

Small Wonder

COLOR, COLLECTIBLES, AND UNCONVENTIONAL SPACE-STRETCHING STRATEGIES GIVE THIS TINY HOUSE A LARGER-THAN-REAL-LIFE OUTLOOK.



Architect Benjamin Clavan's home in the West Hollywood section of Los Angeles doesn't disclose its charms all at once. It requires some scrutiny to discover how a house of demure dimensions came to possess such an expansive demeanor.

What Benjamin *didn't* do to give his small house

big-house character is almost as significant as what he *did* do. He didn't knock down walls or raise the roof beams. He didn't paint everything a space-expanding white, punctuate the ceilings with skylights, scale back furniture, line walls with mirrors, or pare down on possessions.

Instead, in defiance of conventional wisdom, he reshaped rooms with bold blocks of color, prominent pattern, layered-on texture, and towering built-ins. In effect, Benjamin enlarged his 1922 California cottage without remodeling it at all. Except for five new sets of French doors (which blur the distinction between indoors and out and expand the little house's horizons), he made few structural changes.

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Layers of paint were stripped from the mantel to restore the fireplace's focal-point status. A large-scale painting fills the often-awkward void between mantel and ceiling.

Architect Benjamin Clavan, opposite, looks up from his drawing table in the office, just steps from his house.



A WELCOMING entry consists of a yellow brick road of a porch, a tile mural framed and hung on the exterior wall, and a kind of privacy panel of wire screen that shields the front door from neighbors and provides a subtle sense of enclosure.

"When they walk through [the house]," Benjamin says proudly, "no one believes there's just nine hundred square feet of space here. It just feels so much bigger."

Competition from other elements for their attention is one reason visitors fail to focus on the lack of space. These elements include Benjamin's collections of pottery, art glass, Arts and Crafts furniture, artwork, and other objects and artifacts from the "modern" era. The sheer abundance of objects from the first half of the

century—and the way they are effectively exhibited—suggests an abundance of space.

In the living room, for example, Benjamin's space-expanding strategies are as subtle as they are unconventional. Decorative plates and framed artwork stack from low to high on the walls, creating vertical compositions that imply high ceilings. Large pieces of furniture, including an almost-aerodynamic sofa

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HEIRLOOM RUGS and runners and wood furniture from the Arts and Crafts period contribute to the living room's look of longevity. A pair of raised-panel doors, original to the house, add height, width, and a sense of importance to the dining room.





FRENCH DOORS and a 4-foot-wide lattice-enclosed deck visually extend the living room limits. Seemingly floating away from the wall and above the floor, an Eisenhower-era sofa, above, provides big comfort without overwhelming the room.

from the '50s and a buffet and chaise longue from the Arts and Crafts Era, also imply roominess.

"Contrary to what many people think, large pieces of furniture make small spaces seem larger," says Benjamin. "Furniture with legs, and pieces you can see through and under suggest spaciousness much more effectively than a lot of small pieces scattered around."

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The same applies to see-through walls. Behind the sofa and beyond a pair of existing French doors, Benjamin enclosed a sliver of deck with wood lattice to obscure the neighbor's house, just 3½ feet from the edge of the deck. "Creating an enclosure that's not really an enclosure not only provided privacy, but a greater sense of depth for the living room," he says. "In

a way, I got another four and a half feet for the living room without adding on."

Between the doors, he inserted a powerfully pink television cabinet, yet another overscale vertical element. The back of the cabinet protrudes well beyond the exterior wall and onto the deck. "The deck itself was essentially unusable, and the wall space between the doors seemed awkward, so this seemed like a good way to have a large television that didn't take up a lot of space in the living room," Benjamin says.

TWO NEW SETS of French doors give the small kitchen opposite an alfresco attitude. Painted blocks of tan on yellow walls produce an "exploded" effect, making the kitchen seem larger. Benjamin designed the glass-top table.



Flea-Market Royalty

Benjamin Clavan's collection of blue-and-pink Haeger pottery began, as many collections do, with one piece given to him as a gift by a friend. A serious collector of American art pottery such as Rockwood, Weller, and McCoy, Benjamin at first regarded the gift as "the ugliest and most tasteless kind of kitsch." But then another friend provided a companion piece, and Benjamin himself came across a specimen on his own. And, as any collector knows, three of anything is a collection. Benjamin's collection now exceeds 75 pieces and has spread beyond the confines of the yellow cabinets in his bedroom to the kitchen and the dining room.

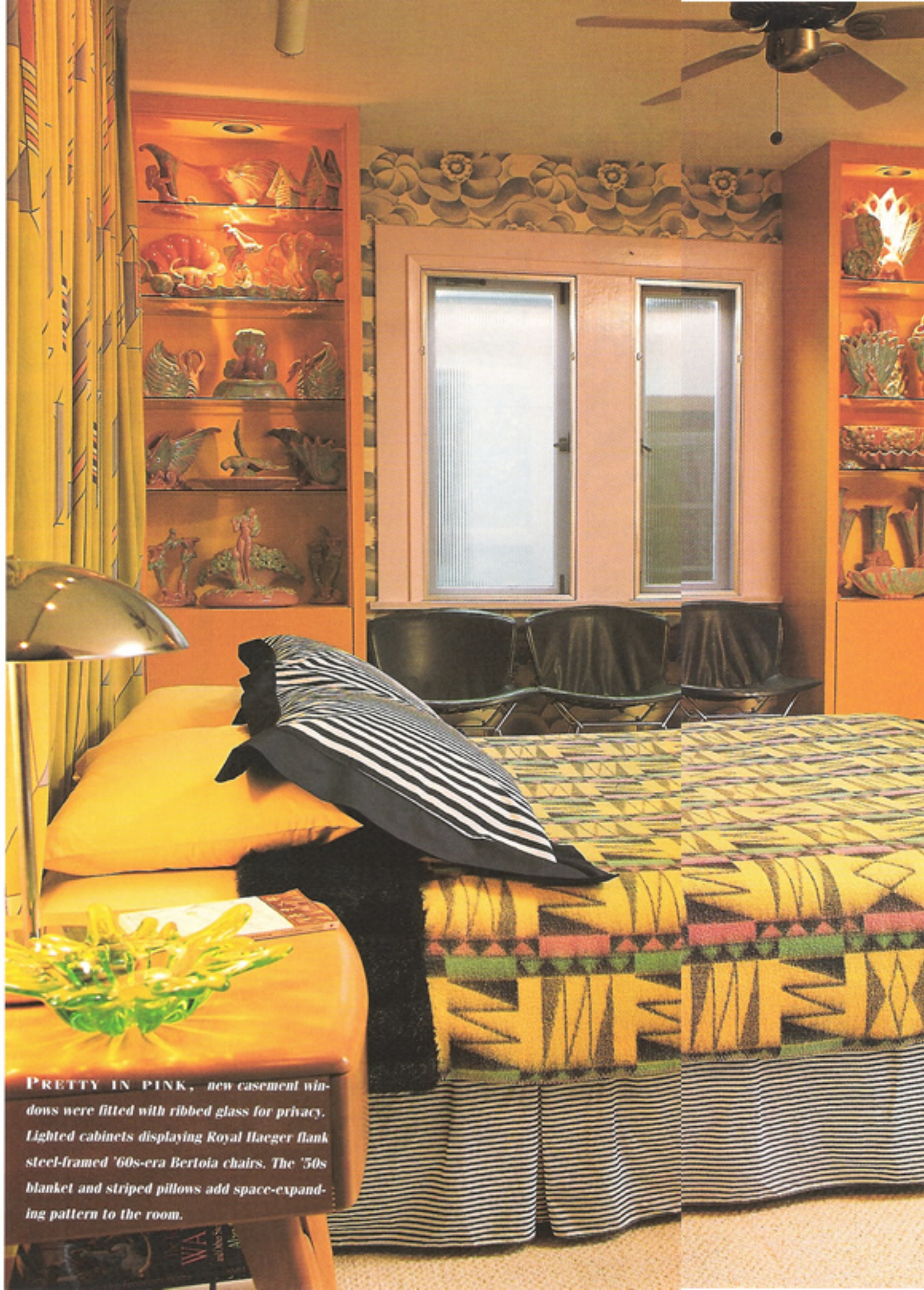
Royal Haeger pottery was designed by and named for Royal Brickman, an artist who joined the Haeger Pottery Co. in 1938. Mr. Brickman created a flamboyant array of vases, bowls, and candleholders in the shapes of swans, peacocks, parrots, mermaids, marlins, and seashells.

Although the Haeger Co. is still in business in Dundee, Illinois, after 125 years, the Royal Haeger line, sold mostly through department stores nationwide well into the 1950s, is no longer produced. That, along with nostalgia, is what accounts for its collectible status.

And as collectible pottery goes, Royal Haeger is among the most affordable. Most antique pottery price guides suggest prices of \$10, \$20, or \$30 for most pieces.

"For me, and probably for most other collectors," says Benjamin, "Royal Haeger is really a form of entertainment. Personally, finding this cheap, gaudy, department-store pottery from the '30s, '40s, and '50s is just fun."

PRETTY IN PINK, new casement windows were fitted with ribbed glass for privacy. Lighted cabinets displaying Royal Haeger flank steel-framed '60s-era Bertola chairs. The '50s blanket and striped pillows add space-expanding pattern to the room.



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REPLACING a small window with French doors, below, brought daylight and verdant views into the bedroom's realm. The '50s lamp/table, a flea-market find, puts a collection of Italian pottery from the same period on a pedestal.

Recognizing that solid-color walls set firm limits on a room's dimensions, Benjamin painted the living room walls in two shades of gray-green arranged in a subtle diamond pattern. "Far from drawing attention, the colors and pattern almost work like shadows," he says. "When you subtract for the windows, doors, furniture, artwork, and objects on the walls, suddenly you're not seeing much of the walls anyway. And when you don't have a sense of the walls, you don't have a sense that the room has solid boundaries."

He achieved a similar effect in the adjacent 10x11-foot dining room/library, where a metallic paint was blotted with waxed paper over a solid lighter color, giving the walls texture, depth, and dimension. Treated like the walls and hung with framed photographs, closet doors were rendered all but invisible. A quartet of tall green bookcases, one in each of the small room's corners, stretches the wall height. Green boxed beams



not only add the kind of substantial architecture usually reserved for grander rooms, but make the lighter color panels between them seem higher.

In terms of color, the look of the bedroom is as distinct from the dining room as the dining room is from the living room, a deliberate attempt on Benjamin's part to combat the kind of excessive uniformity that can make a small house seem even smaller.

"I've found that if you take each room and paint it markedly different or

A DOOR BETWEEN the bedroom and hallway was removed and the wallpaper extended the length of the corridor to give the small room the character of a master suite, above. Reproduction Frank Lloyd Wright drapery panels behind the bed stretch the wall upward.



NEW WINDOWS and French doors help transform an old garage into a light, airy office, below, just steps from the house.



JUST OUTSIDE the office, an exuberant bougainvillea shades a small patio, below, that often serves as an informal conference room.



decorate it markedly different, then each room begins to have a life of its own," he says. "You experience each of them as unique environments as you pass from one space to another, and that visual variety actually makes the house seem bigger than if all the walls were painted the same and all the furniture and fabrics matched."

What the bedroom has in common with other spaces, however, are French doors that extend its domain into the backyard, a pair of tall, narrow cabinets exhibiting Benjamin's collection of blue-

and-pink Haeger pottery, and stacked artwork—all of which give a boost to a regulation 8-foot ceiling. And far from making the 10x13½-foot room seem smaller, two overscale patterned wallpapers in the same colors actually seem to enlarge it.

Just a few steps into the little backyard take Benjamin to his office, once the modest old house's one-car garage. A two-color painted finish was added to new wallboard, yielding a parchmentlike background for tall bookshelves and stacked-to-the-ceiling framed prints.

Out here, Benjamin has employed the same property-

expanding French doors he used in the house. With the doors open, the 12x18-foot space becomes a larger-than-real-work office—and an integral part of the larger-than-real-life house. □

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AN ENGLISH Art Deco armoire with burlled maple doors takes center stage against the office wall behind Ben's simple desk, which is made of file cabinets and a glass-topped hollow-core door.

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