

Robb Report ^{LUXURY} Home

CUSTOM DESIGN + ARCHITECTURE + TECHNOLOGY

Designing Men

Jacob Rothschild in London

Marvin Herman in Chicago

John Coote in Ireland



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A Bachelor's Entertainment Zone GE's Walk-in Wine Vault
The Suspended Aquarium Paintings that Glow in the Dark

A stainless steel floor in the garage of a Bel-Air residence matches the owner's silver Mercedes-Benz SL600 and Harley-Davidson VRSCB V-Rod.



ERHARD PFEFFER

Heavy Metal

INTERIOR DESIGNERS rarely pay much attention to utilitarian spaces, but Charles Allem developed ambitious ideas for the oversize two-car garage of a mid-century house in Bel-Air. “The view was so extraordinary, and I thought the garage should be like the rest of the house,” he says. Taking advantage of the best view in town was a simple matter of replacing the garage’s drywall with glazing. The new wall of glass also showcases the garage’s immediate environs. “It has an incredible view of the architecture,” Allem says.

Allem is justified in categorizing his next proposal as “explosive”—he asked engineers to pave both the driveway and garage with *stainless steel*. “They always say, ‘Oh my God, no, it can’t be done,’” he says, “but that’s where we have to push the envelope of design. Of course, it has to be functional. It has to work. But who knows? In 10 years everyone might be doing this.”

Far from a fleeting whim, the request suited Allem’s overall concept for the house (see “Bel-Air Seducer” on page 54). “My design philosophy is to use one material throughout a project and change the way it’s referenced,” he says. “I like the challenge.” The engineers

gave the go-ahead, and Allem’s client became the proud owner of a gleaming space that matched his silver Mercedes-Benz SL600 and stainless steel-and-chrome Harley-Davidson VRSCB V-Rod perfectly; he also gained bragging rights to an utterly unique garage surface. “It’s the only one I know of,” says Allem. The designer adds that traction on the stainless steel isn’t a problem. “It’s not like anyone is racing in here at 100 miles per hour,” he says. And should anyone misjudge the braking distance, Allem has thoughtfully arranged for external barriers to prevent an inadvertent plunge into the canyon below.

CHRISTIAN GULLIKSEN

A 1960s Bel-Air home is reinvented to reflect the times By Andrew Myers

REAGAN SILBER FIRST MET HER on a blind date in Los Angeles. She was older; he realized that immediately. A little worn, a bit weathered. Her style, though not bad, was of a much earlier generation, rather bohemian. She was also, for the most part, housebound, a semi-shut-in due to lack of space. But her bones? Sublime. Her position in Bel-Air? Lofty. And her perspective on the world was unique. Before their first encounter, Silber, an L.A.-based private investor, was in love. He simply had to have her.

How did this modern two-story, built in 1961 and epitomizing that era's taste—lots of dark brown wood—seduce a young, wealthy Texan who could have his pick of impressively homey, not homely, beauties? "I walked in the front door and looked out the facing windows," says Silber, recalling the fateful moment when she had him, if not at hello, then with the view—a panoramic sweep of the L.A. basin, from the mountains east of downtown out to the Pacific.

To address all the cosmetic and structural shortcomings of his paramour, Silber knew a specialist was in order, a master of residential nip 'n' tuck, who would rejuvenate and improve without making her something other than what he loved. Designer Charles Allem was called in for an immediate consultation. "Charles has a vision that happens very quickly," explains Silber. "He's an artist, very passionate." Allem's prescription: enlarge the backyard, which until then was a 45-degree escarpment; add a third floor that would open to a terrace, pool and gardens; lighten up the two existing floors through additional windows and stainless steel, lacquer and polished woods; and add a central, three-story, helix-like floating stainless steel staircase topped with a glass-and-steel pyramid.



Bel-Air Seducer

The rich ruby and chocolate hues of the office suite, right, warm the stainless steel touches used throughout.

Previous pages: The amethysts and Kelly greens of the media room create the alluring, edgy look Allem wanted. “People look good in that room,” he says. Most of the home’s living spaces spill into the terraced lawn and pool area.



ERHARD PFEIFER

To achieve his vision and Silber’s ideal, Allem—who was born in South Africa, resides in New York and keeps an office in Los Angeles—had to move mountains. Literally. He started with a 32-foot-high retaining wall, not just buttressing but building a backyard, then trucked in hundreds of tons of soil, ultimately yielding not just a terrace but a sleek terrazzo martini bar and outdoor chef’s kitchen, an 80-foot lap pool, terraces of gardens and wide strips of lawns, as well as the house’s bottom floor. The level now has a bespoke gym (with suede walls and custom weight machines, barbells and dumbbells); the media room, overlooked by a huge plasma screen; and the study, reminiscent of an old-fashioned gentleman’s two-story study with a mezzanine of books reached by spiral staircase, but made contemporary by material (stainless steel and richly stained wood); color (ruby red walls, leather and abstract patterned carpet); and art (Andy Warhol’s 1968 series *Flash—November 22, 1963*).

Allem applied this same rich color palette to the renovated spaces. For the middle floor, which houses the master suite (including a luxe lounge/bathroom, dressing room and kitchen) and two cossetting guest rooms, he chose deep chocolate browns offset by a

vibrant Kelly green. For the top floor, the principle indoor entertaining area, Allem used a first-growth forest of greens, and browns from chocolate to aubergine, all the while leaving the floor plan open, from dining room to atrium and staircase to living room. “So many contemporary houses are very cold,” says Allem. “This house is pristine, museum-like on the outside but warm on the inside. It’s a continued flow of color—amethysts, emeralds, rubies. I love that.”

Outside the front glass door sits the entrance courtyard, white terrazzo juxtaposed with stripes of emerald lawn enclosed by reflective stainless steel walls that lead to two heavy stainless steel street doors and a checkerboard walkway of terrazzo and lawn, ending at the garage. Not the usual utilitarian afterthought, this garage (see End Page, page 128), with a stainless steel driveway and window cutout in a white wall, framing the view like a neorealist’s painting, becomes Silber’s love’s last crowning jewel.

So how will the story end? Unloved and neglected? Or worse—jilted for a new love? Unlikely. Just as Allem’s lady loves to entertain at a moment’s notice, so can she adjust to life’s more profound demands: The office suite on the ground floor, currently occupied by Silber’s assistant, Christine Stafford, could easily be turned into a nursery or staff rooms. “Naturally, I encompass potential changes into my designs, but I never let them distract from the primary task at hand,” says Allem. That ability to anticipate, even plan for change, is one of the reasons Silber considers Allem “a genius, one of the great designers of our time.” It also ensures that Silber’s love for his Bel-Air beauty will not soon fade away. 

Charles Allem Designs, 212.702.8831, 310.286.9605, www.charlesallem.com

High Spirits

Cocktails served in swank style By Jorge S. Arango

FRANK SINATRA LIKED TO SAY, “Cock your hat—angles are attitudes.” That outlook informs this residential bar, designed by Penny Drue Baird, which has attitude aplenty. From its agglomeration of styles to the sawed-off corners of the zinc-topped bar to the curved backs of the barstools, it exudes the same

sense of fun as the crooner’s boyish grin beaming out from under the brim of his characteristically tipped chapeau.

Baird’s client, an entertainment executive in his fifties with a penthouse on Fifth Avenue, had hired the designer to appoint his former home in 1993. The penthouse, says Baird, had a lot of “extraneous spaces” that needed reworking. The current bar had been a combination dressing room-bath between the library and living room. “They didn’t need a bathroom there because there was already a powder room on that floor,” explains Baird, who suggested turning the 12-foot-by-6-foot quarters into a stylish, yet cozy, watering hole. “It opened the entertaining spaces up more,” she says.

After renovating the plumbing for the wet bar, the designer swathed the walls in woven leather—a luxurious touch, but one trumped by a trick of the eye: Instead of real wood moldings, she created a molding effect with the use of nail heads. The room’s centerpiece is a zinc-topped Art Deco bar brought from Paris. Its wood facing glows against the warm hues of the leather, and its metal rim is adorned with a repeating motif of grapes in high relief. The bar is crowned with a Regency-style brass chandelier.

The period mixing continues with the traditional barstools and a vintage black-and-white photograph of Ol’ Blue Eyes himself, casting an approving gaze over the scene. The whole thing can be closed off from its adjacent spaces with pocket doors, creating a more intimate lounge setting. “It’s not the kind of bar you’d find in the ’60s, from Rat Pack days,” says Baird, “but it’s a nice, fun place to gather.”

And for anyone requesting a nightcap in this joint, we have some sage, and timeless, advice from Dean Martin: “If you drink, don’t drive. Don’t even putt.”

Penny Drue Baird, Dessins, 212.288.3600

