

COMMUNAL LIVING

ON A QUIET STREET IN THE LOS FELIZ NEIGHBORHOOD OF LOS ANGELES, OF THE-MOMENT DESIGN FIRM COMMUNE HAS ASSEMBLED THE DEFINITIVE EXPRESSION OF ITS ECLECTIC, ELEGANT AND QUINTESSENTIALLY CALIFORNIAN POINT OF VIEW IN THE FORM OF A RELAXED, RAMBLING AND ART-FILLED HOUSE FOR ONE OF ITS PARTNERS AND HIS FAMILY

BY CHRISTINE LENNON PHOTOGRAPHED BY LISA ROMEREIN

A bone mirror and a carved wood side table add natural accents to the airy living room. OPPOSITE Vintage tiles set the artistic tone around the entryway.



WHAT exactly is the definitive Los Angeles house? Is it: A) A dramatic, airy space perched on a hillside with great views. B) A shadowy old Mediterranean manse tucked behind towering palm trees. Or C) A handmade bohemian bungalow filled with the work of local artists and craftspeople?

If you ask Pamela Shamshiri, her brother and business partner Ramin, and the other inspired folks who make up

the Heath Ceramics space in West Hollywood and private residences scattered throughout Los Angeles—that combo platter of styles is a creative gold mine. Granted, it takes a sure-handed mix master to make sense of it all, but when done right, it adds up to richly layered, innovative interiors that celebrate the best the region has to offer.

“We founded Commune, in part, to take advantage of all of the great craftsmen we knew from working in production,” says Pamela, who studied art history and architecture at Smith College and earned her master’s in production design at NYU. Ramin also formerly worked in production and event design, while Commune’s Steven Johanknecht came from retail design and Roman Alonso specialized in marketing and publishing. “We use the drapery guy from Universal Studios and the same plaster guys I used to use. And we like to support as many local artists as we can. We use a lot of pieces by Alma Allen, an amazing woodworker and sculptor in Joshua Tree, who lathes all of his work.”

The house Ramin Shamshiri, the managing partner who handles the business aspects of the firm, shares with his wife, Donna Langley, president of production at Universal Pictures, and their newborn son, Paolo, may be the best statement of Commune’s unique sensibility. It’s a stately 1920s Spanish-style house in the Los Feliz foothills that, before Pamela got a hold of it, had lost its way over the course of several renovations. Under the guidance of Commune, its strong Mediterranean bones have been restored, but the interiors have been reimagined as a well-appointed, eclectic family home.

“We’d spent some time in Alhambra, and we both really liked Moorish architecture,” explains Ramin, who was the first to see promise in the house where Langley and his sister did not. “But it had to feel modern and casual for us to be comfortable here.”

The advantage of hiring a designer with a production background to do residential interiors

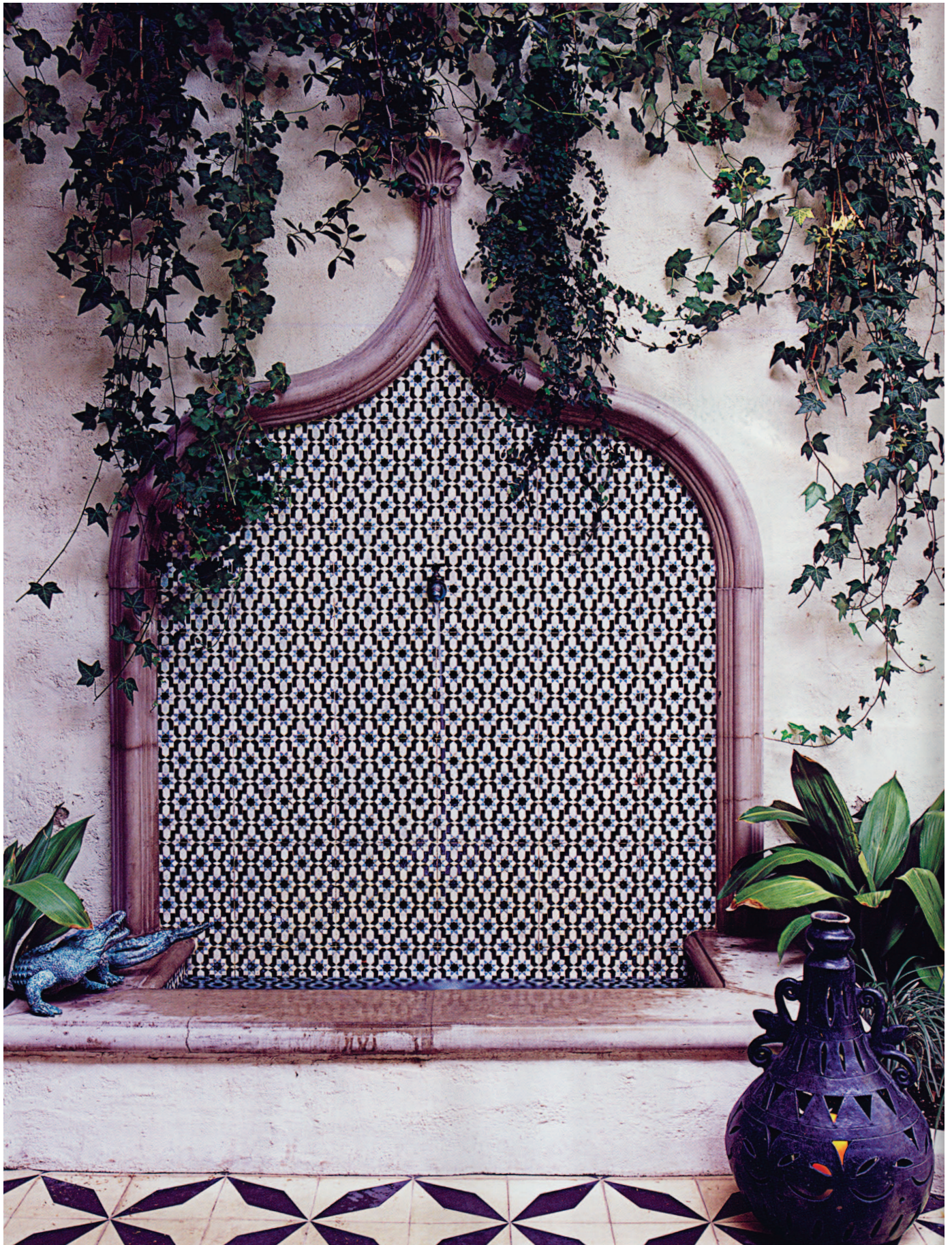
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the five-year-old L.A.-based design firm Commune, the answer would be a resounding D) All of the above, any of the above, or a little bit of each. Traditionally, California style has been criticized for being a little confused, a jumble of divergent influences thrown together in a real-estate heap. But to Commune—a group of four partners who lend their vision to clients like the new Ace Hotel in Palm Springs,



In the den, a kilim-upholstered ottoman grounds the bold yellow George Smith sofa. Opposite, a sculpture by Ernesto González Jerrez hovers in the living room.





A 1960s Murano glass chandelier sparkles above the foyer. OPPOSITE The custom mosaic fountain on the patio features tiles by Ann Sacks.



A single slab of wood forms the headboard in the master bedroom, offset by a pair of custom chairs from Dana John.





is that he or she is accustomed to creating spaces that reflect the character of the person living there. When it came to renovating and furnishing her brother and sister-in-law's residence, it also helped that Pamela knew the residents so intimately. The Shamshiris moved from Iran to Los Angeles during the revolution, when Ramin was six and Pamela was nine. Their father, Reza, owned Taliman, a furniture showroom featuring mainly Italian designers where the brother-sister team would "run around and play house."

"Our mom, Linda, is Italian, and our parents spent a lot of time in both Iran and Italy. And they loved to entertain. My father loved to cook and Mom would be in charge of presentation," says Pamela. "There were always people in the house. And in a lot of ways, Ramin and Donna live that way, too."

Though the kitchen, with its deep green painted cabinetry, Peruvian walnut counters and graphic black and white hand-stamped concrete Mexican tile, is the soul of the house, every last square foot was treated with equal imagination and care. A George Smith sofa shares space with a massive old tree stump, reimagined into a



table, in the foyer. A patchwork cowhide rug was stitched together by a tannery in Argentina to look like old sheepskin rugs "you'd find in a gas station in the '70s," says Pamela. Modern sculptures by Cuban-born artist and jeweler Ernesto Gonzalez Jerrez cast shadows indoors and out. These exquisitely made, one-off items give the house a human touch. And they also demonstrate Commune's efforts to avoid mass-produced objects at all costs.

If you were pressed to define contemporary California style, Commune's combination of rough-hewn and refined, modern but mixed-up, might fit the bill. The firm's approach is inventive, bold and ultimately incredibly comfortable—much like the state itself.

"If there's one Commune signature, it's that we like to use materials that are raw, untampered-with, in their pure state," says Pamela. "And we strive to acquire pieces that look like our client's collection, not like it was pulled together in six months. So we don't have a set style we impose. We're lucky that we take on a lot of clients who are creative in their own right. We just help them find their way." ●



Partners in Commune. Ramin Shamschiri collaborated with his sister, Pamela (seated), on the design of his Los Feliz house. Hand-stamped concrete from Mexico runs between the kitchen and the walled courtyard.