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Modern Sife

With Miesian Candor and an artist's hand, LA designer Janna Levenstein presents Rising Glen

text Saxon Henry photos: Nathan Kirkmar







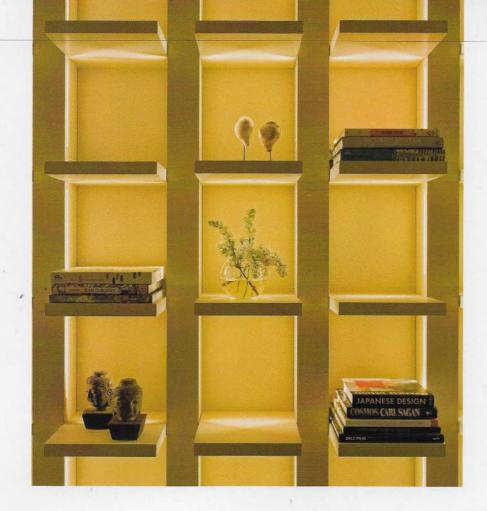


"Thave a fear of formula; in fact, I'm almost paranoid about it," says Janna Levenstein of her quest for the out-of-the-ordinary during the two years of painstakingly creating Rising Glen, her midcentury makeover nestled in the star-studded Hollywood Hills. Levenstein, the principal designer at Tocha Projects, is versed in the prose of affect and angle as she muses, "The home's success lies in the minimal gestures that collectively convey such a different feeling."

That feeling may be difficult to pinpoint, as the home inspires a paradoxical mix of breathless peace and surprise thanks to Levenstein's ability to think beyond limitations of any kind. "When I hit a snag in any project, I know to brace myself because something very cool is about to happen," she says. "I have learned not to become fixated on any particular concept because problems can lead to exciting inventions that are often much more interesting than the original ideas."





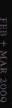


Her artful approach leads Levenstein to explore unique processes and material applications that have garnered her the notice of the American Institute of Architects, which put the home on one of its tours, and Architectural Digest, which tapped Rising Glen as the winner of open auditions in California last year. Polyurethane poured countertops in the kitchen, diamond-dusted epoxy floors and silver travertine walls in the garage, and an acrylic coating on the home's exterior are examples of the fine arts major's penchant for turning avant-garde finishes into powerful media.

You can blame her favorite element in the home, the bifold doors that she had custom made with narrower brushed stainless steel frames, on Piet Mondrian. "I don't love looking at Mondrian's work, but his philosophies are very interesting to me," says the Bennington alumna. "He painted a series of works that he surrounded with white edges to declare that a piece of art doesn't necessarily need a frame. I felt similarly about the glass doors, which I didn't want to act as enclosures for the spaces but serve as avenues leading the eye outside the room to give the psychological feeling of expansiveness."







"There aren't any grand gestures here," remarks Levenstein. Instead, "in order to avoid repeating what other people have done, I look for ways to give whatever project I'm designing my own personal flair." She also admits to a fierce fascination with the understated. "My motto is that there is freedom in restraint," she explains. "I wanted the house to be uncluttered and liberating, and I wanted there to be an ease

Proof that she's created the transcendent environment she envisioned resides in the diverse list of celebrities who have recently scheduled photo shoots in the home. Janet Jackson, Enrique Iglesias, Sylvester Stallone and David Beckham have used Rising Glen as a backdrop for various photo ops. "When I think about how different these celebrities are, I see what a universal appeal the home has," says Levenstein. "Most recently, Beckham was photographed there for an Adidas ad using the ledge on the fireplace as a weight bench. He was definitely easy on the eyes, though I have to admit it had little to do with the surroundings." 

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of feeling that permeated everything."

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