

Film Spotlight: Inside two mid-century modern California classics

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When a property has architectural pedigree, deciding what to renovate and what to preserve is an art in itself.

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Properties with a significant history prompt a perpetual dilemma. When an owner thinks of repairing, improving or modifying their home, should they renovate with an eye on the techniques of today? Or should they honor the original intent within the template of the past? Here are two illustrations from opposite sides of the same coin.

Inspired renovation in Malibu Colony

Any adept architect will tell you that remodeling a renowned predecessor's work is not simply an act of alteration. A great renovation is more akin to re-interpretation, where the lyrical language of the original is translated rather than revised. The result should be a harmony of two artistic voices.

Just ask Marie-Eve Warren and Jeremy Garrett, of the boutique interior architecture studio Warren Garrett.



Despite being stripped down to its studs, the new vision by Warren Garrett conserved the original post and beam construction.

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Three years ago, the duo was called upon to plan the top-to-bottom renovation of a mid-century modern Malibu Colony home. Simple enough, except that the original architects were none other than the Los Angeles firm Buff and Hensman. While the names Conrad Buff III and Donald C. Hensman may be well known to architecture aficionados, their distinctive work will certainly be recognized by many more. As a partnership (along with, at one time, Calvin Straub), the pair designed award-winning homes all over California, including Ronald Reagan's Governor's Mansion, and not one but two contributions to Arts & Architecture magazine's prestigious Case Study House Program.

Suffice to say, updating the work of these masters would require a fair amount of pluck and a certain degree of restraint.

So set forth Warren and Garrett on their plans for the 1972 seaside home. Designs did not begin at the drawing board but in the library, with the Los Angeles-based team immersing themselves in the work of their predecessors. Their studies proved fruitful, as both the tangible and intangible qualities that define a Buff and Hensman home revealed themselves in detail.



As the day progresses, a dialogue between the sunlight and the subtle interior is realized.

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Guided by the original design intent, Warren Garrett stripped the property to its bones and drew up blueprints to fashion it anew. While this may sound like an erasure, listing agent Chad Rogers of Hilton & Hyland says that the post and beam framework of the structure – a staple of Buff and Hensman homes – has been retained. “Rather than attempt to conceal or depart from the original, this trademark remains in every room in the house, as well as on the exterior. The true narrative of the home is undiluted.”

Material selection and placement also pay homage, with many of the same or similar finishes found in their 1972 locations.

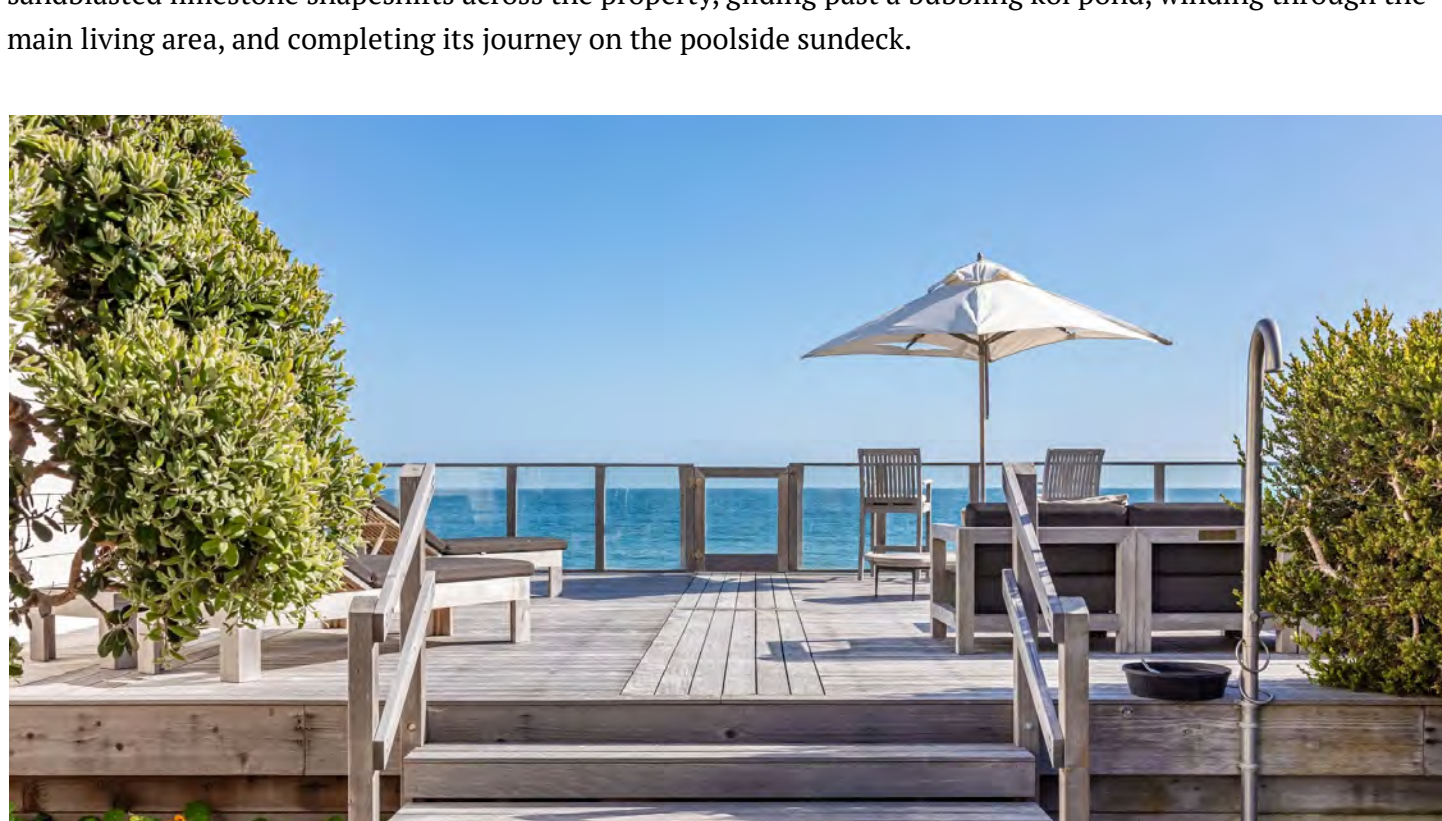


Intricacies of materials take the spotlight against an understated design framework.

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Is the result merely a love letter to Buff and Hensman? Not at all. The understated brushstrokes that define a Warren Garrett design are on full display from the moment you arrive at the gravel drive fronting the five-bedroom home.

The duo have asserted a confident neutral palette with bright accents as punctuation. A pathway of sandblasted limestone shapeshifts across the property, gliding past a bubbling koi pond, winding through the main living area, and completing its journey on the poolside sundeck.



Ownership is accompanied by access to a beachfront sundeck, exclusive to a handful of Malibu Colony residents.

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Wide mid-century horizontal volumes are given vertical breathing room and a direct line of sight through the home, thanks to the conversion of the entryway into a steel-supported, floor-to-ceiling glass wall. Custom features and finishes include alabaster light fixtures imported from France, white oak handrails to a floating staircase and a tailor-made paint color to the textured Marmorino plaster walls.

Completed in April this year, the result is indeed a marriage of two artistic visions.