

MOON TIDE MEDIA'S

Westside

MAGAZINE



the comforts of home

REVIVING A SANTA MONICA BUNGALOW



SIX DOLLARS

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of home ALL THE COMFORTS

*Westside designer Chad Eisner transforms a modest beach bungalow
into his own Santa Monica sanctuary.*

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"I wanted it to have the proper plumbing and electricity, of course, but I wanted it to be true to its period. I wanted it to be humble." - Chad Eisner



It could have gone badly. "I was practically *homeless*!" laughed Chad Eisner. An ironic situation indeed for a successful Venice-based interior designer. "I had put my house in Santa Monica on the market, and it sold very quickly — faster than I had anticipated," he recalled. "I was in escrow on another house, and it fell apart. There were crazy problems with it. I was driving through the neighborhood, and I saw this house with a 'For Sale' sign in front, and I called immediately! It had just gone on the market, and there were already two offers on it, so I had to act quickly. I bought it semi-sight-unseen."

Chad's new house, a classic 1920s beach bungalow, was just a few blocks away from his old home. "I had lived in this neighborhood for five years," he explained. "I had known this house and its potential and the possible secrets it could hold for a long time. I had seen it change hands, and I had seen what previous owners had done with it. I had admired it for so many years; it was part of the *language* of my neighborhood. I had a relationship with it long before I moved in."

The simplicity of the 80-year-old bungalow appealed to him. "I'm

home he wanted all along.

"When people think 'beach bungalow' they either picture some place cozy and flowery, with lots of Laura Ashley, or some place kind of messy and rumpled, with droopy curtains and wrinkled slipcovers," said Chad. "I didn't want anything too fussy or too 'precious.' I wanted it to be informal and welcoming, but *finished*, tailored. And since I'm six foot two, I wanted all the furniture to be comfortable, things you can lean back on. I didn't want anything flimsy; I want to be able to stretch out!"

He custom-designed a pair of Moroccan-style sofas, covered in a dark taupe fabric from GP & Baker for Lee Joffa in the Pacific Design Center, and piled them with exotic pillows, including a slate-colored pair from Fortuny, and comfortable throws from India. Other exotic touches in the living room include an inlaid Anglo-Indian table from Charles Jacobsen and hand-painted dishes from Japan.

"I made a conscious choice to avoid 'contemporary' lighting," Chad explained. "I used lamps I designed myself and antique fixtures and sconces wherever possible, to remain true to the spirit of the house and the kind of lighting it would have had originally."

"HOMES LIKE MINE FIND THE RIGHT OWNER," SAID CHAD.

"They require patience. The windows leak in heavy rain and the house makes strange noises late at night. I knew what I was getting into. It's important to preserve this kind of architecture."

not a very high-tech person," the designer said thoughtfully. "I wanted it to have the proper plumbing and electricity, of course, but I wanted it to be true to its period. I wanted it to be humble."

Beneath some ill-advised "improvements" that previous owners had made, the house had a lack of pretense that Chad found irresistible. "Some horrible things had been done to it," he recalled. "Bad shag carpet ... ugly linoleum. I wanted to bring back its original charm."

His mission seemed deceptively simple, but like all construction projects, it presented unforeseen challenges. "The two front rooms had been 'opened up' to create a great room," Chad recalled. "I like houses to have a sense of openness, but I also wanted a sense of transition from one room to another. It gives you some breathing room to acclimate from one room to another. I interviewed one contractor who told me, 'I'm not really into putting up walls; I'm more about breaking them down.' After a few more interviews, I bit the bullet and acted as my own general contractor."

Chad intended for the house to be completed by the time he moved in, but his professional obligations required so much time and energy that his own home became an afterthought, taking a backseat to his design clients. "I thought I'd move right in, just bringing my clothes and furniture," he recalled. "For about a month, I was showering at the gym a few blocks away because the hot water didn't work. I lived here for about six months with no kitchen: just a mini-fridge my dad brought me from Costco and a rice cooker! It was a great diet, but I don't recommend it as a lifestyle."

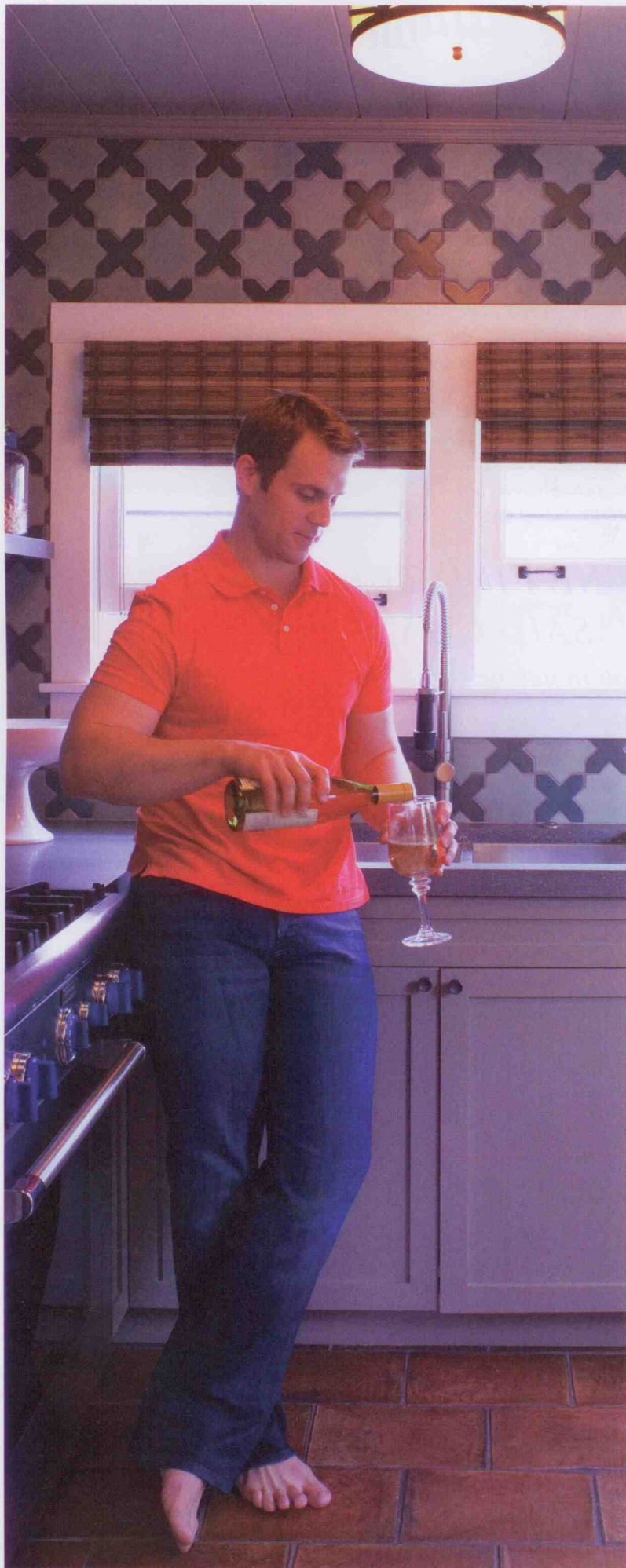
It took more than a year to complete the project but was well worth the time he invested. Chad's Santa Monica bungalow is exactly the

The muted palette he chose for the living room, beach-inspired shades of blue, grey and sand, continues throughout the house, with an unexpected surprise. "I chose my colors carefully," he said. "I think design professionals prefer to surround ourselves with neutrals in our private spaces because we are so bombarded with colors and textures and patterns when we are working. But teal seems to run through my house in unexpected ways. The crackle tile in the bathroom was the catalyst; I didn't expect to fall for it as much as I did."

Chad designed the glass-topped and nickel-plated metal dining room table, and he found dining room chairs he liked at HD Buttercup and had them upholstered in a hemp fabric from Le Gracieux. The antique cupboard found at Charles Jacobsen is from the Shanxi province in China and dates from around 1860. The Cambodian Buddha is sandstone and from JF Chen. Chad found the green ceramic vessel from Therein in West Hollywood and a 700-year-old cup at a Bonham's & Butterfield auction of Islamic art.

He wanted to preserve as many period details as possible in the kitchen, so he restored rather than replaced much of the cabinetry. The "Star and Cross" tile is custom-made and hand-painted by Lascaux Tile Company, and the hardware and fixtures were found at Restoration Hardware. The ceiling light fixture came from Reborn Antiques.

The master bedroom features a walnut pencil-post bed from Shelter and an antique bedside table from Italy, also in walnut. Chad custom-designed the lamps and lampshades, as well as the draperies and window fixtures, using fabrics from Le Gracieux and Lauren. He chose a relaxing shade of "blue slate" from Pratt & Lambert for the walls, to complete the soothing atmosphere. ▶



Chad's 900-square-foot house is very different in scale from some of the luxurious projects he has designed for clients, but if you look closely, you can see some of the same influences and trademark touches that appear in houses he has designed for clients in Malibu and Laguna Beach: rich, sensuous textures, natural fabrics, and cosmopolitan touches from far-flung places like China, Japan and the Middle East, artfully mixed with European antiques and custom furniture of his own design.

"My house is a *garage* compared to most of my clients!" he laughed.

His garden is a special source of joy for Chad. "It's unusual to have land around you in the city," he said. "It's a great privilege. I spend as much time as I can out there, despite having a black thumb."

He's being modest. His garden, in the side yard of his cottage, is lush, filled with succulents and other drought-tolerant plants, as well as desert/Mediterranean stalwarts like sage, lavender and licorice. "It's a study of different shades of green," said Chad, "with touches of deep purple and fuchsia. You can see the garden from every room in the house."

Chad has lived in this house for five years and in this neighborhood for 10. He feels deeply at home in Santa Monica.

"I find great inspiration in all the artists and creative people who live here," he said. "I like the fact that Santa Monica is really taking a stand for the environment and making an effort to be green. I like being able to put on a pair of sneakers and walk to the Third Street Promenade to see a movie; you can't do that in most of Los Angeles. And there is something very peaceful about living at land's end. There is such a sense of peace and *infinity*, knowing that the ocean is nearby; it puts you in your place. I love being able to ride my bike on the path near the ocean; it's such a great stress-reliever."

Chad also feels privileged to be the latest guardian of such an old house. "I have a good friend who is in real estate development," said Chad. "He tells me I should tear it down and build condos! Other people have suggested that I should build something bigger, or at least add a second floor. But this kind of architecture doesn't exist anywhere else. You can't find a house like this in Houston or Chicago. It's a wonderful place to live and a wonderful way to live."

"Homes like mine find the right owner," he continued. "They require patience. The windows leak in heavy rain, and the house makes strange noises late at night. I knew what I was getting into. It's important to preserve this kind of architecture. I love to think about how long this house has existed, long before I was born, and hopefully long after I'm gone. So many things have happened in this house; so many lives have been lived here. I bought it for its character, and I want to preserve it."

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