



deco goes MODERN

A period apartment in Los Angeles embraces its era while reflecting the eclectic tastes of its current owners

Having photographed so many kinds of interiors has made me more discriminating,” says Peter Vitale, whose glossy spreads of residences, penthouses, townhouses, and resorts around the world have appeared in all of the leading design magazines, including *MILIEU*, for whom he continues to shoot as editor at large. “When you have seen so many homes, you eventually come to recognize what’s truly special and creative.” Now he focuses the lens on his own residence in West Hollywood, which he shares with his partner, Harry Greiner, a noted antiquarian.

What began as a professional one-bedroom *piéd-à-terre* to complement the couple’s principal residence in Santa Fe has since become their primary home. “We were attracted to the building’s handsome façade and its graceful approach, with the front doors set far back from the street and accessed via a garden path,” says Vitale. “The generous proportions and layout of the space appealed to us greatly, as did the original art deco details of the building.”

It was, in fact, a building that had long been on Vitale and Greiner’s architectural radar. The seven-story tower was designed in 1931 by Leland Bryant, a Beaux Arts-trained architect whose classically proportioned residential buildings are as sought after in Los Angeles as Rosario Candela’s buildings are in New York. Vitale recalls first seeing a unit on a low floor that he and Greiner liked, but which lacked views. Later, when the designer Tom Boland, an old friend he calls a “design soul mate,” phoned to tell him of an available apartment in a different Bryant building several blocks away, Vitale flew immediately to Los Angeles. But just before going to see that apartment, he heard of a seventh-floor apartment in the first building that had become available. And that is what he and Greiner chose.

“Having been spoiled by the openness and vistas of Santa Fe, we were very intent on finding a place to live in L.A. that had unimpeded views and lots of light, and this space gave us

INTERIORS BY PETER VITALE
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EXPERT MIX of the ANCIENT
and the MODERN.*



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Previous pages: The bedroom of a West Hollywood apartment is kept serene with a palette of grays and soft neutrals used on linen curtains, a headboard, Ralph Lauren shams, Irving and Morrison throw, and artworks. A Cubosfera table lamp is by Alessandro Mendini. Left: A trio of decorative squares by artist Jeremy Thomas adorns a living room wall. Living room furniture, including a T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings klismos chair, is kept low to allow for unobstructed views.



Views from the living room look north to the Directors Guild of America building and east to downtown Los Angeles. The custom iron coffee table designed by the homeowner has a Calacatta marble top. Three of ten prints by Agnes Martin (far right) hang opposite a large mixed-media piece by Udo Nöger. The custom sofa and armchairs are covered in Christian L'aire linen.

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all that,” Vitale says, noting the apartment’s three exposures — north to the Hollywood Hills, east to downtown, and south to the ocean.

The interiors they have created with Boland reflect a key lesson learned early, what might be called the “power of the piece.” No detail, whether captured in a photograph or in one of his own rooms, escapes Vitale’s gaze. “A good piece, no matter the period, can enhance any interior,” says Vitale, noting “good” refers not to provenance or price, but rather to quality and proportion. “We have found many of our favorite finds in flea markets, consignment shops, small stores off the beaten path. Our eyes are always looking for beauty. And with few exceptions, all our furniture and objets enhance each other, whether it be by their complementary or contrasting qualities.”

When the couple moved in, the original floor plan was intact, as were key decorative elements, including wood floors, moldings, even period doorknobs. Crucial, too, were the proportions themselves, which, characteristic of the art deco style, melded streamlined modernity with classicism, a perfect combination for Vitale. “I have always been a classicist first and foremost, it’s what I’m most comfortable with,” he says. “However, there is much in modern design whose beauty cannot be ignored and which we truly love. We find the combination of both to be superlative. It all speaks to us.”

That spirited conversation is evident throughout the apartment. The airy, light-filled living room is defined by an expert mix of the ancient and the modern. “Tom Boland helped me especially with the upholstered pieces, which had to have a streamlined look to capitalize on and complement the art deco style,” explains Vitale, adding that the daybed that fills one side of the room was a gift from Billy Baldwin when the late designer moved from New York to Nantucket.

Brass moved lamps by Cedric Hartman play well against the gilt wood of a seventeenth-century Venetian mirror, while the dark metal base of a marble-topped coffee table complements the even darker pedestals supporting a neoclassical eighteenth-

century stone urn and a nineteenth-century terra-cotta bust. The sculptural form of a T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings’ klismos chair, derived from ancient Greek chairs, stands out below three wall-mounted cube sculptures by Jeremy Thomas.

Details being everything, they created a conspicuous vignette in the bedroom. There, an ancient marble bust of an Imperial Roman noblewoman glows alongside a cube-shaped, modern Italian lamp. She keeps her back to a set of six red, white, and beige geometric lithographs they found in a Santa Monica consignment shop. The bust rests on a Jacobean chest of drawers, its hardware pulls eerily reminiscent of earrings worn by men and women in that seventeenth-century time period.

In the dining room, the dialogue takes a more contemporary turn. Rectilinear black leather armchairs designed by Mario Bellini and a oval chrome and glass table are positioned on a woven-paper rug. Curvaceous baroque Spanish Colonial mirrors hang on opposite walls.

Vitale’s ability to define interiors with furnishings and capture them by camera began with his initial training as a painter. Over the years, his mentors and friends have included the designers Arthur Smith and the legendary Baldwin. “They and others taught me that it’s vital to give the pieces and objects we own the room to breathe,” he emphasizes.

Still, no matter how harmoniously multilayered the interior, is an artist ever fully satisfied with the result? “I frequently move furniture, furnishings, and artwork,” says Vitale. “Harry could leave it be, and he does get annoyed at me for asking him to help move things around so often, especially since they usually end up right back where they were in the beginning. My first instincts seem to be the correct ones.” ■

A walnut Spanish Colonial campaign table is set against a wall in the dining room. The hues of the eighteenth-century Spanish gilt mirror echo those of the decorative ceiling molding, which dates to the building’s construction in 1931.



"The dining room faces north, so it's as though it's backlit all the time," says Vitale. The room's theatricality is heightened by gold paint applied to the molding and the gilt wood framing eighteenth-century Spanish Colonial mirrors. Cassina chairs are grouped around a Kartell glass and chrome table set on a Woodnotes rug.

