

SBLS

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SEASON'S GREETINGS

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LEIGHEN

*BREAKOUT INTERIOR
DESIGNER MEGAN
VANDERWALL'S
MESA ABODE EXUDES
NATURAL EASE*



The Mesa, a eucalyptus-lined enclave perched atop storied bluffs, lies at the threshold of the Pacific. To newcomers and veterans alike, the seafront stretch of sun-soaked greenery, Spanish colonials, and mid-century moderns evokes familiarity, whether from summer soirées at neighborhood social nooks or songs imbuing its archetypal coastal aura.

Nothing quite encapsulates this airy timelessness like Santa Barbara native and interior designer Megan Vanderwall's beachside bungalow, a James Perse-esque haven that sits low and brings spirits high. Angular contemporary architecture makes for a luxe entrance, while exterior white paint and light-stained wood panels truly take the edge off. As feathery palms unhurriedly fan out about the property wherever grass meets stone, warm landscaping hues hint at the earthy tones within.

The home's motto is clear: *let the light in*. As I float through the beaming foyer—illumination courtesy of floor-to-ceiling glass doors rolling to reveal the backyard—my gaze fixes on two old friends in conversation. A pair of coffee velvet armchairs angle toward one another, musing about Gray Malin's pastel cowboy-meets-Prada photograph before them. My head swivels right, revealing a freckled, well-loved wooden bar. A hand-me-down from Megan's parents, the rustic cabinet has jetted "from a beach house in Oxnard, to a ski cabin in Montana, to a kitchen in Seattle," and finally finds refuge in its righteous Santa Barbara roots, wearing its age well. "I swear it's like the sisterhood of the traveling bar," Megan laughs.

Just above hovers a sumptuous mercury-inspired mirror that distorts my reflection with textured bubbles, inviting me in for a lime-infused glass of sparkly and a gander at the indoor-outdoor synergy ahead. I've only just met Megan, yet it feels as though I've walked into the welcoming arms of an intimate space, perhaps to blissfully unwind, or to take her master class in curating livable luxury. My admiration amplifies when she reveals the home was once a bachelor pad, clad in stark black and moody crimson finishes—where others don't, Megan sees good bones.

"My priority was to soften, lighten, and add a lot of texture to the space; I love working with color and pattern a lot, but it just didn't feel right in this modern architecture:

I wanted the backyard and sunshine to sing," she reveals. The open-concept property truly serenades, the exterior's rich greens meld with grounded linens and bleachy blues; the resulting seafoam blend splatters bespoke ceramics ornamenting countertops and corners alike. As I make the seamless transition into the beaming heat, my mind's eye envisages champagne popping, warm acoustic tunes abounding, and puppies Sunny and Oliver frolicking center stage—or center grass, perhaps.

On the outdoor dining table, a quaintly crafted charcuterie board awaits me, ensconced in a pristine glass dome and accompanied by a rattan-encased carafe. Megan neatly nails the details with the ease of a seasoned entertainer, but leaves room for innate wear-and-tear: adjacent to a neatly lain Clic mohair throw and karate-chopped vintage pillows on her creamy sectional lay fresh cushion indents. The home isn't afraid to be lived in, a product of Megan's idyllic upbringing in a traditional Hope Ranch hideaway where "dogs were always allowed on furniture."

The decorator inherited an artful eye from her mother, a de facto designer and "fabulous entertainer" herself, who included a young Megan in constant home renovations and festivity preparations. Lavish, love-touched tablescapes acted as centerpieces for bubbly celebrations, teaching Megan to marry luxury with the natural inclinations of social spaces. "Bringing people together is really what I love about design," she gushes. "[Clients] all have different perspectives on how they're going to use their space; what's their Thanksgiving dinner going to look like in that dining room? How are their kids going to grow up in this room?"

This soulful, form-meets-function philosophy is apparent. The designer's abode hosts a sentimental interplay of found collectibles and dynamic foundational flair—it lives and breathes ease and embraces inevitable evolution. The space expects nothing but bare feet, but a sophisticated Megan looks just right with her taut half-updo and crisp white cotton dress draping to the cool concrete floors.

Helming her two-year-old eponymous firm, Megan is new to the local design scene as head-of-house, but is far from a stranger to the game: hailing from positions at top San Francisco and Seattle firms, she brings over





eight years of diverse experience back to her home base. San Francisco's time-honored Victorian glam instilled an appreciation of age and bold renewal, while Seattle's subdued dark hues and contemporary stone textures allured Megan's affection for harmony with nature. When northern fog banks faded into Santa Barbara bluffs again, the designer was emboldened to take the leap of independence she'd long envisioned, and melded these influences into her instinctual coastal-modern MO. Megan Vanderwall Interiors represents a return to form, reimagined.

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"I have a great deal of respect for designers who are hired for their really strong brand look, but I don't fit into that category," Megan remarks. "I have a central process, but never want a project to feel formulaic or like a catalog. Mixing and matching, highs and lows, new and old; all of that is so important to me. It's all the little layers that make our homes feel special." Megan's nuanced, not nitpicky. Her client-oriented, lifestyle-led intentionality sculpts her designs down to fine finishes.

If not evidenced by her ecosystem-echoing home, Megan's methodology brings the outside in. A recent Brentwood project exudes light birch and ivory tones, layering the area's refined California cool with vibrant neon signs overlaying black-and-white photography. Her glossy-glam Mandeville storybook home honors the spunky side of LA luxe, mixing punches of pigment and pattern with deep velvety sofas, black cabinetry and dark cyan-tiled accent walls. Her work on a Hope Ranch Tudor estate is an elegant ode to the neighborhood's equestrian heritage and the exterior's garden escape: traditional English plaids intermingle with custom floral textiles, mirroring the bustling hydrangeas and buttery roses that greet each window. If Megan's broad-spanning portfolio could speak for itself, it'd be multilingual.

Diverse client visions drive continuous metamorphosis for this designer's creative palette. Her most recent ambition as a full-service design studio—imbuing her inspired comfort into commercial design. "I bring an inviting luxury to the table; it's been fun to flex different muscles lately while breaking into more commercial [work]," Megan reflects.

As we chat al fresco, I peer back at her home's sanded wood ceiling, stretching above our heads in lofty stripes. The fresh framework and its eclectic artifacts offer a clear-cut reflection of what the designer's mind can create with no one to answer to. Each corner brims with worldly idiosyncrasies: a sunken in-situ bath speaks to Megan's serene Asian excursions, hand-crafted zellige tiling induces a zest for Morocco, and open-weave basketry beckons Latin American artisans. Two black-and-white photographs on opposite bathroom walls freeze distinct, solo rowboats in time, unifying a duo of ocean-dwellers

who would otherwise never meet. "[My husband and I] got one [photo] during a backpacking trip in Bali; the other is from a Catalina Island local. We framed them similarly so they look like a set—they're sentimental," she smiles.

The antique white trunk in her home studio holds a trove of textile treasures, and a mélange of locally sourced paintings serves a purpose all of its own: to simply delight. Though curated from both faraway global corners and Santa Barbara cornerstones, each artifact artfully interweaves itself into the bungalow's simplicity. Megan's transformative touch translates visual space into what a deep, cleansing breath feels like.

An open-air anthology of design, the budding designer's retreat chronicles a world well-traveled and acts as an ever-evolving canvas that grows with those who call it home.*



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