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SET IN STONE

TWO NEWPORT BEACH HOMEOWNERS' SOLID-AS-A-ROCK IDEAS ABOUT THEIR DREAM DWELLING RESULTED IN THIS CONCRETE AND SANDSTONE STUNNER.

*By Kathryn Romeyn
Photography by Manolo Langis*

Cast-in-place concrete, natural sandstone, exposed structural steel and natural Cumaru Brazilian hardwood form the building blocks of Nina and Matthew Christensen's newly built 6,500-square-foot home.

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An avid sports fan, homeowner Matthew Christensen has three television screens cleverly integrated into the living room's plated steel fireplace. Opposite page, from top: "Climbers," an art installation by Claudia Rodriguez, was custom-designed to scale the stairwell, backed by Kenneth Cobonpue's C U C Me hanging lamps; outdoor furniture from Room & Board holds the line between indoors and out.



IT'S

almost impossible to envision now, but the space housing Nina and Matthew Christensen's 6,500-square-foot contemporary masterpiece formerly housed a 1960s-era classic ranch-style home. The couple briefly considered renovating it before opting to start anew. "We looked at everything on the market, maybe 70 houses, and realized there would never be a perfect home for us unless we built it," says Matthew. "We're pretty particular people."

Particular is an understatement. The Christensens had a definite vision of what they wanted: a custom, contemporary home to capture the best of the 180-degree views of Newport Beach's Fashion Island, Back Bay, Saddleback Mountains and the Pacific. They did their homework when it came to hiring an architect as well, meeting with a dozen firms before collaborating with Costa Mesa-based Brandon Architects.

"Brandon Architects did a very good job of considering our personalities and lifestyle, and then pushing us a little bit... but not too far," says Matthew. Though he and Nina paid strict attention to every inch of their planned house (at one point in the process, Matthew remeasured the backyard himself, and had the entire house moved forward a foot to perfect the spacing), their overall design directive was broad. "We said, 'contemporary rustic with a hint of Balinese'—whatever that means,"



Matthew laughs. Adds Brandon Architects President Chris Brandon, "They said, 'No curves!' That left us with plenty of room for creative exploration. What became evident is that they love simple, elegant architecture with warm and inviting materials." Their collab was a success right from the get-go, as Brandon's very first architectural sketch is almost identical to the finished five-bedroom abode.

For the active 30-somethings and frequent entertainers in sunny Newport Beach, the functionality and beauty of the outdoor spaces are equally—if not more—important than the interior. The Christensens desired an absolutely seamless transition from the indoors out, from the first step inside until diving into the backyard pool. The architectural solution? Keeping the downstairs entertaining spaces on a single plane and running the same materials from the inside out, "almost confusing the eye of when you're inside and when you're outside," says Matthew. For example, warm wood ceilings were installed both inside and beyond the expansive glass pocket doors.

The backyard is without a doubt the

The Christensens' entry courtyard features floating steppingstones that lead across a reflecting pool highlighted by a graceful olive tree. A trio of living walls planted with succulents add a pop of lush texture alongside the walkway.

Christensens' most-used and loved living space. And the couple were so concerned with making sure the infinity pool functioned optimally they even invited friends of different heights over when it was poured to test the level. (They ripped it out afterward to perfect it.) "Every jet was specifically located for Nina, me or our friends—like, 'Where *exactly* do you want this to hit your back?'" And as for the infinity pool, "it can be like a serene spa or a Vegas party club depending on the music," says Matthew.

The grass beside it "was honestly meant for and built to play cornhole," Matthew adds with a grin. A bar with an ice machine, Lynx barbecue, hibachi grill, backyard heaters and two surround-sound TVs also make it incredibly livable year-round. And the couple's Faz furniture even lights up, giving off a soft glow in the fire-lit yard.

On a more serious design note, the house excels at first impressions. An impactful entrance is one of those places Brandon encouraged gutsy statements, like stone towers, living walls and a poured-in-place concrete wall "floating" in glass above a reflecting pond. This came with engineering challenges of its own; in fact, the extravagant network of underground steel holding up the house is a story in and of itself. The front door alone weighs 1,400 pounds—a response to Matthew's dislike of grand homes with standard-sized front doors.

Indeed, nothing about this dwelling is standard issue, from its airy double-height living room with a soaring custom steel-paneled fireplace to a custom coffee table with an ice trough that cleverly drains through the leg. There's even his-and-hers powder rooms on the first floor, the men's kitted out with a self-washing urinal. Key to accomplishing this was the eye of Corona del Mar-based interior designer Paige Hill of Ultra-Mod. One of her many contributions was tempering the very linear concrete and stone. "Modern style can always be softened with lighting and soft woods," says Hill. "For example, Nina requested a live-edge table in her very modern dining room



MODERN STYLE CAN ALWAYS
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AND SOFT WOODS.

— PAIGE HILL,
INTERIOR DESIGNER

and kitchen, which turned out to be an ideal mix.”

She masterminded the unbelievably detailed, textural home, not only designing furniture for the couple when they couldn’t find the perfect piece—the ebony-stained oak bed in the minimalist master bedroom was a synergistic collaboration between her and Matthew, for example—but also taking them on a Porcelanosa shopping spree. “Admittedly a bit hung over from a night out, we were able to design the majority of the interior,” says Matthew of the one-stop shop. “Going there was one of our best decisions.”

Hill was able to enhance the couple’s desired neutral palette through texture, seen best in the speakeasy-like bar that marries most of the materials in the home—stone veneer, wood, tile, backlit ice-cube marble bar face and more—in an intimate, opulent space with ultracomfortable

lounge chairs. She found even more ways to further personalize things through color: Matthew, a USC athletics fan and member of the USC Athletics Trojan Board of Directors, chose a Cardinal-esque charred wood for the elevator shaft to reference his team’s color, and red rope for the atrium installation of climbers Hill found in a Vail gallery. “I try to take the fear out of wacky ideas,” says Hill.

The seamless marriage of form and function flows from inside to out, where Brandon’s favorite seat in all of Newport Beach encompasses vistas of the Saddleback Mountains and Big Bear, complete with creature comforts. “It’s an engaging home,” says the architect. As for his clients, they’re over the moon. “This house is what we were thinking, but on steroids,” laughs Matthew. “What we ended up with was so much better than what we initially imagined.” ■

BainUltra’s free-standing Evanesence tub is positioned to take advantage of the Newport Beach Back Bay view. Sonneman’s LED pendant Grapes illuminates the space. Opposite page: Brandon Architects custom-designed the master bedroom’s bed, while the striking pendant is Solis by Pablo Lighting.

DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE
Single-family home

LOCATION
Newport Beach

INTERIOR DESIGN
Ultra-Mod
ultra-mod.com

ARCHITECT
Brandon Architects
brandonarchitects.com

CONTRACTOR
RDM General Contractors
rdmgc.com

LANDSCAPE ARTIST
MDZA Landscape
Architecture & Planning
mdza.net

RESOURCES

BAINULTRA
Master bathroom bathtub
bainultra.com

CANTONI
Master bedroom swivel
armchair and ottoman
cantoni.com

KENNETH COBONPUE
Entryway pendant lamps
kennethcobonpue.com

ORANGE SKIN
Living room armchairs
orangeskin.com

PORCELANOSA
Bedroom wall tile
porcelanosa-usa.com

ROCHE BOBOIS
Living room couch
roche-bobois.com

ROOM & BOARD
Outdoor furniture
roomandboard.com

SONNEMAN
Master bathroom
pendant lights
sonnemanawayoflight.com

