

The Great Divide

A LOS ANGELES TALENT COMBINES MODERNISM WITH
PERIOD PIECES, CREATING A GALLERY-INSPIRED SETTING
FOR A WORLD-CLASS COLLECTION OF ART

Convincing strict modernists to include antiques in their interiors is no small feat, but designer James Magni did just that. "I felt that a collection of important 17th to 20th-century antiques would bring warmth to these particular spaces," he says. "I often mix periods, using only the cleanest examples regardless of the century they were created in."

Though persuaded, the homeowners — who had learned to trust the designer during a 20-year, three-home relationship — offered Magni

Design **James Magni**,
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Text **Saxon Henry**
Photography **Mary E. Nichols**,
Los Angeles, CA



Above: In the foyer gallery, an 8 by 10-foot painting by Sean Scully, "Why and What (Blue)," looks at home in the grand hall despite its substantial dimensions. Leather and polished-nickel benches from designer James Magni's furniture collection center this museum-like space.
Left: A wall of water ripples into a bridged koi pond, animating the entrance to the home.



a strong caveat. "Only pieces with pedigree," they said. "We're purists."

The wife is a board member at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and the couple dedicates a great deal of energy to philanthropic causes. With this in mind, the owners asked that Magni transform their expansive 15,000-square-foot house on three parcels of land in Beverly Hills, Calif., into a home that would as easily welcome 300 guests as it would 20.

Above: "Old Herald" by Rebecca Purdum divides the living and dining rooms. **Center:** A Mies van der Rohe "Barcelona" daybed and chairs anchor the largest seating area in the living room, while a cast-bronze floor sculpture by Bryan Hunt, "Precog II," rests hearthside. **Far right:** Magni custom designed the living room's silk-covered sofa.



"I like mixing extremes or putting opposites next to one another," Magni says of his design style. This can be seen in the living room, where he combined modern furnishings with Chinese antiques dating between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. "I find this visually more stimulating than a matched set, which can be quite boring."

Magni's architectural background aided him as he gutted the house and created a two-bedroom residence with statuesque main living areas. "It was more like designing a museum," he says. "What's deceiving is how natural the extremely large paintings look in these rooms. They actually helped to break down the massiveness of the main living spaces."

To prevent the scale from overwhelming the design, Magni paid close attention to furniture placement,






creating seating areas that would accommodate varying-sized groups. "There are three zones in the living room," he says, "a formal seating area with a high-backed sofa and gilded chairs that is perfect for a group of six people; a center space, which seats up to 20 people easily, with a Mies van der Rohe daybed as a pivotal piece; and a music area with a piano, and a long parchment and rosewood table."

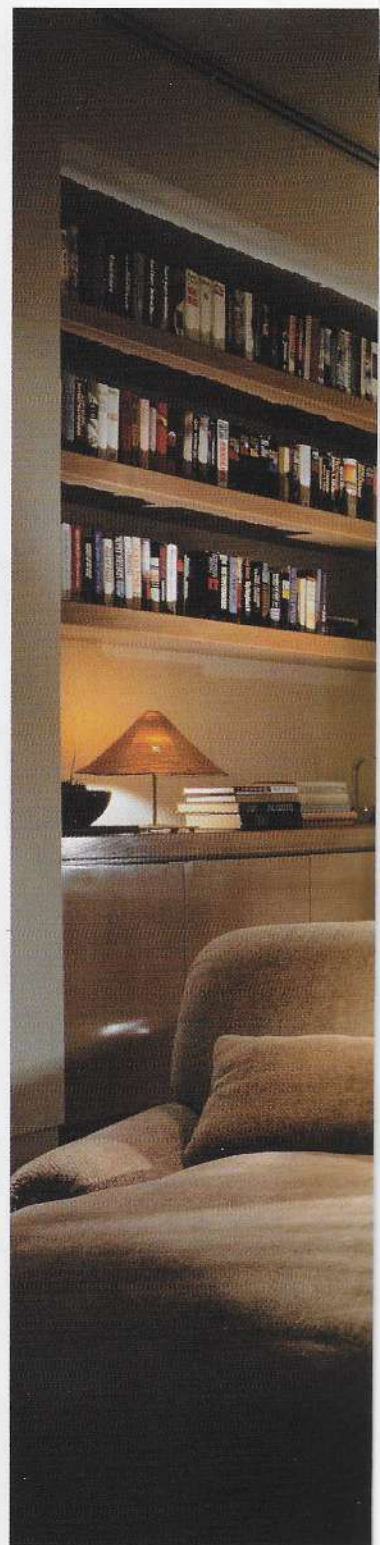
Once the interior renovations were underway, the designer traveled to Europe



Proving his talent for mixing periods, Magni paired a chic 1938 French cabinet, featuring high-gloss black lacquer and pink sharkskin over gold foil, and two 18th-century Louis XVI gilded bergères with a Pat Steir abstract painting, 'The Brussels Group: Starry Night,' in the living room.



The dining room showcases two identical Calcutta marble and stainless-steel tables, custom designed by Magni, which can be used separately or together. A painting by Christopher Brown, top left, floats above the tables set with Richard Ginori china.



"MUTED TONES ALLOW THE ART TO


with these seating plans in mind, visiting Paris, Italy and the South of France to comb the best shops and fairs for pieces with provenance.

Magni interspersed his finds with the couple's contemporary mainstays and furniture from his eponymous Magni Classic line, including two white marble-topped tables in the dining room that can be combined into one



BE THE MAIN EVENT," MAGNI SAYS.

Above: Floral photographs from Robert Mapplethorpe, "Poppy" and "Calla Lily," flank a cherry-wood, four-poster bed custom designed by architect M. Louis Goodman. Magni's bedside tables echo the bed's subdued tones and materials. **Left:** In the master bedroom's main entrance, Brown's oversized painting, "Blue Coats on the Heights," pops against two vintage Art Deco chairs in antiqued gold-leaved mahogany.



An oversized lap pool, measuring 40 feet long, rests within the French limestone deck. A row of chaises from Giati, covered in white Sunbrella fabric, create an airy resort-like ambiance.

large piece. "I'm grateful for projects like this because they allow me to create new products," he says.

The designer's creations continue into the master bedroom with cherry-wood bedside tables with bronze bases, and shelving and cabinetry cut from rifted vertical-sawn oak. A comfortable sitting area composed of a chaise and lounge chair in soft chenille forms a quiet, relaxing space. Magni combined recessed lighting with low floor



lamps to showcase the owners' works of art and create a calming refuge that overlooks the pool and gardens.

From the main spaces to the intimate master bedroom, subdued furnishings and an unobtrusive color palette allow new acquisitions and the couple's impressive collection of contemporary art to make a statement. "There's color, but it's subtle," Magni says. "The muted tones allow the art to be the main event." ●