

THE WHITE ALBUM

In the California desert, Emily Summers restores an elegant example of '60s modernism with sensitivity, vision—and more than a few gallons of vanilla-color paint

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Fan palms shade interior designer Emily Summers's family getaway at the Eldorado Country Club in Indian Wells, California. Summers worked with Lance O'Donnell of o2 Architecture and Wayne Carlton Connor & Assoc. landscape architecture to restore the 1969 property. For details see Sources.



The first tip-off that the woman tooling around the links of the Eldorado Country Club in Indian Wells, California, has something besides tee times on her mind would be the absence of golf clubs in the back of her cart. Then there's her attire. Emily Summers is clad not in pastel slacks and spiked footwear but black leather pants and leopard-print flats. Finally, consider Summers's conversation: "William Cody's later buildings lean to the Brutalist," she pronounces, rounding a sand trap and pulling up to a low rectilinear residence fronted by chunky columns. "Notice the rough cantera stone of the pillars?"

Summers, a Dallas-based interior designer, and her husband, Steve, an investor and serious amateur golfer, have owned a home at Eldorado for the past four years. She enjoys a brisk nine-hole round as much as anyone else in her family (the couple has three grown children), but the sport is not her life's passion. Years ago, while Summers was pursuing a graduate degree in art history at Southern Methodist University, her true calling revealed itself. "I went to Vienna for my thesis and saw the work of Adolf Loos and Josef Hoffmann, and I became fascinated with architecture and the decorative arts," she says. The designer has long since established a reputation for richly textured rooms that often enliven iconic examples of modern architecture.

The house she and her husband acquired just off the 14th hole was designed not by Cody but by an unknown architect in the 1960s (the same era in which their home in Dallas and their summer place in Colorado Springs were built). But the airy, clean-lined residence is very much in keeping with the work of the midcentury modernist responsible for the Brutalist structure across the course as well as (in collaboration with Ernest J. Kump) Eldorado's clubhouse and guest cottages. The dwelling is built around an interior courtyard and features ten-foot ceilings and walls of glass facing the fairway and the Santa Rosa Mountains. Not that these assets were all apparent to the untrained eye. "Some very unfortunate changes had been made to the structure in the '80s," explains Summers. "The courtyard had been turned into an entrance with glass-and-steel gates, the beautiful side-entry sequence had been closed off, and it had been given a red-tile mansard roof."

The designer interviewed a number of architects for the renovation, settling on Lance O'Donnell, a local talent who had rehabilitated one of the club's Cody residences and who is, says Summers, "a true modernist who understands all the great Palm Springs architects." O'Donnell restored the original entry and courtyard. He also installed clerestories under the living area's high ceilings and expanded the kitchen. The club keeps close tabs on construction projects, and the building would have to be painted twice before an acceptable shade of white—Benjamin Moore's Silver Satin—was achieved. But there was never any question that it, in contrast to its earth-toned neighbors, would be white. "I knew the house was going to have white walls and



Above: Gathered around the living room fireplace are a Warren Platner settee, lounge chair, and ottoman, all upholstered in a fabric from Cowtan & Tout, and a wicker chair by Marc Newson; the panels over the fireplace, clad in a hand-painted Porter Teleo wallpaper, conceal a television. Between the glass doors is an Eric Schmitt console, surmounted by a Jim Dine lithograph. The rug is by Madeline Weinrib, and the walls are painted in a Benjamin Moore white. **Left:** The golden chairs are vintage Carlo di Carli, and the black-shaded lamp is from Circa Lighting. **Opposite, from left:** Summers, on the terrace. In the living room, a Qing-dynasty screen hangs above a vintage gondola sofa in a Great Plains fabric; the white-and-gray chair is a Lief design covered in a Muriel Brandolini cotton, and the horseshoe-back chair on the right is attributed to James Mont.



A seating area near the pool is furnished with a crystal chandelier and a custom-made sofa that was inspired by a Rudolph Schindler model. **Opposite:** The courtyard's fountain was commissioned from Spanish sculptor Xavier Corberó and features one of his basalt statues; in the corner is a 1954 Willy Guhl loop chair.





white terrazzo floors and everything in it was going to be light and fresh and crisp,” says Summers.

As far as furnishings were concerned, the designer adds, “I just started playing around with what I had.” Summers’s idea of playing around, it should be noted, involves drawing up meticulously detailed furniture plans. And what she had amounted to a small museum of significant midcentury pieces and other treasures stockpiled over the years. At one end of the sun-flooded living room, a large Qing-dynasty screen Summers has owned since the ’60s grounds a vintage gondola sofa and a pair of Carlo di Carli armchairs plucked from her inventory. On a silver rug by the fireplace, more-recent finds—a wicker chair by Marc Newson, a T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings Klismos end table, an original Warren Platner bronze-plated settee and lounge chair that are of the same vintage as the house—contribute to the relaxed but urbane mood. Panels faced with squiggly hand-painted wallpaper custom made by Porter Teleo provide a graphic focal point while camouflaging the television.

Summers, who also deployed bursts of vivid color here and there—tangerine in a guest room, a deeper

orange in the kitchen, Tiffany-blue in the master suite—acknowledges that she might be “a little more playful” in her approach to her own interiors than she is with those of her clients. The strategic selection and placement of contemporary artwork, on the other hand, is a constant in her practice. A series of black basalt sculptures by Spaniard Xavier Corberó, for instance, sparks a dynamic conversation between the entry hall and the courtyard beyond. A watercolor by Mark Adams, a vintage French plaster relief, and a Jim Dine lithograph animate the public rooms, and Vincent Mazeau’s Grey Sky, a crystal chandelier that appears to be frozen in ice, brings a touch of whimsy to the terrace by the pool. “I thought it would be fun to sit in the sun under an ice-coated chandelier,” offers the designer.

The desert’s built environment clearly holds as much interest for Summers as its natural one; she has become a member of the Architecture and Design Council at the Palm Springs Art Museum. And at the end of the day, her design chops are valued at Eldorado as well. How can she tell? Easing his golf cart up to her terrace, a player pauses to admire the back of Summers’s house. “Love the final paint job!” he yells. □

From top: A Neal Small mirror glints above a Karl Springer sideboard in the dining room; the pendant light is by Jean de Merry, and the Leucos lamp and Jens Risom chairs are all vintage. The kitchen features Bulthaup cabinetry and a KWC faucet; the Bertoia counter stools are by Knoll, and the pendant light is a vintage Max Sauze design. **Opposite:** The house overlooks the 14th hole of Eldorado’s golf course.





From top: C&C Milano linens dress the guest-room bed; the bench is Edward Wormley for Dunbar, and the rug is by Madeline Weinrib. A vintage chair from Trina Turk Residential in Palm Springs in the master bath; the wall covering is by Élitis. The master bedroom features a Claes Oldenburg print and ottomans upholstered in a Rubelli cotton. *Opposite:* A Cannon/Bullock wallpaper brightens the powder room; the Günther Leuchtmann pendant light is from Plug, the mirror is vintage Mexican, and the faucet is by Kohler.

