

a new take on tradition

THE LATEST TREND IN CUSTOM-BUILT LUXURY HOMES IS MOVING AWAY FROM A TRADITIONAL AESTHETIC AND INTO A MORE MODERN ONE. BY KATHY A. MCDONALD

Dream homes in Los Angeles have a new blueprint that reflects today's übercasual lifestyle. Though recent custom-built homes may have traditional architectural style on the outside—a grand Tuscan or Mediterranean villa, for instance—the interiors come as a total surprise.

“The lines are starting to get blurred between modern and traditional,” says Mauricio Oberfeld, CEO of Dugally Oberfeld, a Bel Air-based luxury-home construction firm. “Traditional homes now have much cleaner modern interiors, which were once perceived as cold.” Though this trend varies from project to project, Oberfeld has seen the change firsthand, as he formerly built almost 90 percent traditional homes and 10 percent modern. In LA, that ratio has grown closer to 50/50 in the last five years, with most clients, even those with traditional houses, wanting cleaner, more modern interiors.

This newly streamlined aesthetic is best achieved through simplified—though not necessarily less expensive—interior details. Out of favor are froufrou and palatial flourishes such as heavy wood mantelpieces and dental moldings, marble columns, and gold leaf. Replacing these finishes are lighter, more contemporary architectural elements.

Architects, builders, and designers work toward a balance of styles, because “ultracontemporary can be daunting” to someone building a custom residence, says Oberfeld, noting that many clients are not interested in sterile, minimalist interiors.

Contrasting materials are one way to soften a design. For one Oberfeld project, a patterned, rustic-brick ceiling in the dining room is set off with an

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A Nightingale Drive home reflects the current trend toward a modern design aesthetic.

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elegant Murano-glass chandelier, while the living room's wood-beam ceiling is flattened and patterned in a grid. Even the concept of a formal living room has been reimagined as a great room that opens expansively to a second outdoor living room privatized by drop-down windscreens.

Central to today's statement homes are the lightweight, cleaner lines of an ultramodern kitchen, which is where the change in tastes is most evident. No matter what architectural style is on a home's outside, a European-style kitchen system is a must-have. "People now want something easier to look after, [a room] that's clean and functional but [whose décor] doesn't fight with the architecture of the house," says Charlotte Myhr, Bulthaup Los Angeles's showroom manager.

Elaborately carved corbels and decorative millwork of custom-wood cabinetry is not used in the new high-end, custom kitchen. "We've been through cherry and dark wood, and it's now back to a matte or high-gloss white finish. All-white kitchens are very fashionable at the moment," says Myhr of the trend that reflects an international sensibility in kitchen design with a preference for functionalism, cutting-edge technology, and the most up-to-date equipment. "When tricked out with high-tech built-ins such as plasma screens, espresso makers, and dual dishwashers," she says, "luxurious kitchens can also be practical."

The formal dining room can now be considered an almost-quaint museum piece; separate breakfast rooms have also gone the way of the dodo, being replaced with in-kitchen eating countertops. Myhr has noticed Bulthaup kitchens are often a feature of current remodeling projects in traditional houses as well. To cater to that aesthetic, Bulthaup offers wood finishes in natural and dark rough-sawn oak, but in modern kitchen formats.

Warmer color palettes and wood accents matched with modernist architectural forms have redefined the conventional glass-walled, open-plan design. "[Home buyers] are still getting the modern lines and minimalist interiors," says Beverly Hills real estate agent Mauricio Umansky, CEO and cofounder of The Agency—but those interiors mirror the youthful, simplified lifestyle of Los Angeles's luxury-home buyer.

And without question, a home that is warm, modern, and architectural has good resale value. "There are just not enough of them," says Umansky. "Modern used to mean cold, stark, empty, and all-white," adds Oberfeld. "Now it means cleaner lines with warm décor and colors that match our clients' more relaxed, casual way of life." **LAC**

"The lines are starting to blur between modern and traditional."
—Mauricio Oberfeld



A Bulthaup kitchen features wood accents throughout.



A living room in a Montecito home mixes modern and traditional design elements.



confessions of a power broker

HILTON & HYLAND'S SUSAN ANDREWS SHARES TIPS FOR BUYING IN THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS.

The Hollywood Hills is one of the most sought-after areas to buy real estate, and rightly so. But as beautiful as that area is, it can be complex to navigate when buying a home.

When you finally identify the house you want to buy, the first order of business is deciding on a price, which includes many variables to take into account. Determining the value of a property there can be challenging due to the diversity of views, infrastructure, usable flat land, and access.

Once you're in escrow, investigating the condition of the property is critical. Consider a geological inspection for hillside stability, a drainage inspection to control hillside erosion, and a boundary survey to clarify property lines. The shapes of Hills lots are often irregular, causing neighbors to unknowingly encroach on each other's properties, which can lead to costly litigation—and worse, living next door to your enemy!

I currently represent the buyers of a Sunset Strip-area house where the previous sellers were forced to rescind the home in a down market and ordered to pay almost \$1 million in damages due to an encroachment on a neighboring property they failed to disclose.

To make sure my clients weren't buying a house next to a litigious neighbor, I decided to knock on the door, introduce myself, and get the whole story. The neighbors couldn't have been lovelier, and my clients got along swimmingly with them. Surprisingly, that was the least of our problems.

After performing our own boundary survey, we found two more encroachments with the neighbor on the other side of the property. Even though a seller provides you with reports, it is always wise to conduct your own inspections. Using a knowledgeable Hollywood Hills agent is essential to protecting your most valuable asset—your sanity! *luxurylahomes.com*