

# CALIFORNIA HOMES

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# An Unusual Request

DESIGNERS AUDREY DUNN AND LADD MCRAE LAMBERT CREATE A NEW CONTEMPORARY HOUSE  
TEXT BY KAVITA DASWANI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARLENE HALABY



**BELOW** An open great room floor plan integrates kitchen island entertaining with the adjacent living room and dining room. **OPPOSITE** A custom-designed circular stair railing with Italian chandelier and a display of the client's collection of original watercolors.

**D**ESPITE THEIR COMBINED 50-plus years in design, Audrey Dunn and Ladd McRae Lambert found a client request fairly unusual.

“The clients had just bought a new completely finished tract home,” said Lambert. “They never opened a drawer or stepped on the carpet. But we went in and gutted many rooms down to the studs.”

The clients—a family of four—justified their wishes this way; they loved the location of Hidden Canyon in Irvine, less than eight miles from the Laguna Beach coastline. The brand new construction was by Toll Brothers, in a community of semi-customized upscale homes, mostly in the Mediterranean style.

“Their vision was for a modern contemporary house,” said Dunn. “So we had to take it down to the drywall, after removing all the cabinetry and fixtures, with nothing but concrete floors and half the walls.”

Dunn and Lambert make up the Laguna Niguel-based design company of McRae Lambert Dunn and said they spent two years, until early 2018, completing the project. They worked within the existing footprint of the home, but designed the pool and lanai area, oversaw the interior architecture, added wood

embellishments and ceiling treatments, and furnished the home.

“Visually, they wanted something clean and modern, with light and open spaces that maximized that indoor/outdoor feeling of space,” said Dunn. “They even had an ideas book.”

The family, of Chinese descent, had pieces from their art and sculpture collection they wanted interspersed within the home. These included iron sculptures and metal Buddha figures, and a collection of 14 watercolors done by a single artist which the designers placed in a row as if in a gallery. The homeowners brought in two Feng Shui specialists who gave particular input when it came time to work on the green spaces in and around the home.

“One of the things they said was that we needed to incorporate water, but the water had to move in a particular Eastern direction or it would be bad luck,” said Dunn. “We had a sculpture with three different pools of water, which poured into a reservoir system.”

Other nods to the family heritage; the master bedroom has shades of blue-and-white, traditional in Chinese porcelain; the bedding is white with pale blue accent cushions, against a cobalt blue velvet-padded





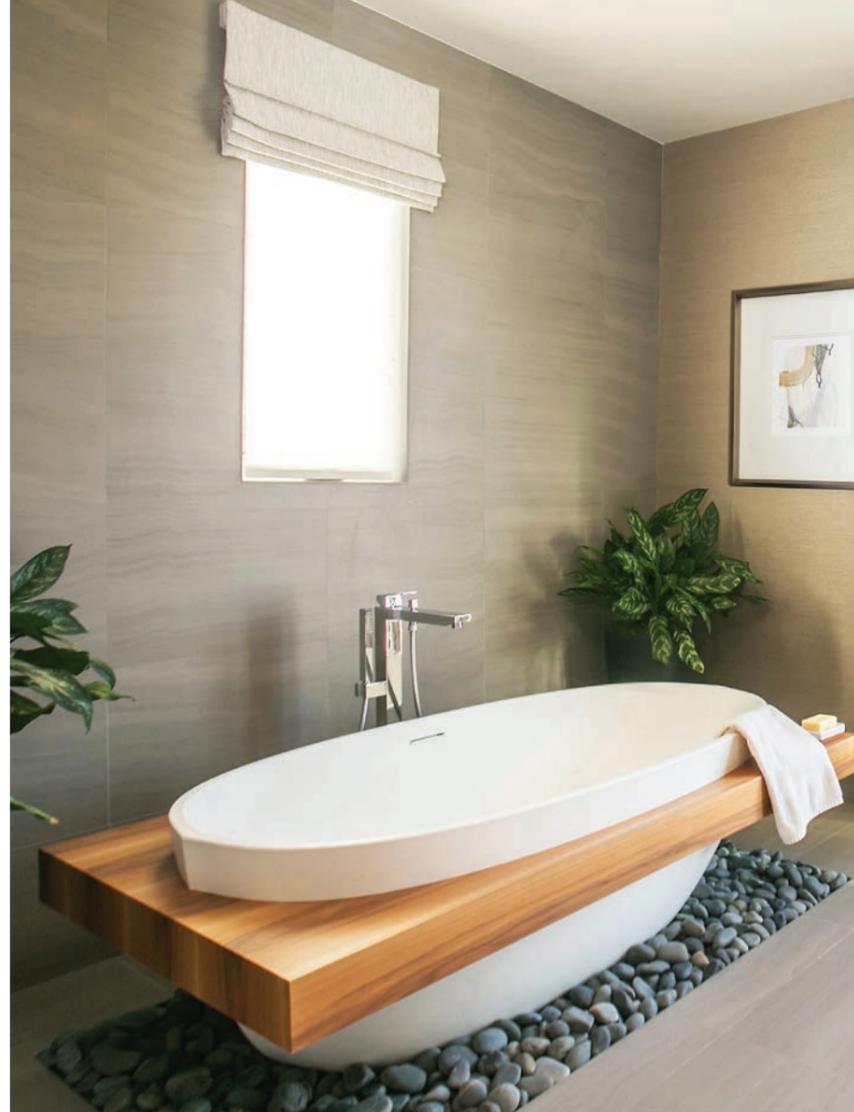
**ABOVE** The kitchen includes double islands for entertaining numerous guests; incorporated hidden pocket doors that slide away to open up to the lanai for outdoor entertaining.

**RIGHT** The decorated ceiling treatment defines the living and dining area, along with an eclectic mix of custom furnishings.



**BELOW** A fretwork screen divides the bedroom area from a comfortable fireside sitting area in the master suite.





wall. The rug is blue and white. And a wooden screen that separates the bed from the sitting area is reminiscent of Chinese design. In the master bathroom, floating vanities hover over beds of smooth black rocks, which are also placed under a deep oval tub. The children of the house, 11 and 14, are ardent musicians and golfers, interests that are reflected in their bedrooms—both of which have a youthful hanging wicker chair. Dunn said that other substantial pieces include an Italian chandelier, essentially a large grouping of crystal leaves, which took six months to be finished. A fireplace is done in steel and hand rubbed to a beautiful iridescence.

Still, Dunn and Lambert said that even though the brand new original house was torn down, nothing went to waste given that the design duo brought in Renovation Angel.

“They go into new homes and homes of high calibre, bring in an appraiser and take everything that is brand new,” said Dunn. “They came into this house and took everything—the sinks, shower heads, all the cabinetry. They’ve all been re-used somewhere.” ❧

**ABOVE** A Zen-inspired bathroom includes a deep bathtub set atop a bed of smooth black rocks.



**BELOW** A contemporary guest room feels tranquil and cozy by introducing warm natural elements often found in Asian design.