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Carved entry console. Gilded iron lamp from Paris. The Ellsworth Kelly work on paper was a gift from the husband to his wife. Floor is painted in a Goyard-style pattern.

SIMPLY FABÛCHE

A NONSENSE WORD CREATED BY THE HOMEOWNER TO EXPRESS UTTER FABULOUSNESS AND FUN, “FABÛCHE” PERFECTLY SUMS UP THE INTERIORS OF THIS SUNSET BOULEVARD HOUSE.



Living-room sofa by Rose Tarlow Melrose House in Schumacher linen. Pillows in Sister Parish Serendipity fabric. Floor lamps from Visual Comfort. Coffee table from Mecox. Red suede chair by Dennis & Leen, from Culp Associates. Schumacher decorative fabric tape at ceiling.

BY REBECCA SHERMAN. INTERIOR DESIGN J. RANDALL POWERS AND CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER. ARCHITECTURAL RENOVATION CURTIS & WINDHAM ARCHITECTS. PHOTOGRAPHY PÅR BENGTSSON. PORTRAIT GERARDO VELAZQUEZ.

A few years ago, J. Randall Powers — or Randy, as he’s known — got an unexpected call from a couple who had just bought a house in Houston’s Southampton neighborhood. They’d seen his interior design work in magazines and online and wanted to hire him to give the home a complete overhaul. His interest was piqued — but what really got his attention was when the wife mentioned it was on Sunset Boulevard. “It’s one of the best streets in Houston,” Powers says. Lined with huge old oaks and gorgeous houses from the ‘20s, ‘30s, and ‘40s. The house sounded like it needed a lot of work, so he asked if they had an architect or contractor yet. “We were hoping you’d tell us who to use,” she told him. That was music to his ears: The chance to assemble a strong team from scratch is a designer’s dream.

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In the family room, the ceiling and walls are covered with Nobilis faux bois wallpaper from Culp Associates. Brunswick & Fils fabric on chairs. Hoof bench, 1930s. Billy Baldwin table. Brunswick & Fils sofa upholstered in Carleton V fabric. Vintage dhurrie rug. Painting found in Atlanta.

His recommendation was Curtis & Windham Architects, a firm with an impressive legacy of renovating historic houses, along with building classical homes from the ground up. Powers set up a meeting at the house and was immediately smitten with his new clients, then in their late 20s. “The house is very traditional, but the couple is so youthful and playful,” he says. “They wanted to keep it classical, but with an edge and a little funkiness.” With high-pressure jobs and an intense travel schedule, the couple was happy to give their new team creative freedom. “They turned over the whole project to us and told us just to go for it,” Powers says.

Architect Bill Curtis led the way, removing several bad additions built years after the house was completed in the 1940s. The interiors were gutted, rooms and windows opened up, and kitchen and bathrooms

updated. New white oak floors were laid, and new period-appropriate molding was added. All of the brass hardware — including door hinges, knobs, and cabinet fittings and screens — were made by the century-old Frank Allart company in Birmingham, England. “It became a house that people need for contemporary living, but we tried to do it artfully and subtly,” Curtis says. “Most people wouldn’t be able to tell that a lot of it isn’t original.”

The renovation and interiors took more than two years to complete — ample time to have fun with the furnishings and art, says Powers, who was assisted by his partner in the design firm, Christopher Alexander. The clients love color and weren’t afraid to take risks with the interiors. “Every time we had an idea and ran it past them, they were, like, ‘Love it, love it!’ The wife even made up a word for when

she really loved something, like the enormous sofa with the fringe. She’d exclaim, ‘Well, that’s just fabûche!’ That living-room sofa, custom-made by Rose Tarlow Melrose House, is covered in brown and white linen in a Schumacher over-scale damask print, with a skirt of six-inch fringe. Most of the furnishings were custom-made or selected specifically for the interiors. “It’s a bespoke house,” Powers says.

An artisan was brought in to paint and stencil many of the floors, including the one in the foyer, which is done in a bold Coyard-inspired geometric pattern. An optic tumbling-block pattern in the kitchen and breakfast room is reminiscent of European tile floors, and a zesty zigzag border in the dining room is made from inlaid faux ivory. Powers had a blast with color and patterns, such as glossing the dining-room doors in



J. Randall Powers
Christopher Alexander



red and kitchen cabinets in Farrow & Ball Hague Blue. Red-and-white Schumacher fabric tape in a classical dentil pattern borders the ceiling in the living room and ties into the custom lampshades, all lined in a happy red starburst wallpaper from Sister Parish. The main bedroom is a riot of floral, with walls wrapped in green-and-pink Schumacher scenic wallpaper and matching draperies at the windows. Powers dramatically layered the wife's study with Brunswick & Fils' famous Les Touches animal-print fabrics in several different colors on walls,

shades, and upholstery.

In keeping with the house's classical bones, "We went for tried-and-true old-school furnishings, but messed with some by painting them in unusual colors or unexpected upholstery," Powers says. The four vintage Mies van der Rohe Brno chairs surrounding an old farmhouse table in the breakfast room might make a Bauhaus purist blanch, but here they strike the right note in pink-and-white buffalo-check upholstery and white automotive lacquer. The dining room's French Louis-inspired chairs got an unexpected refresh in

Tiffany-blue leather, and a bust of Beethoven with a pie in his face by plaster artist Stephen Antonson is a cheeky take on classical sculpture.

One-of-a-kind furnishings were procured for the house during shopping trips around the world, including a dazzling 18th-century Dutch cabinet discovered at a tiny antiques shop in Maine, where Powers was vacationing. The cabinet, which is now in the guest bedroom, has an ornate exterior painted to resemble wood marquetry and a surprising interior painted a delicious salmon hue. "It's one of

Above: Breakfast-room table is antique. Knoll Mies van der Rohe Brno chairs, re-covered and repainted. Antique French toile light fixture. Floor painted in optic block pattern.

Above, left: Kitchen cabinets designed by Curtis & Windham, painted in Farrow & Ball Hague Blue. Calacatta Viola marble countertops. Hand-stenciled and -painted floors.

Previous page, clockwise from top left:

In a vestibule off the family room, Lucite card table and McGuire chairs upholstered in Brunswick & Fils Les Touches fabric. Brass cabinet grilles and hardware made in England by Frank Allart.

In the living room, fireplace mantel custom-made from black Belgian bluestone. The '60s Georges Pelletier mirror and '40s snake andirons are from Paris. Holly Hunt sconce. Painting discovered in NYC.

Billy Baldwin slipper chairs. Floor lamp from Paris with custom red shade. David Aylsworth painting from Inman Gallery.

the best pieces of furniture I've ever found, and I almost kept it myself, but it was perfect for this house," he says. An important '60s-era Georges Pelletier starburst mirror over the living-room mantel was spotted in a shop along Paris' Left Bank,

while other antiques were procured in England and Italy.

Everything came together in a tour de force of fun and fabüche. "The clients didn't see the house until it was 100 percent finished," Powers says. "We welcomed them at

the door on a Friday at 5 o'clock with glasses of rosé. She started crying, then he started crying — they were so happy. It was one of our all-time favorite jobs, and they are one of our all-time favorite clients."

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Opposite page:
In the dining room, Henrique Oliveira painting from McClain Gallery. The zigzag pattern on the floor is inlaid with faux ivory. Vintage Dessin Fournir chairs in Tiffany-blue leather.

Above:
The master-bedroom wallpaper and drapery fabric are Schumacher. The deep-orange headboard is Holland & Sherry velvet. Longoria Collection bedding. Stark rug. Fabricut upholstery on vintage chair. Italian glass lamp, 1960s, from Found.

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