

ELLE DECOR

WINTER 2022

THE ESCAPES ISSUE

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A DESERT SANCTUARY MADE FOR THE MOVIES

OCULUS QUEST

In California's high desert, a Hollywood agent's spectacular new home brings light and shadow into cinematic focus.

BY **ALEXANDRA LANGE** PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ROGER DAVIES** STYLED BY **ANITA SARSIDI**

The entry to Todd Feldman's retreat in La Quinta, California, which was designed by Los Angeles-based Kovac Design Studio. The canopy is foamed aluminum by Alusion, the facade is Portland cement plaster, and the water feature is lined in absolute black granite. For details, see Resources.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE

to make a getaway truly relaxing? For some people, it's communing with nature. For other travelers, it's spa services. For week-

enders, it can be a home away from home. For Todd Feldman, a film and television agent at Creative Artists Agency, it was not having to choose. His seven-bedroom, 9,200-square-foot vacation house at the private Madison Club in La Quinta, California, designed by Kovac Design Studio and completed in 2020, is Palm Springs pad as boutique hotel, with *Mad Men* flourishes and a museum-worthy outdoor canopy, a bar ready for *Out of Sight*-level seduction, and a concession stand stocked for Fight Night.

"Often, when you're lucky enough to be invited to someone's place, there is that little bit of awkwardness," Feldman says. "You get up in the morning, and if you are an early riser like I am, you're standing there by the coffee machine and you haven't yet brushed your teeth. Or even when you're having a great night, some people want to go to bed a little earlier. There's a push-pull."

Kovac Design Studio's Michael Kovac and Thomas Schneider ensured there would be neither late-night nor early-morning awkward-



The great room overlooks the pool terrace and Madison Club golf course. The Warren Platner chairs and stool (right) are by Knoll, and the Antonio Citterio daybed is by B&B Italia. On the terrace, the sectional is by Gloster, and the grill is by Wolf. **OPPOSITE:** The entry's pivot door is in oil-rubbed bronze, and the Jens Risom bench is from Design Within Reach.



ness by laying out the house as a central, double-height gathering space with flanking bedrooms, separated by outdoor walkways and planted courtyards for visual and sonic privacy. Each "casita" has its own bathroom, coffeemaker, and mini fridge, as well as an outdoor shower; Feldman had fun stocking them with his favorite products, from oat milk to Fever Tree cocktail mixers. Downstairs, there's a generous gym with adjacent massage studio and locker room. But the main event is a six-bed, walnut-paneled bunk room, beloved by Feldman's nine-year-old son but also fun for adult slumber parties. (Every bunk is outfitted with a charging port, a reading light, and a beverage shelf.) "It can be juice boxes or rosé in the fridge down there," says Feldman, depending on the age of the guests in residence.

The five-part ensemble is tied together by the 5,000-square-foot sunshade, made of panels of an off-the-shelf aluminum foam product originally developed as an acoustic material. "We hoped initially to do a canopy modeled on a cholla cactus skeleton," Kovac says. "We did a lot of research on how we could get this pattern, but then budget reality intruded." A solution came when they looked up, noticing the material of the conference room ceiling in their office. The result is striking in the

desert's penetrating light, casting dappled shadows on the sand-colored walls and poured concrete floors and living up to its inspiration—Jean Nouvel's Louvre Abu Dhabi. In the evening, a programmed lighting system by Lux Populi synced to sundown slowly brings up the warm lights embedded in the canopy, creating a candlelit glow from above.

The shade also frames an unimpeded vista of the mountains over the golf course onto which the property backs. ("It's kind of ironic, since Todd is not a golfer," Kovac says, "but it is fun for his friends.") If the mountain view is reminiscent of "a wide-screen cinema," as Kovac puts it, the oculus in front is more of a James Turrell moment, with the architecture focusing and filtering the light emanating from above. "If there's too much sky, it dilutes your attention," he notes.

Inside the house, warm tones, midcentury furniture, and tactile fabrics predominate, from the bronze mesh curtains to a sprawling velvet Patricia Urquiola Tufty Time sofa to the vintage Pierre Paulin chairs reupholstered in wool. The walls are made of integral plaster in a shade that was developed on-site by looking at the colors of the desert, because "big expanses of white plaster become fatiguing," Kovac says. Indoor-outdoor fabrics were also specified in many places, given

the easy back-and-forth between poolside and inside when the back wall is left open, as it is most of the time.

The 10-by-17-foot screen in the upstairs media room is really a motorized wall, which swings out to reveal a balcony awaiting a DJ and the generous surface for projecting films. Feldman is as likely to have basketball or Ultimate Fighting Championship bouts playing as he is to be screening French cinema classics, making this the desert's most fabulous sports bar.

What has surprised Feldman most about the house? "It was always designed to be both a vacation home and one for entertaining," he says. "But during the pandemic, it was my primary residence for a lot of that time. It just has this warmth and calmness to it. The sunsets and the balmy nights, sitting out there by the pool—it is just really peaceful." ■

With views of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto mountains, the south primary suite has a Jesse bed, a Studio Piet Boon sofa, and a side table by Luca Nichetto. The desk is by BoConcept, and the chair is by Eero Saarinen for Knoll. **BELOW, FROM LEFT:** A passage between the main house and guest bedrooms. The north wing's primary suite has Poliform armchairs, a side table by Setsu & Shinobu Ito, a vintage Italian floor lamp, and artwork by Jake Longstreth.



The bathroom in one of the two primary suites has an Agape tub, sink fittings by Axor, and a custom walnut and limestone vanity. The stool is by Frama, and the ceiling is clad in walnut veneer. The outdoor area features a topiary pine and a path that leads to the pool.



Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* is projected on a custom motorized screen in the great room, which features a floating theater with a glass railing over a curtained bar area. The seating area's sectional is by Patricia Urquiola for B&B Italia, the cocktail table is by RH, Restoration Hardware, and the rug is by Armadillo. The artwork is by Jeremy Blake.



In the lounge, stools by RH, Restoration Hardware frame a custom bar of American black walnut. The mesh curtains are by Whiting & Davis. **ABOVE:** The entertainment room's sectional is in a Maharam velvet, and the built-in bunk beds are made of walnut.