

# THE HOUSE WHISPERERS

A South Bay trifecta summons intuition, inspiration and experience to help transform a **1970s Rolling Hills ranch house** into a modern sanctuary.



Ian and Michelle Fitt had no intention of renovating another house. They went through a challenging renovation with their home in Rancho Palos Verdes, and then Ian saw a listing for the Rolling Hills house. A concrete hockey rink in the backyard intrigued him, and he urged Michelle to check it out.

Inspired by the bones of the house, Michelle saw past the dated, dark, '70s interiors. Although they knew the renovation would be extensive, they took a leap of faith and purchased the house.

The Fitts wanted the new house to have a modern aesthetic, which involved gutting the interiors and blowing out the ceilings. Architect Miles Pritzkat explains, "One of the challenges was to open up the floor plan and raise the ceilings while maintaining the structural integrity of the building (the existing roof was to remain), as well as providing a means to heat and cool the spaces. The end result is a syncopated riff on the original high ceiling planes that gives a nod to the original house."

WRITTEN BY ZOE ALEXANDER  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY SIRI BERTING



“Our HOMES ARE OUR SANCTUARIES. I like to tell each client’s story with their home as my canvas.”

crystals creating a glow that offsets the dark chairs and industrial-style dining table. Baubles are also present in the neighboring light fixture in the kitchen and the artwork that hangs by the front door countering the angled lines of the ceilings with organic, circular forms that soften the space.

South Bay vendors Battaglia Marble and Classic Tile supplied the visually appealing and family-friendly stone and tile materials. The Fitts, along with their children, Hailey and Colin, are an active bunch, so durable materials were needed.

The kitchen counter is Brazilian quartz, the powder room features an intricately assembled wall of geometric tiles from Thailand, and there is a grand fireplace composed of imported Escher-esque carved limestone. Another standout is the Baldwin designed wine room, which is walled off by glass doors so its beautiful walnut woodwork is visible.

The den, known as “the fun room,” is both lounge and playroom. There are video games, high bar tables and chairs, and a built-in sunken sofa (“the Fitt pit”) for watching television. Robert Allen custom throw pillows add a pop of color, while Michelle purchased plush pillows expressly for kids and pillow fights.

Diane points to a fun room wall that features photos of the four Fitts holding hands, jumping into their pool with their clothes on. She is delighted the family accepted her idea to pose in mid-air for Redondo Beach-based photographer Stephan Cooper, as the photos truly capture the spirit of the Fitts and the house itself. ●

Contractor Dave Baldwin also notes that the house was ripe for updating. “The house originally had many small rooms with a 7’6”-high ceiling in the kitchen! We completely reshaped the layout to open it up for today’s style of living.”

The space is surrounded on all sides by windows that reveal a stellar view of the city below. The team also worked with Marco Polanco of About Space Interior Design to include a dining nook large enough for a steady stream of guests.

“Our homes are our sanctuaries. I like to tell each client’s story with their home as my canvas,” says interior designer Diane Barber. The house is distinguished by custom fixtures, exquisite materials and a unique layout for a close-knit family fond of entertaining. The entryway invites your eye to a dazzling light fixture and salt water aquarium, eases your senses with a tranquil wall-mounted fountain, and engages your whimsy if you happen to ring the doorbell (it plays the theme song from *The Jetsons*.) The fountain was custom-made with illuminated rain glass, accented by a shelf of stones and candles.

There are many “wow” factors, but the handcrafted chandelier in the dining area is especially dramatic. An Australian company that makes large, commercial light fixtures caught Diane’s eye. She provided the Australians with her designs for a scaled-down version of one of their hotel fixtures, and it was crafted in Canada and driven over the border in a crate.

The piece is a unique work of art, with glass and



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