

# FRESH BREEZE



Atelier AM animates a historic 1930 Montecito estate with a contemporary spirit grounded in classic connoisseurship

TEXT BY **MAYER RUS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON** STYLED BY **MICHAEL BARGO**

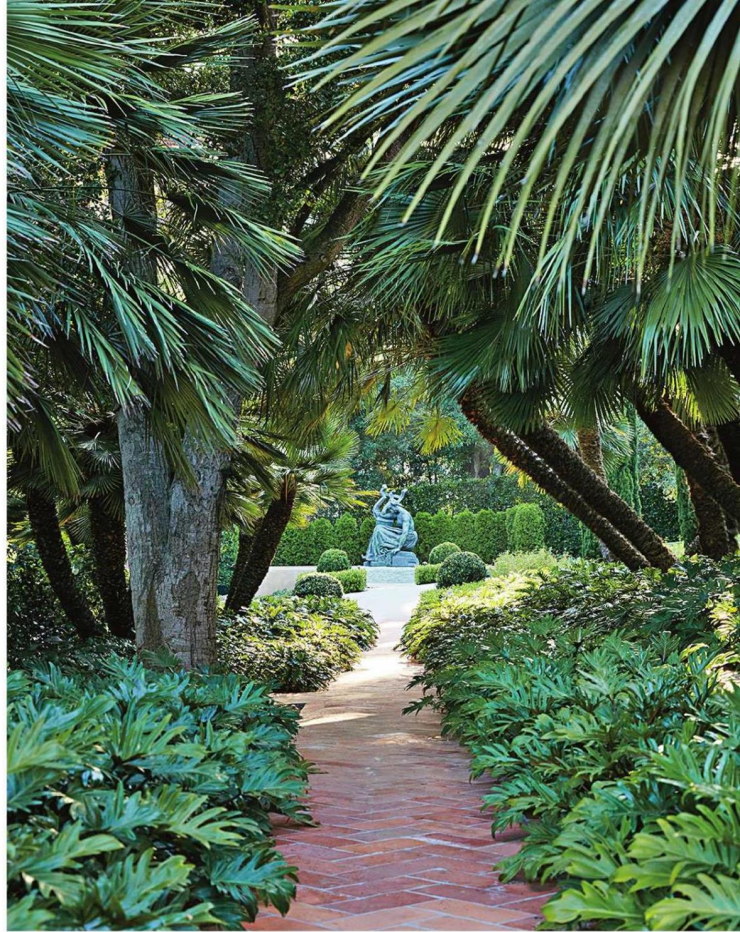
SCULPTURE: © 2018 THE ISAMU NOGUCHI FOUNDATION AND GARDEN MUSEUM, NEW YORK/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK

A MURANO-GLASS CHANDELIER BY SEGUSO PRESIDES OVER THE DINING ROOM. CUSTOM BLEACHED WALNUT TABLE BY L'ARTIGIANO STUDIO; 18TH-CENTURY ITALIAN CHAIRS; BRONZE BOAT SCULPTURE BY EDOUARD MARCEL SANDOZ. OPPOSITE AN ISAMU NOGUCHI SCULPTURE STANDS BEYOND THE ENTRY CORRIDOR. PAINTING BY MORRIS LOUIS. FOR DETAILS SEE RESOURCES.





**ABOVE** IN THE LIVING ROOM, A PAIR OF ANTIQUE TORTOISESHELL-AND-EBONY CABINETS FLANK A SOFA BY DESIGN QUEST CUSTOM IN A DE GOURNAY SILK VELVET. CLUB CHAIR BY DESIGN QUEST CUSTOM IN LORO PIANA INTERIORS LINEN; EARLY-19TH-CENTURY PORPHYRY TABLETOP MOUNTED ON NEW WOOD BASE; GILTWOOD CHAIR IN A ROGERS & GOFFIGON BLUE VELVET. **OPPOSITE** A BRONZE SCULPTURE BY ÉMILE-ANTOINE BOURDELLE.



**a**lexandra and Michael Misczynski, the wife-and-husband team behind the Los Angeles-based AD100 design firm Atelier AM, are standard-bearers for the increasingly superannuated concepts of quality and connoisseurship. In an image-driven culture, where novelty and extravagance so often masquerade as virtues, the Misczynskis remain steadfast in their belief that true style can emerge only from substance. It's an old-fashioned idea, perhaps, but as the firm's work so eloquently demonstrates, it can be applied in ways that celebrate the present and future as well as the past.

Consider the spectacular Montecito estate recently reimagined by Atelier AM in collaboration with Richard Manion Architecture. Built in 1930 by architect Reginald Johnson, author of such Southern California landmarks as the Santa Barbara Biltmore Hotel and the mansion at Ganna Walska Lotusland, the Montecito property was ripe for reinvention when it was purchased roughly seven years ago by longtime clients of both the Misczynskis and Manion. Instead of a slavish renovation that would have ossified the Italianate villa into a baronial relic, the designers conspired to revitalize the home in order to serve contemporary tastes and needs without sacrificing any of its patrician élan.

"The house had been bastardized over the years, and we wanted to bring it back to what it had been, but not in a literal sense," Michael explains. "Our work was more of a reinterpretation, calculated to instill a modern spirit and energy suitable for a similarly modern, multigenerational family."

Atelier AM's modus operandi is predicated on a reverence for patina and the evidence of appreciation that materials



“We focus on form, line, and the integrity of the objects that inhabit our interiors.”  
—*Alexandra Misczynski*



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT ALEXANDRA AND MICHAEL MISZYNSKI. MAJOLICA ROOSTER SCULPTURES PERCH ON KITCHEN ISLANDS BY ARCLINEA. PENDANT LIGHTS BY PAUL FERRANTE. A 17TH-CENTURY ITALIAN MANTEL EMBELLISHES THE LIVING ROOM. ANTIQUE STOOLS AND TABLE.**



accrue over years of loving use. In the Montecito project, that approach is manifested in the deployment of reclaimed, timeworn wood beams and decking, vintage terra-cotta tile floors, artisanal plaster, Italian marble, and ample architectural details of gray Pietra Serena sandstone. “It was a favorite building material of Brunelleschi’s,” Manion says, striking an appropriately lofty Renaissance note.

The Misczynskis outfitted the graciously scaled rooms with meticulous compositions that span centuries—indeed, millennia—of art and design. Gilded Italian furnishings from the Baroque and Rococo periods mingle amicably with important 20th-century French tables and chairs by Jean-Michel Frank, Jean Royère, and Jean Dunand. Lighting encompasses a magnificent Viennese giltwood chandelier, a floor lamp by Alberto Giacometti, repurposed Han Dynasty vases, and a flamboyant confection of Murano glass that hangs above the dining table. A Roman statue of Fortuna and a nearly 5,000-year-old Bactrian stone object expand the heady mix into the realm of the ancient.

The natural hues and textures of the wood, plaster, and stone building materials establish the serene mood of the rooms, while jewel-toned upholstery silks and velvets add strategic jolts of lush color. “We don’t do a lot of kooky wallpapers and graphic prints,” Alexandra says. “Our color sensibility is a bit more subtle and organic. We focus on form, line, and the integrity of the objects that inhabit our interiors.”

The Misczynskis’ sympathetic embrace of both the antique and the contemporary is manifested with particular brio in the design of the newly expanded kitchen. Beneath a ceiling of rough-hewn, reclaimed wood beams, two minimalist stainless-steel islands, as taut as Donald Judd boxes, suggest a home that has evolved over time, with modern amenities unapologetically inserted into a historic envelope.

“It’s not about artificial theatrics,” Michael says of the style clash. “We simply believe that the past and the present do not exist in opposition. They are complementary. Harnessing the tension between the two to create something beautiful, meaningful, and of the moment—that’s the essence of modernity.” ▲

# FRESH BREEZE

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST | MARCH 2018



Reprinted from the Architectural Digest Archive

<https://archive.architecturaldigest.com/article/20180301067/print>



©2021 - ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST ARCHIVE. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.