

Living together

HOW COUPLES CREATE DESIGN HARMONY AT HOME

ERICA LENNARD AND DENIS COLOMB WITH JULIA SZABO





Together, they run a Los Angeles event and interior design firm called Aqua Vitae, and it would be hard to find a young couple more spirited than Alexandra and Eliot Angle. As Alexandra puts it, "We have a similar style—we're both sentimental about family things, but we're also interested in new design. Plus, we both appreciate a sense of humor in things." All three facets of their shared personal style are evident throughout their 1940s house, which they recently designed and renovated, and where they now live and do business.

"We both fell in love with this house the second we saw it," Alexandra says. "The house itself had very good bones, and we loved the location. We have three-hundred-and-sixty-degree views of the Hollywood Hills, the San Gabriel mountains, and downtown L.A.!"

Before they met, they led very different lives. "I traveled all the time," Alexandra says. "I'm obsessed with moving, and the fact that I was constantly on the move obviously affected my

L.A. effervescence

alexandra &
eliot angle



style of furniture. In Japan, I had Japanese furniture. In the old townhouse where I lived in Portland, Maine, I had antique Victorian things." Then she met Eliot, who happens to have a lot of family heirlooms: tables, chairs, lots of old books, and silver. This helped awaken Alexandra's heirloom instinct, giving her a new appreciation for the furnishings handed down through her family, like the antique cabinet from her grandmother's basement that now lives in the couple's dining room, and the imposing portrait of Alexandra's great-great-great Aunt Lydie, which presides over the living room from its spot above the fireplace.

Fittingly for a couple that produces memorable cocktail parties for a living, the Angles' place boasts an enviable bar, fully stocked with attractive glassware handed down from both their families, as well as the collection of vintage shakers, strainers, and decanters they've gathered together.

"When we first started living together," Alexandra explains, "we started to restore a lot of old family stuff that we both had inherited. That was our focus: how to use these pieces in a contemporary setting. We had a lot of beautiful things—they just needed a lot of attention." Like the 18th-century French mahogany table the couple found in the chicken barn at Alexandra's uncle's house. "It was in very bad shape," she says. Now, in its glorious restored state, it occupies a place of honor in the study (which doubles as a sunroom).

"Both of our families are from New England," Eliot says, "so there are all these attics we can pilfer, especially with older relatives who just don't want all these things. It's been a real privilege, like having our own little flea market, but much more meaningful! That's been quite influential to our style, I think. And it brings a whole romance to design, when you use things that have been passed down through different family members."

Besides sending treasured heirlooms to the furniture restorer, Alexandra and Eliot also regularly collaborate—she designs, he gamely builds—on do-it-yourself projects that are sure to be heirlooms for future generations. His talent for building things is something Eliot admits he wouldn't have discovered without his wife's encouragement. "I wouldn't say I'm a master carpenter," he says, modestly. "But I started wanting to make things because of our mutual interest in design, which she helped me to develop."

Among Eliot's creations are the impressive, angular, "Japanese-contemporary-style" decks in the garden and the queen-size platform bed in the master bedroom. "It's a pretty crude design," he says of the bed, "but we wanted a very stark, almost Asian feel, so I made it out of fourteen-inch wood beams and painted it charcoal gray. It took a fair amount of trial and error, off and on for about a week," he adds. "And there were definitely some trips to Home Depot and then more trips, when it wasn't working out. But it was really fun to make."

Across from the bed is an unusual bedroom feature: a Kohler bathtub big enough for two. "That was my idea," Alexandra explains. "I love taking baths. And I've always wanted a bathtub in the bedroom because it seemed incredibly romantic to me." It has proved quite romantic: Although he's a shower person, Eliot went along with the bath-in-the-bedroom idea and the couple now bathe together about twice a week.

A renovated house in Los Angeles

PRECEDING PAGE (119)

The living room, dominated by an imposing portrait of Alexandra's great-great-great Aunt Lydie.



ABOVE A beautiful table setting created by a couple who make entertaining an art and a business.





common grounds



harmonious how-to's

- If one half of a couple agrees to a design feature to please the other half, it's nice to return the favor. Elliot made a concession to Alexandra's love of baths, and she acknowledged his love of showers in the master bathroom—a massive, open shower tiled in dark gray slate, a nod to the dominant color of the landscape in New York City, Eliot's beloved hometown. This is one couple that really knows how to bathe in style: The shower also features a full-length window that affords a fine vantage point on the house's spectacular view. "It's kind of great to stand in the shower and look out at the hills," Eliot says. "It's a little racy, but the property is situated so that no houses can really look in!"

- Two sinks in a shared bathroom can be a simple formula for harmony that more and more couples are incorporating into their living arrangements. "It's nice to have individual sink space," Alexandra explains. "That way, you're not crowding each other out."

- If you don't have sufficient basement or barn space, consider renting a storage unit. Besides keeping your living space free of clutter (which is a common source of conflict between couples) it enables you to hold on to things you might give away in haste and regret later. The Angles currently store several pieces of furniture and miscellaneous items, many from their respective families, which they felt simply didn't work in their current surroundings. "I'm sure they will appear in other places," Alexandra says.

PRECEDING PAGES

(122-123) Two glimpses of the house's extraordinary views. The farmhouse dining room table was recycled from their previous house in Maine.

LEFT The bar with a collection of vintage decanters and glasses (top). Bathing beauty: Individual sinks provide convenience (bottom).

OPPOSITE A tub in the bedroom (Alexandra's idea) is pure indulgence.

