



SITTING ROOM (both pages) A pair of Forties Italian **chairs** are upholstered in a navy blue velvet from Claremont, which also supplied the cream-coloured fabric used on the **armchair**. A green velvet from Kravet was used to cover the custom-made **sofa**. The Spanish tiles on the stairs leading up to the main bedroom are original to the house

Kindred spirit

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A Twenties hacienda-style house in California presented a few challenges for interior designer Todd Nickey – not least that it had once been the home of his husband's grandparents





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Todd and his husband Greg keep hens in their garden, which is planted with succulents and drought-tolerant salvias. The plaster dog in the stairwell just off the sitting room is a carnival prize from the Thirties. The courtyard has a terracotta pineapple bought in Mexico, an English rattan armchair and a tiled **coffee table** from Todd's company Nickey Kehoe. A black and white 1954 **painting** by Robert Chuey hangs in the sitting room behind a Twenties grand piano bought from a specialist broker in Los Angeles. All the doors are original to the house, including those that open onto the plant-filled courtyard. Lunch is served on the patio. In the main bedroom, Hedy the chihuahua sits on an **'Italian Wing Back Chair'** from Nickey Kehoe, covered in a vintage toile. The entrance hall has a wall-mounted fountain with a tiled inset above, both original to the hacienda-style house; Greg inherited the carved wooden table from his grandparents, who lived here between 1952 and 1972



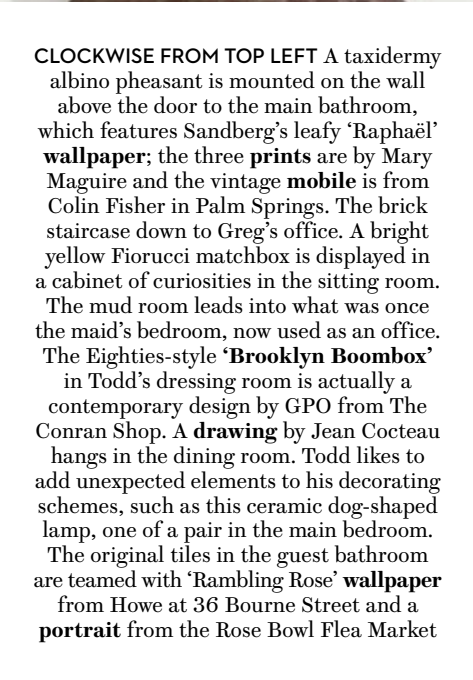
PATIO The canvas awning is supported by a classic wrought-iron structure that was added by the second owners of the house in the Forties. Potted geraniums, begonias and a money plant surround a dining table bought from a local haunt in Pasadena

DINING ROOM The 'Cove Dining Chairs' from Nickey Kehoe are covered in 'Night and Day' by Gert Voorjans for Jim Thompson. On the custom-made dining table, a vintage pewter Champagne bowl from France has been repurposed as a planter. The antique Mahal rug is from Marc Phillips



KITCHEN The original worktops are made of gumwood, which was a popular choice in southern California during the Twenties when the house was built, while the newer worktops are Carrara marble. **Walls** and **cabinets** painted in 'Lime White' by Farrow & Ball contrast with the Rydholm 'Uppsala' wallpaper in the mud room next door





MAIN BEDROOM The headboard of the Thirties Venetian bed stands out against Iksel's 'Arcadia' wallpaper. The bedcover is from Les Indiennes and the curtain fabric is 'Toscana Linen' in peacock by Scalamandr 

When Todd Nickey of LA-based design studio and showroom Nickey Kehoe and his husband Greg Holcomb, a real-estate broker, moved into their home in Pasadena in 2015, they faced several challenges. First, the 4,000-square-foot hacienda-style house was three times the size of their previous bungalow. Secondly, the couple needed to spend a good chunk of their budget on behind-the-scenes work for the 1927 poured-concrete house. This included having to modernise the electrical, plumbing and heating systems, some of which had not been touched in almost a century.

The third – and most daunting – challenge was addressing the elephant in the hacienda, namely that Greg's grandparents had lived in the house from 1952 to 1972. His father grew up here. Greg was brought home from the hospital to this house when he was born and it is where he celebrated every birthday, Thanksgiving and Christmas as a young boy. The rub? How to honour that legacy without letting it become a ball and chain, how to look forward as well as back and create a home that reflected the spirit of its current owners.

Todd remembers thinking, 'This is the best project I have ever had.' For Greg, it was more a question of restoring a Californian historical site. 'I joked, "We're not having any re-enactments here." For both of us, it was edging towards the middle and finding Switzerland – neutral territory,' he recalls. Fortunately for Todd and Greg, the woman who owned the property after Greg's grandparents had not done anything to the house.

In the recently published book *Golden Light: The Interior Design of Nickey Kehoe*, the designer and hotelier Liz Lambert describes the work of Todd and his business partner Amy Kehoe as: 'Unforced... they repair what exists. It is their love for the natural that I find is so often missing from design.' Indeed, much of this hacienda has been left as it was. The doors, hardware and floors are original, as are the bathroom tiles and the kitchen worktops. Todd made one structural change: removing a wall between the butler's pantry and the kitchen to make space for a fridge.

Greg had held onto a handful of items from his grandparents, including a cabinet of curiosities filled with objects made by artist friends of Greg's father Grant (a former director at the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, in upstate New York). 'They are back in the same place they started, which is fantastic,' says Greg. 'But there aren't so many pieces that they dominate. We wanted to express ourselves individually and as a couple here.'

The couple moved into a largely undecorated space, giving them time to experience the house, observe the light and work out which areas they were especially drawn to and how they wanted them to feel. 'It took us two years to settle into the upgrade,' said Todd. 'And even just to settle into the idea that we live here and are stewards of this great old architectural piece.'

Surrounding themselves with treasured objects and artwork was key to making the house a home. But they have done it with a light touch. 'The litmus test was that something must fit in and never



stand out,' Todd explains. He and Amy are avid shoppers for clients and for their LA store, whether at a brocante in the South of France, an estate sale in Texas or a vintage showroom in Palm Springs.

'The house is a great canvas for rotating our ever-growing collection,' says Todd. This includes a 1921 Chickering grand piano bought from a broker in Los Angeles, and two wooden busts of Haitian rulers they spotted at an estate sale. A large terracotta pineapple in the courtyard was lugged home from a trip to Mexico.

In their interiors projects, Todd and Amy like to throw in the odd unexpected piece. They call it 'a wink and a nod'. Todd points to several 'winks': Greg's yellow Fiorucci matchbox and their Chinese-inspired, Italian ceramic dog-shaped bedside lamps. These objects keep things from being too serious, as do the couple's three dogs, the latest addition being Carol, a 60lb Doberman puppy.

'I think of my home as a test space – a safe place for experimenting and figuring out how to make a space like this feel intimate and comfortable,' says Todd. 'We let the dogs lie all over the place, but it still has an elegance. Cracking that nut is important to me' □

Nickey Kehoe: nickeykehoe.com. Golden Light: The Interior Design of Nickey Kehoe (Rizzoli, £42.50)