



A SKIRTED COCKTAIL TABLE ANCHORS THE LIVING ROOM. NICKEY KEHOE SOFA; CUSTOM CHAISE IN A ROSE CUMMING LINEN; VIGGO BOESEN CANED ARMCHAIR; CUSTOM RUG BY STARK. FOR DETAILS SEE RESOURCES.

OVER THE RAINBOW

Outside Los Angeles, designer *Frances Merrill* composes a symphony of brilliant hues and fanciful decorative motifs for a mother and son with gutsy tastes

TEXT BY **MAYER RUS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **LAURE JOLIET**

KATIE AND HANK WITH
THEIR BLACK LAB, ECHO,
IN THE COURTYARD.
LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY
TERREMOTO.



JENNIFER SHORTO WALLPAPER COMPLEMENTS THE BURGUNDY BEAMS IN THE DINING ROOM. NICKEY KEHOE
TABLE; JOSEF HOFFMANN CHAIR; SENTIENT WALNUT BENCHES COVERED IN AN OSBORNE & LITTLE WEAVE.



"I was blessed to find a kindred spirit in Katie," says designer Frances Merrill. "She's incredibly adventurous when it comes to color and pattern."

IN THE KITCHEN, A CUSTOM BANQUETTE WEARS A KNOLL MOD PLAID. CUSTOM TABLE BY MONROE WORKSHOP; SHAKER CHAIRS BY S. TIMBERLAKE; THE CABINETS ARE PAINTED IN BENJAMIN MOORE'S LAFAYETTE GREEN.



LEFT IN THE POOL ROOM, A CUSTOM CURTAIN IS COMPOSED OF ASSORTED LINENS. ROBERT VENTURI CHAIR. BELOW TILE BY HEATH CERAMICS COVERS A SHOWER. VOLA FITTINGS; SHOWER CURTAIN OF A GERT VOORJANS FOR JIM THOMPSON PRINT.



it's

not that Frances Merrill never met a color or pattern she didn't like. Not at all. "It just has to be the right color, the right pattern," says the wildly imaginative founder of the Los Angeles-based firm Reath Design. A case in point is the classic midcentury home Merrill recently reinvented for Katie Jordan, a cofounder of the youth-aid organization Foster a Dream, in the L.A. suburb of Altadena. To say that the home is animated by a riot of polychromatic wallpapers, fabrics, and paints would be misleading. Despite the kaleidoscopic array of brilliant hues and fanciful patterns, the overall effect registers as warm, welcoming, and joyous—there's nothing cacophonous about it.

"I was blessed to find a kindred spirit in Katie. She's incredibly adventurous when it comes to color and pattern, both in the vintage clothes she loves to wear and the kind of home she wants to live in," Merrill says. "If ornament is crime, Katie is my accomplice," the designer adds, taking a sly dig at Adolf Loos. Jordan, for her part, returns the compliment. "Without Frances, I imagine my house would be a hodgepodge of a lot of beautiful things with no common denominator. I get excited by so many different fabrics and colors, and so does my son, Hank. He actually picked the paint colors in his room. Frances took all of our passionate chaos and made sense of it," the homeowner notes.

Early conversations between Merrill and her client focused on ways to soften the taut lines and hard angles of the existing architecture. "We talked a lot about feminizing the house. Although I appreciated the broad expanses of glass and the connection to nature, I didn't like how masculine it felt. I honestly wasn't sure if it was possible to make it cozy," Jordan recalls.



ABOVE IN THE MASTER BEDROOM, ASH SIDE TABLES BY KALON FRAME THE BED. HEADBOARD AND BED SKIRT OF A VERVAIN LINEN; BEDDING BY HAWKINS NEW YORK; BOLSTER PILLOW OF A KERRY JOYCE LINEN; SHAMS OF A DESIGNERS GUILD LINEN-COTTON.


Merrill's response was to play against type, rejecting the all-too-common impulse to dress a midcentury house entirely in period furniture and finishes. "When I was a kid, we had a family friend who owned a Marcel Breuer house in Princeton that was furnished with Persian rugs and old family heirlooms. There was something compelling about the tension between the angular architecture and the traditional furniture," Merrill says. "I tried to channel that spirit here. The chaise we picked for the living room, which is covered in a Rose Cumming floral, could easily work in somebody's grandmother's house."

Nevertheless, it's the rare granny who would choose to paint all the interior and exterior wood beams and columns a shade of burgundy similar to that of a Japanese maple. Or to paper the dining room in a strange, trippy pattern of oranges erupting into tiny cityscapes. Or even to install a rainbow curtain of eight separate color panels that visually extends from the master bedroom to the lounge off the pool.

What's most extraordinary, perhaps, is the completeness of the designer's vision. Merrill's orchestration of delight is

not simply confined to the house's primary social spaces, like the generous open kitchen, where bright-green cabinetry is punctuated with abstracted floral cutouts and humble Shaker chairs are unexpectedly adorned in red and black canvas tapes. The joy of color and pattern extends into a bathroom clad in blue tile accented by cherry-red fixtures and a sprightly red-and-blue floral shower-curtain fabric designed by Gert Voorjans for Jim Thompson. (Fun fact: Thompson, the Thai silk czar who disappeared mysteriously in Malaysia in 1967, was Merrill's great-great-uncle.) There's also a rainbow coalition of brilliantly hued outdoor dining chairs, custom color-blocked cushions for the pool chaises, and a massive ultramarine outdoor sofa set against the ivy-covered hillside that cradles the house.

"There was a skeleton of a great midcentury garden that had been denuded over the years. Our job was to rebuild what was there and elevate some of the materials and details," says David Godshall, cofounder of the burgeoning L.A.- and San Francisco-based landscape-design firm Terremoto.

A two-page spread from a magazine. The left page shows a swimming pool with a black dog standing at the edge. The right page shows a modern house with large windows and a large tree. The text is overlaid on the left page.

**"The giant boulders
on the site were the
launching point for
our work," says
landscape designer
David Godshall.**

A COAST LIVE OAK SHADES THE POOL. VINTAGE BAMBOO ARMCHAIRS.



RATTAN DIRK VAN SLIEDREGT BARSTOOLS STAND AT THE COUNTER. THE BEAMS ARE PAINTED IN BENJAMIN MOORE'S BORDÉAUX RED.

"Frances took all of our passionate chaos and made sense of it."

That process involved redoing an aged acrylic fence with panels of tempered glass and replacing what Godshall describes as "Rice Krispies concrete paving" with period-appropriate exposed-aggregate concrete framed with wood borders. "The giant boulders on the site were the launching point for our work. The original garden made references, both subtle and overt, to Japanese landscape design, and we underscored that affinity by doing things like installing pathways of buried boulders combined with square and rectangular concrete pavers. Horticulturally, the garden is part Japanese, part native California, and part jungle," Godshall explains.

One of the plantings Godshall chose—a red Abyssinian banana tree—gives a clear nod to Merrill's color choice for the architectural framing, which sets the tone, literally and figuratively, for the entire house experience. When asked if she has any advice for do-it-yourselfers eager to hop aboard the crazy color wagon, Merrill demurs. "It's not something you can codify or teach. It's intuitive," she insists, adding, "This isn't exactly rocket science, except that it kind of is." ▀

IN THE FRONT GARDEN, KATIE SITS ON A CUSTOM CURVED SECTIONAL COVERED IN A SUNBRELLA FABRIC. FIRE PIT BY WP THATCHER DESIGN.

