



HOUSE IN THE HILLS

A HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOME GOES FROM '70S DISCO TO MODERN BEAUTY

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In order to keep the '70s feel while also modernizing it, designer Steve Hermann added a white shag rug and covered the built-in, custom sectional with a synthetic suede in a contemporary chocolate brown. Slate-colored terrazzo surrounds the sunken living room and adds another modern element to the mix.

For months, friends and colleagues told Steve Hermann about a Hollywood Hills home he had to see. But like many things in real estate, the price and timing were off. Nevertheless, Hermann, a well-known architectural designer whose niche is catering to young celebrities who are drawn to his clean lines and simplistic yet dramatic architecture and interiors, was intrigued. So after months of prodding and an exceptional cut in asking price, Hermann “decided to go and take a peek at it, more out of curiosity than anything else,” he says.

Within five minutes of walking through the space, he was sold. “I made the agent an offer right there,” says Hermann. “I just knew that this was a very special house and that I’d regret passing it up.”

In spite of its “fantastic bones and great character,” he says, the 30-plus-year-old home was in serious disrepair. The original owners, actress Liza Minnelli and her then-husband, Jack Haley Jr., were known to throw extravagant house parties during the ‘60s and ‘70s. “Supposedly they were some of the wildest, star-studded parties in Hollywood,” says Hermann. But when Haley passed away, his family inherited the home and was unable to maintain the property, resulting in rotted wood, faulty plumbing and electrical, not to mention outdated aesthetics.

Hermann knew this project would be very different from the minimal, modern residences he’d become accustomed to creating, but the challenge piqued his interest. “I had some anxiety over the project because the usual tricks or elements that I’d apply weren’t going to work here,” he says. “I really had to sit down and think what direction to take it. I didn’t want to mold it into the house I wanted it to be. I wanted to relive some of the swinging ‘60s and ‘70s feel that it had but also modernize it at the same time.”

One room where Hermann abandoned his signature crisp lines and minimal décor in favor of a more “playful and striking” look was the living room. Outfitted with a wet bar, expansive views of the Los Angeles basin, and a sunken living area with an enormous triangular fireplace and built-in sectional sofa, the living room functioned more as a great room where homeowners could host a cocktail party and keep everyone in one area, if necessary. Striking glulam poplar wood beams, which lined the ceiling and jutted from



the inside through the glass and out and above the outdoor living area, were one feature Hermann adamantly wanted to restore.

The triangular fireplace was another feature Hermann chose to keep, albeit with some changes. “The fireplace was originally lava rock,” he says. “It was very cool. But at the same time, I wanted to add some meaty elements to it.” Hermann covered the fireplace in stainless steel, which provided a cool, contemporary edge, but he also made sure the lava rock was preserved underneath, “so if someone wanted to turn it back in 20 years, they could,” he says.

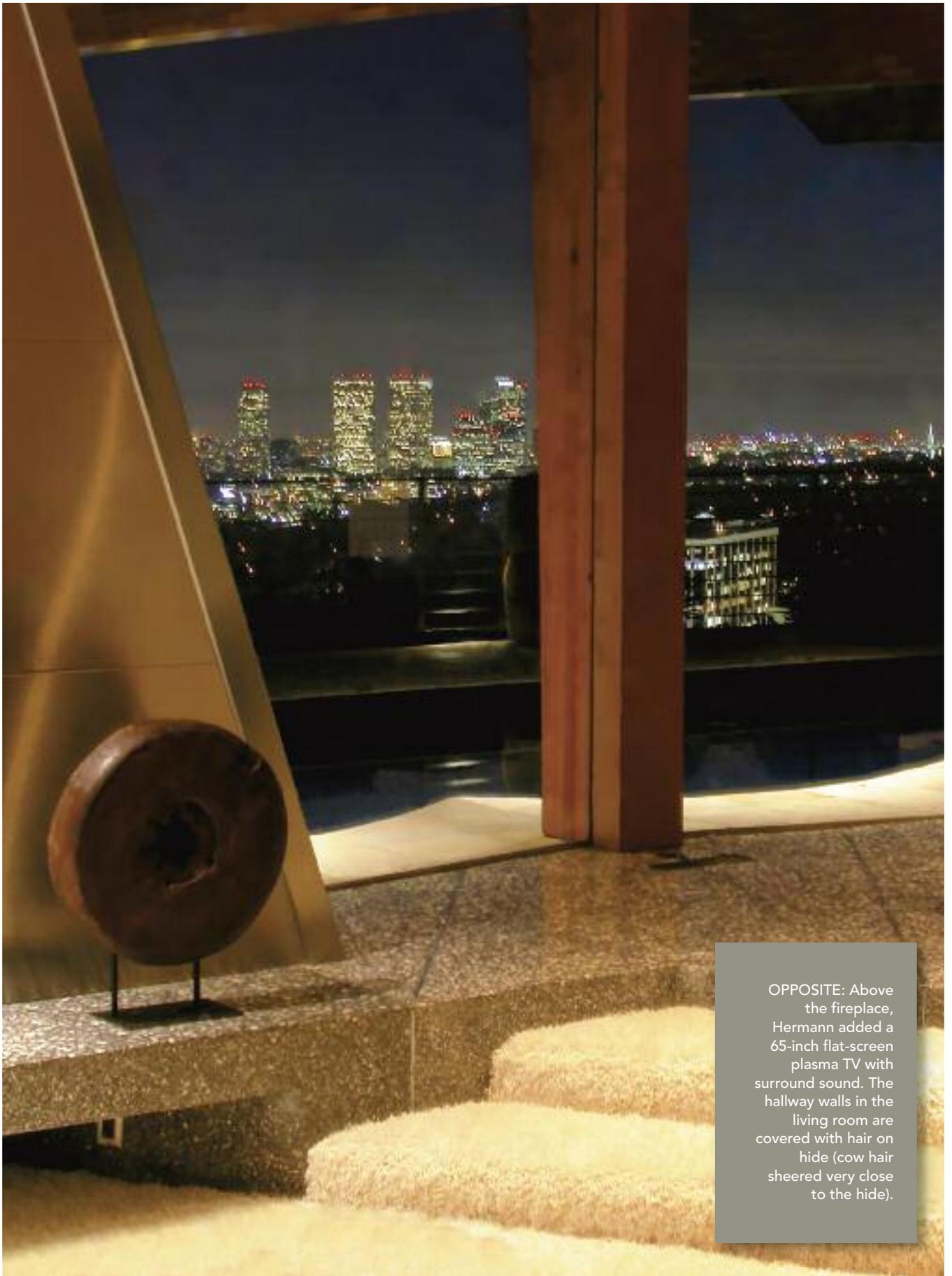
To complement the edgy look of the fireplace, Hermann opted for slate-colored terrazzo flooring, which runs throughout the living area and the rest of the house. The sunken living area, though, was furnished with a significant white shag rug, a retro nod to the home’s ‘60s origin. “The rug created a nice contrast between the terrazzo and the couch,” Hermann says. “It added a punch to it.” The aforementioned built-in sofa was a usual fixture in ‘70s-era homes, and Hermann again was set on keeping it but modernizing it at the same time. To customize the expansive, three-piece sectional, Hermann swathed the piece in a rich, chocolate brown synthetic suede, which works well with the brown, gray, and white color palette he established in the room. To further enhance the color scheme but

also add some texture to the room, Hermann covered the wall along the backside of the living space and in a hallway leading to the sleeping quarters with hair-on-hide panels with round, convex glass fish tanks. “It created a very sexy, very fun, very entertaining house,” he says.

After an 18-month renovation of the property, Hermann and his then-fiancée finally moved in and enjoyed the fruits of his labor, even by having their wedding reception there. Just eight months later, though, Hermann decided to sell after seeing the opportunity to cash in on his extraordinary design.

First it was *Friends* star Courteney Cox Arquette who fell in love with the home and its unique design. But with two dogs, Arquette had to pass because of the small size of the home’s yard. But it was the second potential buyer, Grammy-winning recording artist Christina Aguilera, who could not resist. Aguilera purchased the property in its entirety—artwork, furniture, candles, silverware, and all.

Since the completion of what Hermann calls one of his most challenging projects, he has designed homes for other hot, young Hollywood types from executives to producers to actors to musicians. But this home will forever remain unique. “The house had a strong personality of its own,” he laughs. “You couldn’t make it minimalist. It wasn’t an option.” ■



OPPOSITE: Above the fireplace, Hermann added a 65-inch flat-screen plasma TV with surround sound. The hallway walls in the living room are covered with hair on hide (cow hair sheered very close to the hide).