

# dwell

At Home in the Modern World

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Durham, North Carolina

**Petal Power**  
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Blooms in the Berkshires

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Isaac Resnikoff of  
L.A. design collective  
Project Room and his  
son, Eli, arrive at their  
Highland Park house,  
which is finished with  
simple materials and  
filled with vintage finds.



Architect Warren Techtin collaborated with artists Christopher James and Kristin Beinler James to renovate the couple's once-derelict home in the Los Feliz section of Los Angeles. When they first bought it, the corner entrance was obscured by a tangle of vegetation.

## Step by Step

Over the course of nearly 20 years, two artists renovate a Los Angeles home and adjacent bungalows into the perfect live/work space.



**Christopher James vividly recalls when** he and his wife, Kristin Beinler James, first laid eyes on the pink and maroon house in L.A.'s Los Feliz neighborhood in 2000. Divided into upstairs and downstairs apartments, the house was a wreck, and the three bungalows out back weren't much better. "The sewer in the main house was disconnected, there was no heat, and rain streamed in through broken windows," says Chris.

Built between 1906 and 1926, the structures, which locals say were once used to accommodate out-of-town talent for a nearby movie studio, had obviously seen better days. But the property offered the live/rent opportunity the couple, both artists, were looking for, and they saw the potential to create a place to both work and raise a family.

After purchasing it, they settled into the upstairs apartment and began renovating

the one-bedroom bungalows and renting them out to fellow artists. "We had a sort of reverse discrimination policy," Chris jokes. "You had to be an artist to live here."

In 2010 they reached out to architect Warren Techentin, a friend, to redesign a collapsing exterior stair on the south side of the main house. Five years later he returned to explore how Chris and Kristin, who have two daughters, might convert the 2,700-square-foot house into a four-bedroom, single-family home. Elevated above the nearly half-acre lot, the boxy structure offered the perfect blank canvas for clean-lined rooms, but there was little connection to the surrounding garden that the couple had brought back to life.

In addition to making the house suitable for a family of four, the couple wanted to retain its Mission lines and Moroccan-inflected details. "Chris and Kristin are modernists, and they wanted a modern >



Rebuilt windows give the living room (opposite, top) a daylight glow. The pendant is by Serge Mouille. Chris, at left, and Techentin stand in the library, which they outfitted with a solid brass counter (opposite, bottom). In addition to turning what had

been two apartments into a single residence, Techentin reconfigured the garden facade (right), adding a terrace, French doors, and a freestanding chimney. The updated kitchen (below) pairs Heath tiles with Porcelanosa countertops.



### Golden Age

A once-neglected home gets ready for its close-up.

- **c. 1906**  
Three bungalows are built on a lot measuring just under a half-acre on the edge of Los Feliz.
- **c. 1912**  
A one-story house is built on the site.
- **c. 1926**  
A second story is added to the house.
- **1910s–1920s**  
The buildings are used as quarters for out-of-town talent by a neighboring movie studio, according to local lore.
- **1940s**  
The two floors of the main house are converted into separate apartments.
- **2000**  
Christopher James and Kristin Beinler James buy the property and begin the process of updating the bungalows and the upstairs apartment. Chris also begins revitalizing the landscape.
- **2010**  
Architect Warren Techentin redesigns the exterior stair on the main house, along with a garden shed and a deck.
- **2015**  
Techentin begins working on a plan to convert the two apartments into a four-bedroom, single-family home, a project that requires significant shoring up of the foundation.
- **2016**  
Chris and Kristin finish renovating two of the bungalows for use as art studios.
- **2018**  
Renovation of the main house is complete.

**“We had a lot of conversations about how to adapt the character of the building, as well as how to open up the house to the garden.”** WARREN TECHENTIN, ARCHITECT

In the library, tucked beneath the renovated staircase, is a reading nook featuring cushion fabric by Sarah Morris for Maharam (right). The pendant is by Louis Weisdorf for Gubi, and the sconce is by Bernard Schottlander for DCW éditions. An oil painting by Chris hangs in the dining room (below). Other works by the couple and artist friends are displayed throughout the house.



Chris customized the main bathroom's patterned Granada cement tiles (below). "I had them take out some of the lines," he says. "I'm a fan of '60s Op art, and you



get a 3-D effect if you lay them in the right way." Lush plantings surround one of the two bungalows on the property that the couple converted into art studios (opposite).

home," Techentin says. "But they wanted the character of the house to come with it." For inspiration, they looked to the early work of pioneering modernist Irving Gill. "There is something very restful and satisfying to my mind in the simple cube house with creamy walls, sheer and plain, rising boldly into the sky, unrelieved by cornices or overhang of roof," the architect wrote in 1916.

The project was both a renovation and a recasting of the original, with added elements that feel as though they were meant to be there all along. Chief among them is the long terrace that connects to the garden through new French doors in the dining room and kitchen. Of the new detached chimney and outdoor fireplace, Techentin says, "Louis Kahn did them frequently as ways to modulate scale. Here,

the chimney balances the two volumes and helps the house to read as one entity."

Upstairs as well as downstairs, new and reconstructed windows flood the rooms with light. Echoing an existing curved opening between the living and dining rooms, an archway leads from the barrel-vaulted living room to a diminutive library located beneath the renovated stair that leads to the second-floor bedrooms. Lined with books and featuring a reading nook and a bar, it's an intimate counterpoint to the public rooms.

To make the tiny kitchen more usable, Techentin moved walls and added storage. He worked closely with Chris and Kristin on choosing finishes and materials, like the solid brass handrail on the staircase and the library's bar counter, crafted of brass sheeting. Chris also modified existing

cement tile designs and created layouts for the tile in the bathrooms.

The rooms are hung with pieces by the couple, who now work out of two of the bungalows, and by artist friends. The pair has also found a place for several antiques that were in Chris's mom's home in San Francisco. "They're so over the top and just weird enough that they fit here," he says.

The dialogue between old and new is fitting for a property that has evolved over the years to become a deeply personal reflection of its owners, who have created a place that's conducive to work as well as play. Friends come to stay, and there have been art exhibitions and video screenings, along with the occasional dance party. Says Kristin, "It's an oasis in the city." ■

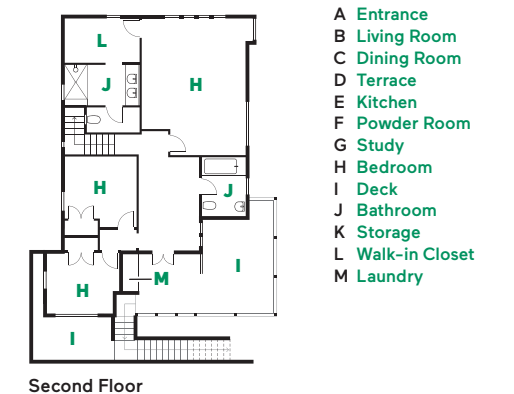
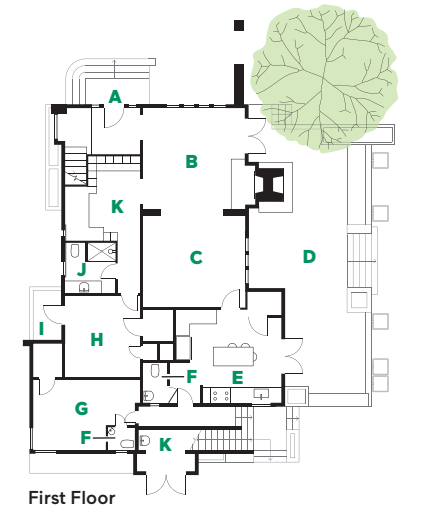


ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT

Los Feliz Residence



ARCHITECT Warren Techentin Architecture  
LOCATION Los Angeles, California



First Floor

Second Floor

- A Entrance
- B Living Room
- C Dining Room
- D Terrace
- E Kitchen
- F Powder Room
- G Study
- H Bedroom
- I Deck
- J Bathroom
- K Storage
- L Walk-in Closet
- M Laundry