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DESIGN



CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

**THE PALM SPRINGS VACATION HOME
THAT'S PART HOUSE, PART PLAYGROUND.**

Text by SYDNEY LONEY | Photography by JANIS NICOLAY



The first thing homeowners Sarah and Murray Bancroft do when they arrive at their Palm Springs, Calif., vacation home is whip open all the sliding glass doors leading to the backyard. They're instantly rewarded by the scent of lavender, jasmine, citrus blossoms and bougainvillea wafting in from the garden. "If you could bottle that smell, you'd have a best-selling perfume," says Sarah, the editor-in-chief of VitaminDaily.com. Next, Sarah hops on her bike and is off to fill her basket with grapefruit, oranges and lemons from the family's favourite trees around the neighbourhood, while their girls, Emmanuelle, 8, and Charlotte, 5, head straight for their scooters. "That's the best thing about having an open floor plan and concrete floors," Sarah says. "The girls can just scooter through the house."

The Bancrofts, who call Vancouver home, bought the 1,600-square-foot holiday retreat two years ago, choosing Palm Springs partly for the climate and partly for the prevalence of mid-century modern architecture. "I grew up in an Edwardian rabbit warren-style home in Vancouver," Sarah says. "But I remember watching *The Brady Bunch* and thinking, 'That's the kind of house I want to have.' I've always loved the aesthetic of that era." After months of searching, Murray, who's a food stylist, and Sarah happened upon this home, which was designed by renowned architecture firm Palmer & Krisel in 1959 and built by the Alexander Construction Company, famous for its modernist tract housing.

Unfortunately, it wasn't quite as cool as the Brady abode: in addition to a very '80s peach colour scheme, the house still had its original appliances, plumbing and wiring. Undaunted, the couple bought it and were then lucky enough to contact legendary architect William Krisel, who co-founded Palmer & Krisel in the 1950s, and ask him some big-picture questions about his original design which helped them plan their reno. Now, the bright and airy ranch-style

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ABOVE: An all-white exterior on the ranch-style house suits the climate and serves as a backdrop for the spare landscaping. A new pétanque court on one side uses Palm Springs Gold gravel, which mirrors the colour of the mountains. **OPPOSITE:** Sarah and Murray Bancroft (with daughters Charlotte, left, and Emmanuelle) had their hearts set on a vintage enamel drop fireplace. They finally came across a white Malm in perfect condition and bought it on the spot. It has become a focal point in the backyard, where the family gathers in the evening to relax and roast marshmallows. **Fireplace, 20 First Vintage & Modern; Solair chairs, Vancouver Special.**

Q+A

HOME TRUTHS

HOUSE & HOME: *With all the traffic from friends, family and guests, how do you keep the upholstery white?*

SARAH BANCROFT: We chose a durable canvas for the sofa, and you can unzip all the cushion covers to wash them, but we also went through almost a case of upholstery protector at the beginning! Still, overall we opted for easy, unstructured furniture that's designed to look comfortable and used, as opposed to something you shouldn't be sitting on. It also helps that we have a really good cleaning crew.

H&H: *How did you manage to make a mid-century modern design aesthetic kid-friendly?*

SB: The open floor plan and the fact everything is on one level means we have really long sight lines, which is great when you have little children because it's easy to keep an eye on them — and the backyard is a continuation of the indoor space. We did remove a lot of the cacti out there to make it safer.

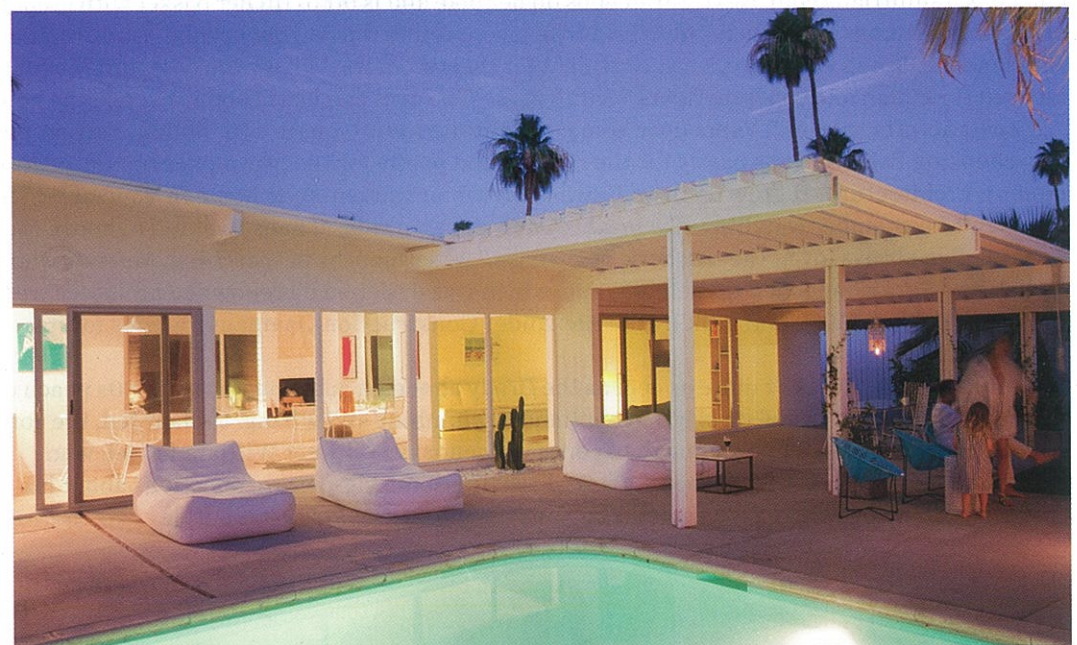
Indoors, we picked chairs with widespread legs that don't tip and hard-wearing materials like concrete (with a few strategically located rugs for softness) and Lucite. Even our dishes, purchased from a restaurant supplier 15 years ago, are designed to take a beating. Overall, we wanted to create a space that is fun and inspirational, where we can all enjoy spending time together.

H&H: *How do you maintain the minimalist, clutter-free look?*

MURRAY BANCROFT: This style of architecture is designed with a lot of built-ins for storage, which helps a lot. There's very little need for extra furniture. But Sarah and I also share a less-is-more aesthetic. We don't just buy random things: we try to find things that are meaningful and suit the space. That way, we're not always tripping over mountains of stuff. We can just arrive, put everything away in a closet and head out to the pool.



LEFT AND BELOW: An informal, low-slung Ikea sofa in crisp white canvas and an unstructured blue beanbag chair encourage relaxation and repose. "We wanted to create the experience of forcing you into relaxation and fun — this is the kind of furniture you'll just feel awkward in if you try to sit up straight," Murray says. "We play board games at night, and the kids are usually sprawled out on the floor, so it's good to be sitting closer to their level." The wood-burning fireplace is original to the home and provides a quiet, cosy nook — the perfect spot to relax on a cool evening once the kids are in bed. **Pillows, West Elm; coffee table, 20 First Vintage & Modern; blue Paola Lenti chair, LivingSpace.**



Murray designed the kitchen, where light grey Caesarstone counters complement the concrete flooring and white cabinetry, making the room feel cool and airy. Plank ceilings lend rustic contrast to the modern space, while a sculptural Saarinen Tulip table and elegant Russell Woodard chairs provide a perfect marriage of form and function. The cowhide rug is vintage. **Table, chairs, 20 First Vintage & Modern.**



“WE WANTED TO BRING THE
BACKYARD BACK TO A
SERENE, CALM SETTING
THAT STILL FELT LUSH”





Sarah and Murray designed the backyard themselves using a couple of Sharpies and one of the oversized boxes some of their furniture had been delivered in. "We realized we had a huge surface to work on, so we mapped out the landscaping right there on the box while looking out at the yard," Sarah says. The yard was full of cacti, and its 15 mature palm trees had been left to their own devices for so long that they'd grown beards. An army of gardeners with rock-climbing equipment scaled the trees to cut them back. "We wanted to bring the backyard back to a serene, calm setting that still felt lush," Sarah says. They planted several dwarf citrus trees, as well as an olive tree they hope to harvest from next year. Today, most of the action takes place in the backyard. Because of the heat, much of the vintage metal furniture had to be newly powder-coated, including the elegant Salterini table and chairs, where the family dines alfresco in the evenings. A custom Acapulco rope swing chair (hung with sailing rope) is a favourite resting place for visitors of all ages. *Beanbag chairs, RH Restoration Hardware.*

The family showers outdoors more often than not, thanks to the privacy afforded by UV-resistant glass and high hedges. **Mat**, CB2; **towel**, Rebecca Bree.



SPRING FEVER

Homeowners Sarah and Murray Bancroft dish on a few of Palm Springs' best design bets.

DESIGN INSPIRATION

PALM SPRINGS CITY HALL

"This is right around the corner from us. It's hard not to take pictures of all the buildings in the area; even the banks and the high school are cool. It's rare to see so much of this style."



VINTAGE FINDS

20 FIRST VINTAGE & MODERN

"This is one of our favourite spots for treasure-hunting. It's where we found our Malm fireplace, the Lucite coffee table in our living room and some of the rope furniture in the backyard."



STYLISH SNACKS

WORKSHOP KITCHEN

"This restaurant is in an old movie theatre, so the space has a cool structure, high ceilings and even a romantic courtyard full of twinkling lights."



ANTIQUÉ-HUNTING

GALLERIA

"There are always nice vintage pieces in this shopping area. There's so much disposable furniture out there that it's more important than ever to preserve things from this era. They come from a time when craftsmanship was still important."



CHIC LIGHTS

HEDGE

"This is a great spot to find vintage lighting, and the owners are very knowledgeable. People in this area are invested in preserving that aesthetic overall — it's almost a community effort."

Nice, big bunk beds and a bright palette give the girls' room broad appeal among children and adults alike. "We wanted a room that wasn't necessarily gender-specific," says Murray. The couple has an affinity for worn Persian rugs and the aesthetic of carpet on concrete (they dyed this one themselves in their bathtub). The CBC logo is a sly touch of Canadiana, while the glow-in-the-dark Penny skateboard, which is routinely ridden around the house and around the neighbourhood in the evening, is a nod to the nearby Palm Springs Skate Park. **Bed, Ikea; lamp, bedding, Target; Eames elephant stool, EQ3; rug, Estate Sale Company; table, West Elm.**



A playful teal alligator-print wallpaper in the principal bedroom picks up the cool blue and green accents highlighted throughout the home, while a narrow window takes the place of framed art. A wall of closets eliminates the need for dressers or armoires, contributing to the minimalist feel of the room. **Bed**, Ikea; **bedding**, Cost Plus World Market; **wallpaper** by Designers Guild, The Cross; **shoes**, Trina Turk; **lamps**, West Elm.



LEFT: In the all-white bathroom an oversized mirror makes the room feel spacious, while inexpensive industrial-style lights are a fun touch. A narrow window floods the room with light and picks up on the clean lines of the vanity. **Lights**, The Home Depot; **towel racks**, Room in Order; **glassware**, West Elm. FAR LEFT: Blue glassware carries the colour of sky and pool into every room. "It's like jewelry," Murray says. "Just a few little flourishes, but not so many that guests feel as though they're surrounded by other people's stuff."

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