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DECONSTRUCTED

Showcase for lots of 'stuff'

BY CRAIG NAKANO >>> Designer Betsy Burnham looks back at this Benedict Canyon house as one of her most fun projects, even though her description of her client includes the four words that would make some decorators wince: "He likes his stuff."

It's often easier working with a blank canvas, but Burnham said her client happened to be "a collector of the most unusual things. There is no end to the treasures he would pull out: vintage Hermès, vintage model Chris-Craft boats." If you spot a clock in the house, she said, it's a good bet it's vintage Cartier.

We asked the Los Angeles designer to deconstruct her design for this edited Q&A and talk through her process. Burnham got the joke when we looked at the photo of the dining area, loaded with pieces of art and design, and asked ...

Where to start?

[Laughs] The client was someone who was slightly more traditional. He didn't want modern. He liked his stuff, he liked layering stuff. We are looking at the dining room of what is really a great room that combines living and dining. Behind us is the kitchen. The console with the two lamps backs up against the sofa.

Tell me more about that console table.

The console is a high-lacquer vintage Asian piece. On it are lamps from [antiques dealer] JF Chen. The table and the coral do feel Asian, but what's as important is that they read strong and masculine. My client is a bachelor. I don't think the room reads as overly feminine even though there is all this stuff like the shiny silver clock on the console and the nail-head detail on the chest in the background.

Let's talk about that back wall.

The chest is actually leather and has nail heads in this sort of Dutch pattern. It's from Formations, on Metrose. The ceiling

beams had been driftwood color, and we stained them darker. We added texture — grass cloth on the walls, woven Roman shades, worsted wool curtains. We really layered and layered the walls and windows, but the result still feels edited and not froufrou. I like to think of myself as not fussy or stuffy, and this still feels true to that. The painting is almost Byzantine; it is an old piece that I think my client got at auction.

The chandelier is from Dennis & Leen on Metrose. He was very specific about wanting a fancy chandelier. It's normally not my thing, but I love it here. We bought a new Maguire bamboo hexagon table, and my client already had these vintage Maguire chairs. There was a lot of talk about, "Can I use these? They are not really dining chairs." But I really wanted to try to use them because they combine all these elements — vintage Hollywood, Asian design — and they're comfortable, which is important when you have people for dinner.

Chairs prove to be an important part of the home office, but first,



Photographs by Bernstein Design

DESIGN TOUCHES include a console table, left, with lamps from JF Chen, chandelier from Dennis & Leen and a Maguire bamboo hexagon table. The client had the vintage Maguire chairs.



WHY CHOOSE one rug when you can layer? A zebra rug tops a Turkish one.

What about the color?

We knew we wanted to have a statement wall in the office. This is the view as you approach the door. We both were crazy about these De Gournay silk panels that are

usually in fancy dining rooms. We decided to go for it. When you see the room in person, the color is actually subtle because it's silk. If you were to see the other walls in this room, you'd see a very pale blue paint.

And the chairs?

My client had this absolutely horrible black desk chair. People are funny about their desk chairs. I just said: "If we keep it, can we use some fabulous fabric on it?" This is discontinued Osborne & Little fabric. The chair in foreground, part of a pair, is vintage. The lamp is vintage.

And underfoot?

I love Turkish rugs. I even love threadbare rugs. We couldn't decide between the zebra or the

Turkish rug, so we used both. It's more of a bit of layering.

With so many layers and so many collections of objects, how do you make sure a room doesn't look like one big jumbled mess — that your design intentions are still clear?

I am a big fan of a lot of color, but I balance it with a lot of neutrals. All of the permanent things in that living and dining area — the walls, the drapes, the furniture — are neutral. I really think that helps to ground the accessories. I know not everyone has the time or interest, but I also love to use vintage stuff. When everything is new, it looks like a showroom.

You don't have to use everything at once. Switch out your things by season. Or even keep an area completely clear for a while, and see if inspiration strikes. TV shows make design look like it was intended to be done in 24 hours. Even when I install an entire house full of furniture, it's not until the second or third or fourth or fifth trip that I do accessories.

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