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Modern Love

Midcentury design reaches a high-water mark in Surf City.

| By Carrie Storke Williams |
| Photography by Anthony Gomez |

Wave after wave of architectural and interior design styles have hit the Southern California coast since writers began scripting these things. But perhaps no residential design aesthetic is more enduring—or more at home here—than that of the midcentury modern school. Paying homage to Frank Lloyd Wright has never gone out of style on our shores. In fact, since A-listers like Brad Pitt have made highly publicized pilgrimages to view Wright's most famous projects, and prominent millennial architects and interior designers continue to embrace the movement, there seems to be more modern love for midcentury on the California Riviera than ever before.

So, it's no surprise to come across a midcentury-inspired home in Huntington Beach. It is, however, a bit serendipitous to discover the modern prairie-style home of Louis and Lavon Dennis in the city's idyllic Lake Park district, where redone ranch residences are the order of the day.

"The house was inspired by the Dennis' love for midcentury home design," says the residence's interior designer John Wooden Jr. (grandson of the famed college basketball coach John Wooden). "Many of the well-known houses from the 1950s were referenced for material selections and architectural details."

Wooden, who helms an eponymous design firm with offices in Laguna Beach and Los Angeles, worked with business partner Dustin Dorr on the home's interior spaces, and collaborated with architect

This stunning modern prairie-inspired home shows a double lot in Surf City's Lake Park district and stands out among a landscape of ranch residences, thanks to architectural elements like its hipped roof and overhanging eaves, along with its contemporary SoCal-style landscaping, complete with drought-resistant plants and rockscapes.



From top: An open floor plan allows for effortless, indoor-outdoor living and features a retro-modern living room that connects to the library and opens out to the central courtyard and pool (opposite page).

Jeffrey A. Dahl and landscape architect Robert McMahon of RMA International Landscape Architecture & Planning—both based in Huntington Beach—on architectural elements, outdoor spaces and exterior finishes.

“The goal was to create a warm, modern shell to house the Dennis’ collection of original art, vintage furniture and new, modern furnishings,” says Wooden. “We tailored spaces with materials and detailing reminiscent of classic midcentury homes to feel authentic yet up-to-date.”

Both architect and designer felt that a contemporary take on the prairie school of architecture was the perfect fit for this family and this site, where a double lot—the original two houses were torn down to create the new 3,700-square-foot residence—allowed for an expansive, horizontal orientation.

Dahl stayed true to the genre by using a flatter, hipped roof, with broad overhanging eaves and windows grouped in horizontal bands. Modern twists are evident—albeit restrained—in the artisan-forged iron





Head to the upper floor, and an oasis awaits in the expansive master bedroom and spa suite. Opposite page: Midcentury design is highlighted in the kitchen, with cool Caesarstone countertops and minimalist, Poliform cabinetry.

entry gate and front door, where a bit of refined Hollywood Regency fun enters the mix.

McMahon's landscaping also contemporizes the architecture—fast-forwarding the late 19th and early 20th century prairie style popular in the Midwest into 2013 Huntington Beach with native and drought-resistant plants and rockscapes, the shapes and colors of which add a softer, organic and very West Coast vibe.

Once inside, the home reveals its true heart—a spacious, central courtyard that departs from the prairie for true Surf City living. The floor plan embraces the courtyard, with both the living room and garage (the latter a misnomer for what is a luxe club room with a fireplace and media amenities for entertaining, as well as displaying vintage cars) featuring bifolding doors that seamlessly open to the courtyard and pool for chic indoor-outdoor living in all seasons.

Wooden's team worked to ensure that, throughout the three-bedroom residence, horizontal planes were employed to echo the exterior architecture. Wooden softens these lines with vintage lighting and the Dennis' unique art pieces—many acquired from student auctions. In the entry, a floating expanse of varnished walnut juts horizontally from a stone wall, creating a display for a pottery lamp and anchoring one of the collectors' vibrant paintings.

The library is a powerful case study of Wooden's talent for blending old and new, art and life, color and texture. Walnut panels clad the walls, while a dark metallic ceiling with bronze elements calls attention to a vintage Italian chandelier. Impeccably detailed walnut cabinetry displays

the owners' collection of rare books, original art and interesting objects, and vintage furniture serves up flavor and fun.

Other nods to the 1960s come in the form of terrazzo floors, mica wallcoverings and interior doors featuring simple walnut frames inset with vibrant opaque panels. But the pièce de résistance to the midcentury period is the simple yet sublime kitchen featuring sleek cabinetry by Poliform with Caesarstone countertops, Gaggenau appliances and vintage 1960s Koch & Lowy pendants. Here, even the goldenrod-hued, wall-mounted rotary phone rings true to style.

To connect the main level and the upper floor, Wooden designed a spectacular work-of-art staircase composed of walnut risers, terrazzo steps and lacquered, white glass panels perforated to reveal stainless steel filaments. Upstairs, a spacious master bedroom awaits, but it's the bathroom that steals the show. In this serene spa suite, a band of clerestory windows bathe the room in soft light. Bathtub becomes sculpture when set against crushed mica walls. Contemporary custom wood vanities, slab Calcutta marble countertops and terrazzo floors stand in hard-edged contrast to a remarkable bubble lamp by George Nelson—all proving that, in this home, art not only has a place, it's an essential part of everyday life.

"The chance to place original art, to curate a mix of both new and vintage furniture and lighting, and to take cues from the house's architecture is what we look for in a project," says Wooden. And, those looking for an homage to (midcentury) modern love will find it at this home in Surf City. ■