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The A-List

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In the living room of designer Ernest de la Torre and Kris Haberman's home in Suedens Landing, New York, the custom sofa is upholstered in a Toyne Sellers fabric, the 19th-century Belgian cabinet was found at an auction in London, the bronze pendant light is by Hervé Van der Straeten, and the Georgian fireplace is attributed to Robert Adam; the walls are coated in waxed plaster, the flooring is Indian sandstone, the silk rug is by Fort Street Studio, and the painting over the mantel is by Ross Bleckner. For details, see Resources.

THE BIG SWITCH

When transforming a 1950s ranch house in a Hudson River hamlet into his family home, designer Ernest de la Torre changes virtually everything, front to back and top to bottom

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For many of us, the impulse to follow a wild and beautiful dream is kept in check by an inner voice of caution: *Surely it would be too risky, too time-consuming, too dear.* Designer Ernest de la Torre has a knack for tuning out such misgivings, at least judging by the house that he shares with his husband, Kris Haberman, and their son, Parker. From the broadest gesture to the smallest detail, their home is a testament to the rewards of going all in.

Located in Snedens Landing, New York, a historic community a dozen miles north of Manhattan, the house offers surprises at every turn. A kitchen counter is inlaid with petrified wood; brass parakeets pivot to turn on a bathroom faucet; “cloud” reliefs float on hand-troweled plaster walls; blown-glass dragonflies flit around translucent light fixtures; and raindrop mirrors cascade down a wall. A garden theme unifies the house, but nature here has a wonderland quality. “I like things to be unique,” says de la Torre, “so that someone can’t come along and say, ‘Well, I could do that too.’ I’d rather create something new.”

Not that de la Torre jumped blindly down this rabbit hole. Before undertaking the work, he and Haberman spent eight years living with the home’s limitations. The 1950s structure is a back-split ranch—one story in front, dropping to two at the back. In the original configuration, all of the public rooms were on the upper floor, with the bedrooms downstairs. “We were always going out the front door and around to the back of the house to be in the beautiful yard,” says de la Torre. “So I had this crazy idea to take the floor out, creating a double-height living room at the back.” Also swept into this somersault was the kitchen, which had been situated by the front door. “Once those changes were decided, we pretty much repositioned everything,” says de la Torre—a process that required structural reinforcements so complex, the designer describes it as his master’s degree in construction. “It would have been cheaper to tear the place down and rebuild,” he admits. “But the house would have lost its charm.”

Another key goal was illuminating the interior. “The house was really dark,” says Haberman, who works as an account executive for ESI Design. To that end, the roof was punctured with skylights, and solid walls gave way to expanses of glass. “I’ve always ogled steel casement windows,” says de la Torre, who planned to use them in just the living room. “But this is how it starts with decorators, right?” Now, the entire house is outfitted with custom windows and matching doors.

Not to be outdone by this influx of sunlight, lamps and overhead fixtures also offer flashes of brilliance. “I’m really big on lighting,” says de la Torre. “It draws your eye. It’s like jewelry.” A giant bronze cocoon light by Hervé Van der Straeten hovers above the living room, while a pair of Charles Rennie Mackintosh sconces flickers beside a nearby fireplace.

The designer paid as much attention to how the house would function and feel as to how it would look. “Underlying everything, I want it to be super comfortable,” says de la Torre, who credits his former boss and mentor Peter Marino with helping to develop his appreciation for texture. Whether upholstered



The foyer’s parchment consoles were found at auction, the Marc Bankowsky bench is from Maison Gerard, and the 1919 bronze chair is by Armand-Albert Rateau; the pendant lights are from Murano, and the doors are painted in Benjamin Moore’s Midnight.



The living room’s circa-1905 Josef Hoffmann chairs are covered in Burmese python, a sculpture by Sol LeWitt serves as a cocktail table, and the Wendell Castle pedestal was originally a newel post. For details, see Resources.