

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>®</sup>

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*room with a view*

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# open invitation

Dennis Gibbens builds himself a home for all Los Angeles to see  
text: zule cohen photography: benng chan/fotoworks



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**Dennis Gibbens** may be one of the best-kept secrets in Los Angeles. Attribute his under-the-radar status to his clients, A-listers such as actress Debra Messing who are determined to keep their private residences just that. But Gibbens has no qualms about throwing open the doors of his own place on Venice's still-funky Abbot Kinney Boulevard. His skills in designing architecture with extraordinary spatial *and* object qualities are visible at a glance. So is his appreciation of decor. He's fearless when it comes to finding pieces and mixing them up.

If the apartment's layout produces a sensation of *déjà vu* among Gibbens aficionados, that's because he replicated the courtyard configuration of his former home, just blocks away. However, this duplex, at 3,500 square feet, is larger, more elaborate, and denser with materials. And its location, a ground-up three-story building, represents Gibbens's first foray into the real-estate arena.

In keeping with Abbot Kinney's shop culture, he divided the ground

level into a four-car garage in back and a 600-square-foot retail space in front. Then he handpicked the tenant: Tortoise General Store, a gallery selling international contemporary design and Japanese arts and crafts and mounting the occasional art exhibition. Only from across the street does one get hints of a residence above. A 20-foot-wide opening in the board-formed concrete facade frames a glimpse of the balcony off the living room. Farther back and higher up, a white stucco parapet with a port-hole hints at the roof deck behind.

Tucked alongside Tortoise's front window, a gray-painted steel gate swings in to reveal an open-air stairway. "There was to be no small ground-level foyer and interior stair," Gibbens states. "Visiting Barcelona inspired the design." The ascent terminates at the central courtyard, surrounded on three sides by the glass walls and sliding door of the apartment's lower level.

The courtyard offers visual clues to interior organization without entirely giving it away. Step inside, and





**Previous spread:** In the Los Angeles dining area of Dennis Gibbens Architects's namesake principal, a chandelier by David Weeks hangs above a table by Patricia Urquiola and chairs by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec. A Tang dynasty horse stands on a Qing dynasty altar table.

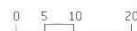
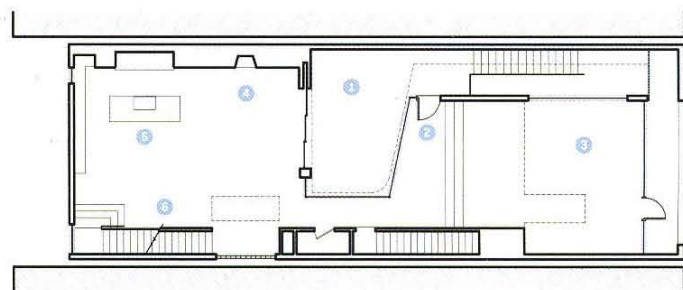
**Opposite:** The formal living room features Alfredo Häberli's swivel chair and footstool. Mica-flecked terrazzo floor tile flows throughout the downstairs.

**Left, from top:** Konstantin Grcic chairs furnish the courtyard; photography: Nazy Alvarez. The kitchen's custom cabinetry of stained zebra wood contrasts with a backsplash of back-painted glass. **Right, from top:** In front of the sitting area's Italian marble mantel, an Alvar Aalto lounge chair, an antique scholar's chair, and another Häberli swivel chair with footstool gather around a 1970's cocktail table by Gary John Neville. The ceiling's insert of tempered glass is framed by polished chrome-plated steel.





*Above: Entry is via the central courtyard. Opposite top, from left: Naoto Fukasawa's ottoman in the living room. Steps of Brazilian cherywood in the upstairs hall; photography: Nazy Alvarez. Opposite bottom, from left: A granite-and-bronze table on the upper landing; photography: Nazy Alvarez. The master bedroom's 15-foot ceiling. The rosewood-veneered enclosure of the bathroom off the roof deck; photography: Nazy Alvarez.*



- 1 COURTYARD
- 2 ENTRY
- 3 LIVING ROOM
- 4 SITTING AREA
- 5 KITCHEN
- 6 DINING AREA

everything becomes clear and simple. The roughly U-shape space comprises front and rear areas unified by white terrazzo, its mica flecks sparkly against gutsy walls of more board-formed concrete.

Gibbens thinks the street-fronting living room is the proper setting for “parties, musical evenings, screenings, or lectures—I almost kept it empty.” That didn’t last long. Not when he found an American root table, circa 1960, a groovy red fiberglass ottoman by Naoto Fukasawa, and vintage French upholstered chairs to accompany the baby grand piano. After all, guests need to be

comfortable when viewing *La Dolce Vita*, Gibbens’s favorite film, on the ovoid screen he designed to complement the curved ceiling.

A short corridor connects the living room with the multipurpose space to the rear of the courtyard. Dense with eye candy, the dining area features Patricia Urquiola’s white glass-topped table and Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec’s pinstriped blue-gray chairs, set beneath a three-armed David Weeks chandelier. Nearby, cream-glazed ceramic vases form a Giorgio Morandi-esque composition on the top of a built-in credenza that extends into the open kitchen. Behind its gener-

ous island is what could be one of the most refined pantries ever: a storage wall in dark-stained zebra-wood. This cabinetry extends, in turn, into a sitting area anchored by a wood-burning fireplace’s white marble mantelpiece.

For furnishings here, Gibbens was largely a locavore. With good reason. Right on Abbot Kinney, he scored a 1970’s cocktail table that looks like a flying saucer, plus a skinny contemporary floor lamp. He had to drive only 10 miles east to La Brea Avenue to pick up the considerably less precious cowhide rug from a street vendor. He did, however, go the



showroom route for a pair of Alfredo Häberli swivel chairs and footstools in heavily distressed leather—think beloved motorcycle jacket. (The other set is in the living room.)

The initial view of the top level comes from below, courtesy of a tempered-glass insert in the sitting area's ceiling, aka the floor of the hallway connecting the two bedrooms to the study, an additional bathroom, and the roof deck. Full disclosure: Once up the cherrywood stairs, we leaped across the hall rather than stepping on the glass. Gibbens laughed. "I intended to add a sense of danger," he quips.

On a practical note, the glass insert was his way of allowing the lower level to benefit from the circular skylights in the upper hallway. Another skylight, in the master bathroom, lets the sun shine down onto the marble and concrete walls. Most striking of all is the master bedroom's ceiling. Gibbens punched it up to 15 feet and capped it with an aperture inspired by the mesmerizing *Skyspaces* of James Turrell.

**PROJECT TEAM**

**OREN DOTAN** (SENIOR PROJECT ARCHITECT); **RYAN TURNER** (PROJECT ARCHITECT); **DENNIS GIBBENS ARCHITECTS**; **LUX POPULI**: LIGHTING CONSULTANT. **AUDIO VIDEO EXPERIENCE**: AUDIOVISUAL CONSULTANT. **TAYLOR & SYFAN CONSULTING ENGINEERS**: STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. **CREATIVE MASONRY**: CONCRETE CONTRACTOR.

**PRODUCT SOURCES**

**FROM FRONT** **MOLteni & C.**: TABLE (DINING AREA). **LIGNE ROSEY**: CHAIRS. **DAVID WEEKS STUDIO**: CHANDELIER. **CAESARSTONE**: CONSOLE SOLID-SURFACING (DINING AREA), ISLAND SOLID-SURFACING (KITCHEN). **THROUGH CHARLES JACOBSEN**: ALTAR TABLE (DINING AREA), SCHOLAR'S CHAIR (SITTING AREA). **MAHARAM**: CURTAIN FABRIC (STAIRWELL). **MOROSO** **THROUGH JULES SELTZER ASSOCIATES**: SWIVEL CHAIRS, FOOTSTOOLS (LIVING ROOM, SITTING AREA). **THROUGH GALERIE SOMMERLATH**: COCKTAIL TABLE (LIVING ROOM), TABLE, LAMP (SITTING AREA). **MAGIS**: CHAIRS (COURTYARD). **THROUGH JULES SELTZER ASSOCIATES**: TABLE. **DORNBRACHT**: SINK FITTINGS (KITCHEN). **ARTEK**: LOUNGE CHAIR (SITTING AREA). **THROUGH IN-EX**: OTTOMAN. **VALENTI**: SCONCE. **DRIADE**: OTTOMAN (LIVING ROOM). **WATERWORKS**: TILE (GUEST BATHROOM). **TOTO**: TOILET. **KOHLER CO.**: TUB. **HANS-GRODGE**: TUB FITTINGS, SHOWER FITTINGS (GUEST BATHROOM), TUB FITTINGS (MASTER BATHROOM). **WEISTYLE**: TUB (MASTER BATHROOM). **KARVELL**: STOOL. **GLEN RAVEN**: CUSHION FABRIC, PILLOW FABRIC (DECK). **CLAUDIA BENVENUTO INTERIOR DESIGN**: CUSTOM BOLSTER (MASTER BEDROOM). **THROUGH PLANTATION**: LAMP. **CAPPELLINI** **THROUGH TORTOISE GENERAL STORE**: CHAIR. **THROUGHOUT** **LUCIFER LIGHTING COMPANY**: CEILING FIXTURES. **SILISTAR** **THROUGH ARESYS**: FLOOR TILE.







*Opposite:* Glass tile defines the guest bathroom. Photography: Nazy Alvarez.  
*Left, from top:* Calacatta gold marble, board-formed concrete, and basalt mosaic tile meet in the master bathroom. Tortoise General Store occupies the storefront on Venice's Abbot Kinney Boulevard; photography: Nazy Alvarez. *Right, from top:* Antique glazed ceramic stools sit on the ipe roof deck. A vintage silk ikat covers the bolster in the master bedroom.

