



THE DESIGNERS DREAM

A SIMPLE REHAB TURNS INTO A FULL — SCALE RENOVATION WHEN
A HOLLYWOOD POWER COUPLE FALLS IN LOVE WITH A MIDCENTURY CLASSIC



When it comes to visions of a family dream home, certain essentials seem to be universal to the genre. A safe and welcoming environment for children? Naturally. Happy common areas for family relaxation and diversions? Of course. Comfortable places to receive friends and relatives? Check.

To complete their picture of domestic bliss, Lynn Harris, an executive vice president of production at Warner Bros., and her husband, Matti Leshem, founder and CEO of the branding company Protagonist, had two additional requirements—neither of which involved such typical Hollywood demands as an infinity-edge pool or a Pilates studio.

“The house had to be big enough to host a Passover Seder for at least 60 people,” Leshem says. “That’s a lot of matzo balls!”

“And don’t forget the dogs,” adds Harris, referring to their lovable albeit occasionally unruly Weimaraners, Hank and Coco. “It’s all about our dogs. If they’re content, so are we.”

The couple found the raw material to fulfill their dream in a classic midcentury post-and-beam house in Studio City, a short distance from Laurel Canyon, the bohemian mecca immortalized by Joni Mitchell. Architect Maynard Woodard, a former set designer for MGM, Warner Bros., and RKO, built it for himself in 1951 while working at Welton Becket & Assoc., the venerable firm that would go on to design such Los Angeles landmarks as the Capitol Records Building and the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Neighborhood lore has it that renowned California architect Cliff May—the reputed originator of the ranch-style house—also briefly lived in Woodard’s home.

Despite its excellent pedigree, the house, like so many of its contemporaries, had suffered over the years from a series of unsympathetic renovations, its integrity lost in the shifting tides of taste. “It looked like no one had loved it in a very long time,” Harris says. “There were shutters everywhere, so it felt bizarrely dark and cramped—the exact opposite of what it was intended to be. Plus, there were awful details like stucco walls, mirrored walls, even a mirrored wet bar. That might sound cool in a hip, nostalgic kind of way, but trust me, it wasn’t!”