

# WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND MOST?



In L.A.'s Hancock Park, a 1920s mansion is lovingly preserved, setting the stage for gutsy contemporary art and furniture by modernist icons.

BY JANELLE ZARA PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM ABRANOWICZ

The foyer of Sonya Roth's 1927 Mediterranean-style home in Los Angeles, which was recently reimaged by Cliff Fong. The walls display art by Mark Flood (left), Kenneth Anger (center), and Alex Israel (right). The table is by Angelo Mangiarotti, the vintage stools are by Charlotte Perriand, and the chandelier is by Circa Lighting. **OPPOSITE:** Art-filled rooms flow into outdoor spaces around the home, which is in the historic Hancock Park neighborhood.





**ABOVE:** In the living room, the vintage furnishings include leather sofas by Kaare Klint (left) and Børge Mogensen (right), a bench by Jean Prouvé, a cocktail table by Charlotte Perriand, and a pair of stools by Pierre Jeanneret. The custom chandeliers are by Paul Ferrante, the sconce is by Serge Mouille, and the floor lamp is by Gino Sarfatti. A Paul McCarthy artwork hangs over a 17th-century French mantel from Exquisite Surfaces. The sculpture (left) is by Sterling Ruby, and the painting (right) is by Stanley Whitney.

**S**TYLE, ACCORDING TO CLIFF FONG, IS ABOUT POSSESSING A SINGULAR SENSIBILITY. Having worked in fashion in a former life, the Los Angeles-based interior designer, who operates under the firm name Matt Blacke, takes an approach informed by the personal style of fashion icons: “They’re never head-to-toe in Saint Laurent or Gucci,” he says. “It’s about the mix.”

In Fong’s latest project, a 1927 Mediterranean-style mansion in L.A.’s historic Hancock Park neighborhood, his fashion-forward philosophy resounds through the home’s various eras of art and design. In the dining room, where the original oak paneling is almost a century old, the dining table is a 21st-century work by Rick Owens, embodying the high-low ethos by combining petrified wood and plywood. The delicately wrought ceiling lamp is 1950s Serge Mouille, whose distinct graphic language abounds in the house’s many vintage Stilnovo lamps and sconces of his design. Fong compares such pieces to a favorite handbag or accessory—“things you can always count on to make your look work.”

Sonya Roth, Fong’s client and a managing director of Christie’s auction house, lives here with her three children: 10-year-old Anabel, 7-year-old Colette, and 3-year-old Henry. She and her late husband, Josh Roth, bought the house together in 2017, charmed by the grand archways that carved clear views from one side of the house to the other. They were in awe of many of the original architectural flourishes, including the curves of the grand spiral staircase, but they did not

love the outdated finishes or the “10 million sconces,” Sonya recalls. “It was very heavy-handed.”

The couple had the dark hardwood floors replaced with neutral shades of reclaimed French marble, and the living room’s ornate plaster fireplace replaced with one in 17th-century French limestone. They chose both their materials and their furniture to match the historical weight and authenticity of their art, a collection they began together in the mid-2000s as they became fixtures on the L.A. art scene. Sonya was an active patron of the city’s Museum of Contemporary Art and the nonprofit LAXART, and before Josh passed away in 2018, he had bridged the worlds of the entertainment industry and fine art by launching a visual-artist representation division and exhibition space for United Talent Agency. The couple gravitated as much toward the artists themselves as they did to their works. “Our collection is mostly our friends’ art,” she says.

To complement the pieces in their collection, Fong

**RIGHT:** In the sitting room, a vintage sofa by Illum Wikkelsø is topped with pillows from Pat McGann, the leather Bibendum armchair is by Eileen Gray, and the sculptural wooden chair by Casey McCafferty is from JF Chen. The cocktail table is by Jacques Adnet, the vintage two-arm sconce is by Serge Mouille, and the ceiling pendant is by Lumfardo. The artwork is by Will Boone.



sourced vintage editions of venerated midcentury designs by icons of the period. The living room, for example, features black leather sofas by Børge Mogensen and Kaare Klint beside an enormous canvas by Stanley Whitney. Even so, when Sonya entertains, her guests—a mix of Hollywood power players and artists—inevitably shuffle through a trio of archways into the media room, beckoned by a plush sectional in vibrant aubergine. It is one of the more colorful elements in a house that hews to white walls and soft gray wool rugs—neutrals that accommodate, rather than compete with, newly acquired works of art. “Rugs to me are like your favorite jeans,” Fong explains. “It doesn’t matter what you put on top of them if you get the right one.”

Sonya says she never worries about how an artwork might clash with the decor. She does, however, have to answer to her children’s budding connoisseurship. “They certainly have opinions,” she says with a laugh. “They see things through different eyes. I’ve noticed that as I get older—I’m in my 40s now—my kids help to keep my eye a little fresh.”

Despite the extensive renovation, much of the architecture that the couple initially fell in love with remains. Visitors enter past white columns adorned with baroque reliefs, leading into a double-height atrium that glows in the neon lettering of artist Kenneth Anger’s *Hollywood Babylon*. The illuminated sculpture hangs below the original lace-like millwork with an archway on each side, offering a peek into the sun-drenched interiors beyond.

“It’s not easy to make a beautiful old house comfortable for contemporary living,” Fong says, commending the couple for preserving the essence of the mansion’s history while bringing the interiors up to date. Sonya, on the other hand, describes a much more intuitive process: “I just wanted to hang on to everything original that was good.” ■

The media room retains its original arched doorways. The Calacatta Viola marble counter is topped with a sound sculpture by Harry Bertoia (left) and a lamp by Vico Magistretti. The sectional is custom, the vintage Karl Springer cocktail tables are from Galerie XX, the rug is by Woven, and the artwork is by Florian Maier-Aichen.



**ABOVE:** In the dining room, the table is by Rick Owens, and the vintage furnishings include Arne Jacobsen chairs, a Gerrit Rietveld sideboard, Stilnovo sconces, and a Serge Mouille chandelier. The white oak wall paneling and carved wooden door are original. The sculpture is by Jason Rhoades. **LEFT:** In the kitchen, the stools are by Pierre Jeanneret, the breakfast nook chairs are by Jean Prouvé, and the artwork is by Larry Johnson. **RIGHT:** Roth's daughter Colette peeks through the door to her mother's home office, where the 1967 desk is by Peter Lovig Nielsen for Dansk Designs. The table behind it is by Arne Jacobsen, the vintage chandelier is French, and the artwork is by Ed Ruscha.





**OPPOSITE:** Roth, wearing a dress by the Great and Gucci heels, relaxes on the patio with her children (*from left*) Henry, Colette, and Anabel. The garden chairs are vintage, and the Nagasaki chairs are by Mathieu Matégot. The floor tile is by Granada Tile, the pendant is original, and the painting is by Sam Durant. **ABOVE:** In Roth's bedroom, a custom bed is topped by Frette linens, and the bench and chests are by Lief. The sitting area has a 1940s Danish sofa from Galerie Half, vintage sheepskin chairs from Denmark 50, and a Philip Arctander cocktail table. The chandeliers are by Robert Caillat; the artworks are by Jack Goldstein (*left*) and Mark Hagen (*right*). **BELOW, FROM LEFT:** The main bath's tub is by Waterworks; the stool and side table are from JF Chen. Beside a bedroom chaise from Galerie Half, a vase by Chris Brock rests on a sculpted tree stump. The rug is by Mansour Modern, and the lamp is by Arne Jacobsen. For details, see Resources.

