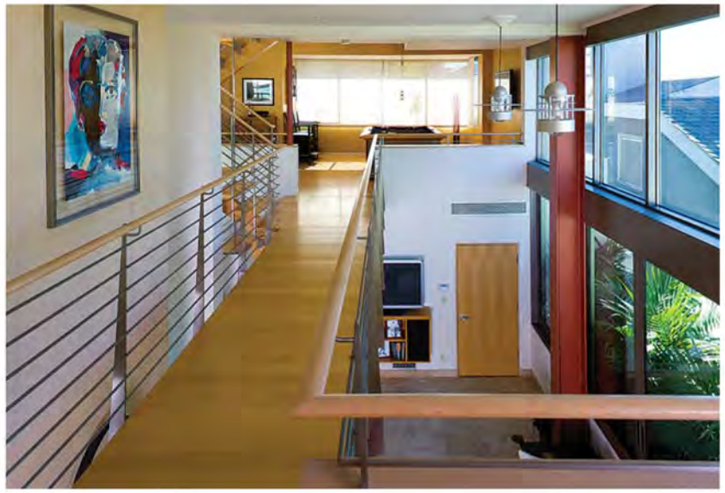
apart from anything else I had seen in or around Manhattan Beach." Therein would be her greatest challenge: to bring the house into the twenty-first century without losing its art deco originality. But how does one modernize a historical home while keeping its definitive history intact?

First, she understood the possibilities of what could be produced within the larger context of period and form. "My approach was to fuse today's modern with the 'moderne' style and attitude of the 1930's," Rigazio says. "For instance, in the powder room and girls' bathroom, we used glass mosaic tile on all the walls. Glass was a very popular deco material though not in mosaic pieces. We used a lot of stainless steel, which became popular as a decorative residential material during the deco era." She also preserved the stucco facade of the original portion of the exterior and reinforced those design elements when detailing custom features such as stone flooring patterns and staircase railings. Above the living room fireplace hangs an original but refurbished deco glass window.

Ceiling heights and space vary from

Top, the state-of-the-art kitchen features a dumb waiter to the third-level deck.

Bottom, the intimate dining room highlights a Brueton table with stainless steel base and ribbon mahogany top.



Top, large windows on the second floor yield extensive natural light.

Bottom, the bar area floor is covered in custom stone.

room to room. Large windows on the second floor yield extensive natural light and outdoor atmospherics, which give the illusion of a succession of warm, open reception spaces. "I emphasized the large scale of the Rumsford fireplace with a massive stone surround," Rigazio says. "The fire screen in the room was custom-designed by the client. The adjacent dining room is a much more intimate space. Here the focus is on the furniture; the Brueton dining table with polished stainless steel base and ribbon mahogany top epitomizes the elegance of the deco era."

Thematically, color was vital. Historically art deco color schemes leaned toward vivid, saturated hues, but as those were inconsistent with the elemental setting of the beach, Lee opted for a considerably softer scheme. The palette was also determined by the travertine flooring on the first level and the natural stained maple stairs on the second. Still, the home doesn't lose any of its theatricality. In fact, according to Rigazio, the fact that Errol Flynn once lived there "keeps the drama going."

The structure's unique interior details were largely determined by function and scale given the home's open floor plan. The walls are plaster, the fireplace surrounds are custom, and there is stone flooring at the bar, in the powder room and in the master bath. The decorative lighting ranges from contemporary classic Louis Poulsen fixtures to traditional Neidhart wall sconces. A dumbwaiter travels from the first-level kitchen to the third-level deck. The master suite contains an exercise area and walk-in closet while the master bath features intricate stonework, double vessel sinks in brushed nickel and unobstructed ocean views.

As a collector of properties, Shields has plans to create a Craftsman home and recently purchased a 1930s Spanish Villa, also in Southern California. Thankfully, because of owners like Shields, classic buildings get a new lease on life, preserving their importance for generations to come. Close up, please. •

Jenn Thornton

Keeping the beach setting in mind, designers opted for a soft color scheme.

The master suite houses an exercise area with incredible ocean views.

Above, the art deco treasure illuminated at dusk.

SHIELDS RESIDENCE DESIGN COLLABORATORS

Interior Designer:
Melissa Rigazio, Rigazio Design
925 Highview Avenue
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266
310-880-2808

Architect: Michael Lee
Michael Lee Architects
2200 Highland Avenue
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266
310-545-5771
www.MLeeArchitects.com

General Contractor: Tim Peterson
Peterson-Wozniak, Inc.
440 S. Hindry Avenue, Suite G
Inglewood, CA 90301
310-338-0521
www.Peterson-Wozniak.com

Millworker: Chris Sample
CDS Cabinets
3820 W. 102nd Street, Suite B
Inglewood, CA 90303
310-672-1900

Stone: Doug West
DWCC, Inc.
P.O. Box 613
El Segundo, CA 90245
310-322-6884

Associate Designer: Peter Davidson
Peter Davidson Design
3011 Linda Lane
Santa Monica, CA 90405
310-581-9335

Photography by Brian Thomas Jones, www.brianthomasjones.com.