

# COUNTRY LIFE

In Agoura Hills, a sophisticated new ranch house melds East Coast style with the spirit of the American West.

WRITTEN BY MAILE PINGEL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY KARYN MILLET



Architecture: Erik Evens, Evens Architects Interior Design: Joe Lucas, Lucas Studio, Inc. Home Builder: Jay Bruder, Bruder Construction Landscape Architecture: Erik Evens, Evens Architects, and Michael McGowan, KAA Design Group

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he pull of home can be an irresistible force, and for one Manhattan Beach couple, the lure of Agoura Hills, where they both grew up, was too great to ignore. Moving inland meant their three young children could

live closer to grandparents and extended family, surrounded not only by love but by chaparral-covered hillsides—6 acres of them, in fact—for the ultimate play space. Tradition beckoned, too, as the couple sought a house rooted in historical styles, both inside and out.

“Our clients were interested in creating a comfortable family home that connected to the great tradition of American farmhouses,” says architect Erik Evens. “They also wanted the house to be the center of family life and to support outside living.” After taking a deep dive into the couple’s aesthetic, Evens set about devising a plan anchored by a central structure (a great room containing the home’s formal living and dining areas) with adjoining wings that contain casual family spaces to one side and the bedrooms to the other. “It harkens back to how a house might have been added onto over the years,” says general contractor Jay Bruder.

Working with Bruder, who has a keen interest in historic buildings and has renovated homes by Wallace Neff and Paul R. Williams, Evens crafted generously scaled spaces with architectural elements that “feel uniquely American,” he says, pointing to the trussed kitchen and family wing. And rather than simply conceiving a hallway to the bedroom wing, he devised a library that doubles as a passageway, in keeping with the rambling, added-onto feel of the home. “They wanted everyone sleeping in close proximity—a nest—which was a bit of a planning challenge,” he recalls. “Access to the bedrooms needed to feel natural, so an open aisle skirting the library allowed us to do that without a corridor. I liked that notion. It demands that kids confront the library every day, and that’s a good message.” It also didn’t take much convincing for this family of readers. “It’s a really interesting idea to pass through the library,” says Bruder, who worked with site superintendent Alex Mukhar on the build. “It’s a neat feature of the design.” And it’s just one of many.

Designer Joe Lucas eagerly embraced the couple’s interests, realizing rooms that “stayed true to the house but also to them, a modern family,” he says. Plus, since the couple kept their beach home for vacations, it meant all their existing furniture stayed there, and Lucas was free to start fresh. One of his first purchases was a mahogany settee, one of a pair he found on a buying trip to the south of France. He chose other antiques (the grandfather clock in the entryway and the George III-style secretary in the living area, for example) to render “an East Coast vibe, but one that isn’t fuddy-duddy,” he says, sharing a designer tip: “You can’t have just one piece of brown furniture, you have to have the right amount throughout the house.” Balancing the period furnishings are new, lighter pieces from contemporary designers like Bunny Williams and Celerie Kemble.

The palette, too, was key to establishing harmony. “The wife fell in love with the colors in the Fromental wallpaper we used in the breakfast room, so I knew those could be our through colors,” says Lucas, aided by design director Jessica Spink and senior designer Monique Morales. Blues, yellows and greens now flow throughout the house, going more pastel in the kitchen and main bedroom. “The rooms are sunny and happy,” he notes. And by choosing florals, Lucas has devised interior “gardens” that counter the landscape’s dry brush. “We gave them what they don’t get outside,” he says, though he did pull the breakfast room’s bright yellow drapery from the mustard that blooms across the hillsides each spring.

Lucas furnished the outdoor spaces—a loggia that runs along the back of the house and a large pool terrace—with traditional pieces that relate to the interiors, like a suite of rattan furniture that he describes as “preppy but not too preppy.” Evens, too, working with his colleagues at KAA Design Group, including Michael McGowan, brought his ranch house vision to fruition outside with the development of a landscape that includes lawns, an herb garden and fruit trees. “The grounds really are special,” adds Lucas, noting space for a soccer field and one day, perhaps, a barn. “I love that this project let me show my East Coast side and that we were able to have a little fun. All the elements just play off each other here.” ■



The paneled foyer makes a gracious entrance to the great room of an Agoura Hills residence. Designer Joe Lucas crafted custom seating for the living area, covering the sofa in a floral by Lee Jofa and the lounge chairs in a Peter Fasano print. The round antique table is from Harbinger. The entry’s settee sports a stripe by Jasper Furniture & Fabrics.

In the living area, the cushions on a caned Paul Ferrante chair are covered in fabric from Claremont; the chair in a Zak + Fox floral is from Kneedler Fauchère. The coffee table is from Williams-Sonoma Home. Just beyond is a dining table from Harbinger and Bernhardt chairs from MacQueen Home, wearing Moore & Giles leather. The painting is by Amy E. Sidrane. Coleen & Company lighting hangs overhead, while a Swedish rug from Marc Phillips grounds the space.





**Above:** The breakfast room, with its vibrant Fromental wallcovering and Walfab draperies, centers on a Bunny Williams Home table and Made Goods chairs. The chandelier is by Visual Comfort & Co.

**Opposite:** Lucas placed cushions in a Chris Barrett fabric on the kitchen's Williams-Sonoma Home barstools and added pendants by The Urban Electric Co. and brass hardware from Rejuvenation. The countertops are from Stoneland USA; the range is by Wolf. Carrying the blue theme into the space is cabinetry painted in Benjamin Moore's Woodlawn Blue.





**Above:** Lucas continued the loggia's look on the pool terrace with pieces like the Serena & Lily dining table and Lane Venture chairs with cushions in a Chris Barrett fabric. The chaises are by RH with a Perennials stripe. The umbrellas are also by Serena & Lily. Avanti Pools handled the pool installation.

**Opposite:** Draperies in a Fanny Shorter floral enliven the family room, which includes a sofa in Pindler fabric and club chairs in a Ronda Carman check. The Bunny Williams Home wing chair and ottoman are covered in a Peter Dunham Textiles print and Moore & Giles leather, respectively. The lamps are by Visual Comfort & Co., and an Ann-Morris lantern hangs above. The antique rug is from Marc Phillips.





**Above:** The pool bathroom is defined by its Ferrick Mason wallpaper, a pattern the designer also chose in his own home. Above the Kohler sink and faucet are a CB2 mirror and Visual Comfort & Co. sconces.

**Left:** Lucas dressed the William Yeoward for Jonathan Charles Fine Furniture bed with Matouk linens. The Bunny Williams Home armchair and ottoman are swathed in Clarence House fabric from Kneeder Fauchère, and the custom Harbinger sofa is covered in wool from The Isle Mill.