



SIMPLE LUXURY

A foothills manse borrows great style from the past to meet the needs of a busy 21st-century family.

BY BETTIJANE LEVINE

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ARDEN

THIS SIMPLE, STately HOME IN THE SAN GABRIEL FOOTHILLS MAY trip the memories of architecture buffs. Reminiscent of an Italian villa or a 1920s design by iconic California architect Wallace Neff, the 21st-century residence exudes the serenity and warmth that comes from superbly achieved proportions and dignity of detail — rare qualities in many new homes that claim Mediterranean style as their inspiration.

The plain façade, with its sun-blushed color and tall arched windows, is framed by old oaks and a garden approach that includes olive trees, Italian cypresses, roses, rosemary and lavender. Set on 1½ acres, the Pasadena-area home looks like it might have actually been built during California’s architectural Golden Age a century ago — a time when tycoons had money to burn on mansions and the San Gabriel Valley was blessed with designers of taste and talent. In fact, the 11,200-square-foot house with seven bedrooms and 10 bathrooms was designed and built in 2009, offering views of gardens and courtyards from French doors and arched windows in every room.

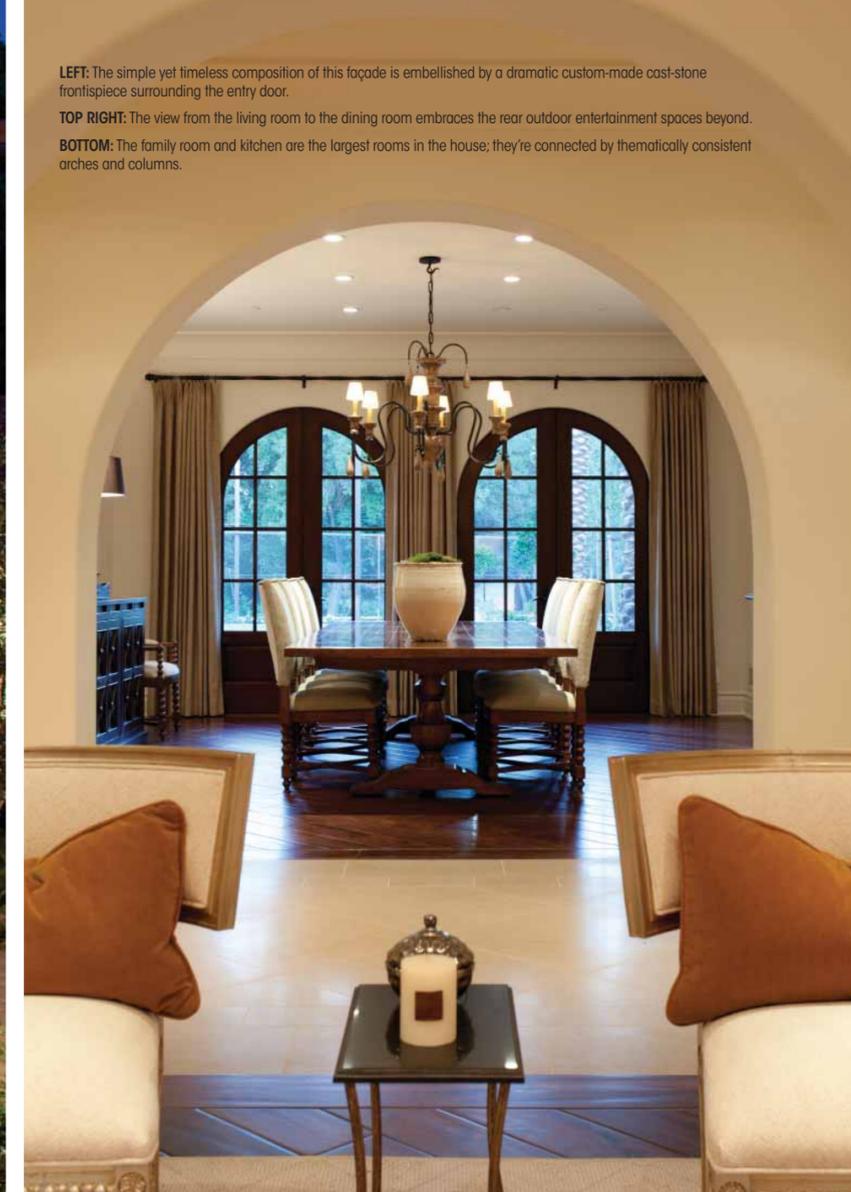
“It was one of our easier projects,” says Everardo Garcia, a principal of the Pasadena architecture firm Lim Chang Rohling & Associates. His clients were a young couple with three children, newly arrived from China and willing to let him design anything he deemed appropriate. “They said they were new to this way of life and new to what is acceptable,” Garcia says. “They asked us to come up with something that would be appropriate for their status and for the neighborhood — a house they could be proud of.”

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LEFT: The simple yet timeless composition of this façade is embellished by a dramatic custom-made cast-stone frontispiece surrounding the entry door.

TOP RIGHT: The view from the living room to the dining room embraces the rear outdoor entertainment spaces beyond.

BOTTOM: The family room and kitchen are the largest rooms in the house; they’re connected by thematically consistent arches and columns.





TOP: The stairs' sinuous double curve, the arches' comfortable proportions and the painted wood paneling add warmth to the grand foyer. **BOTTOM LEFT:** The home's warm neutral tones are continued in the living room. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The wood-paneled library is a retreat for conducting business or quiet conversations.



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Communicating with the help of partner Adele Chang, who's fluent in Chinese, they told Garcia they planned to do a lot of entertaining, especially for business associates, and wanted indoor and outdoor areas to accommodate that, along with guest suites for visitors. But their primary concern was their children. The house had to be functional and comfortable for them, with informal spaces for the family to enjoy time together. Garcia found the design solution in a Mediterranean mix — “a blend of Italianate with Spanish Colonial. We were very much influenced by Wallace Neff, and especially by the homes of that period built in San Marino.”

The first floor of the L-shaped house is divided between public and private wings. Enter the grand foyer, with its 19-foot beamed ceiling, and the eye is directed through a series of arched-ceiling rooms to windows that open onto fountains and the great outdoors — a vista



that immediately warms the vast entry space. “The house is so large and the ceilings so high,” says Cee Atcheson of Objekt Design in Corona del Mar, who worked on the project with partner Don Cordova. “We wanted it to flow perfectly, and so we did all the walls in one color: warm ivory.” The floors of the public rooms are limestone; the 12-foot ceilings vary between vaulted and cove. “We decided on traditional European[-style] furniture throughout,” Atcheson says. “The furniture is all custom-made to fit the room scale, with most of the fabrics from Italy.” Cushy, oversized upholstered seating helps create a sense of coziness, further enhanced by the warm burnished-wood tones of accent pieces and the public wing's palette of cream, ginger and rust.

Turn right from the entry reception hall into the private wing, and you enter an oval vestibule that leads to the great room, where the family spends most of its time. The

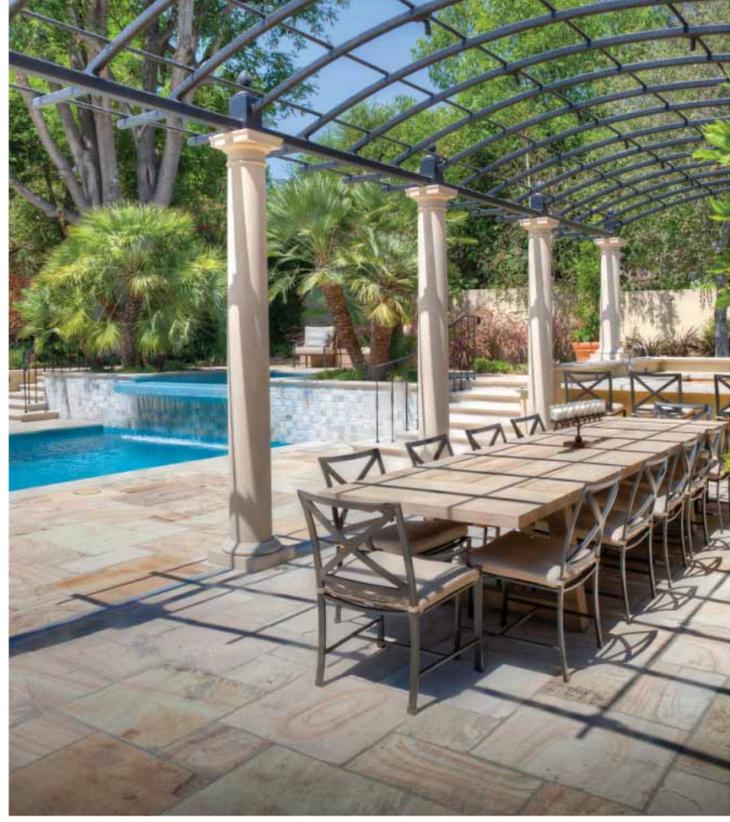


ABOVE: Designers were inspired by the iconic examples of Wallace Neff. **TOP RIGHT:** The artificial turf putting green sits amidst a drought-tolerant garden comprised of Jerusalem thorn tree, peppermint tree, California live oak, agaves, kangaroo paw, pride of Madeira and other plants. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** An outdoor kitchen with an arching metal trellis and classical columns provides comfortable poolside dining.

open-concept design uses arches to define the family room as a space separate from the large kitchen and intimate morning room with barreled ceilings. The great room opens onto the terrace and pool beyond 9-foot-tall arched French doors, maximizing the indoor-outdoor atmosphere. From the family room one can also enter the children's study or the home theater, which Garcia says has “a sound system equal to that in any theater. We didn't put in any of those clunky usual theater chairs — just great comfortable sofas and chairs that you can relax into while viewing.”

Wander up the exquisitely curved grand staircase to arrive at a circular foyer that leads to the bedrooms and an upstairs family room with a 13-foot vaulted ceiling, a wet bar and a powder room. The master bedroom, with its partly covered terrace overlooking the grounds, includes a 600-square-foot sitting room and a bath suite with his-and-hers water closets, dressing rooms, a large gray marble shower and a tub set into a windowed alcove with a panoramic view.

The usually budget-conscious family splurged selectively for the children, on the little girl's room — a fantasy factory boasting a custom canopy with hand-painted fabric and an antique mirror suspended from the ceiling — and a \$60,000 Steinway grand piano



custom-made from a single tree, which the company holds onto for future repairs.

Landscape architect Rob Pressman, president of Burbank-based TGP Inc., says he worked with Garcia from the project's inception, when the main house, pool house, tennis court and putting green were sited so as to preserve the many beautiful old birch, ash and oak trees. His job was to design a landscape and hardscape that would optimize the views from every window and create a series of outdoor experiences. “We created a meandering path that travels from the front of the house throughout the property, so that guests and family have a variety of different landscape experiences or zones through which they can wander,” Pressman says. He also planted Japanese maples, flowering shrubs and groundcover amid existing trees to create a wooded glen, and a shade-tolerant garden with flowering Rhapsiolepus and magnolia trees. A putting green with artificial turf is adorned with drought-tolerant California succulents.

If the estate sounds a bit grand, Garcia says it's really much more livable than that. “These clients are not ostentatious. They are family-oriented and down to earth. We kept the whole thing simple, subtle and elegant because that was appropriate for the area and for who they are.” ■■■