



Los Angeles-based MEGAN DUFRESNE uses her desert getaway as a proving ground of possibilities.

STORY BY LEILANI MARIE LABONG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN BUSKEN



Facing both water and fire, the Sunbrella-covered swivel chairs from Anthropologie make for a plush cocktail hour at Megan Dufresne's waterfront Lake Mirage hideout. opposite: The designer in the home's main office.

A goldenrod-hued U-sectional sofa and sienna armchair, both from Interior Define, anchor the living room in a desert palette. opposite from left: Ice reservoirs built into the bar countertop make self service a breeze. A vintage Warren Platner dining set provides the home's signature "Palm Springs minute."



TO UNDO THE flagrant flamboyancy inside a waterfront vacation house in Lake Mirage that Los Angeles-based interior designer Megan Dufresne purchased midpandemic, she adopted a mighty battle cry: "If it's not a 'no,' then it's a 'hell yes.'"

Desert dwellings are a bit of a family legacy — she grew up visiting her grandparents in Rancho Mirage Racquet Club, where her father currently owns a home — so Dufresne was unfazed at the notion of taking on the 1980s Spanish-style weekender's "John Gotti meets Liberace aesthetic," as she calls it. Even so, she was aghast at such passé pomp: an onslaught of smoky mirrors, gold trim, lavender walls, and floor tiles with an off-putting fleshy-pink tone. It's hard to think of such "inspired" scenery as a blank slate, but as Dufresne says, "Nothing couldn't be undone, and everything — anything — was possible."

Acquiring a vacation property in the Coachella

Valley often begets decorative experimentation, partly because the at-times monotonous expanse of the desert demands it. For Dufresne, her Rancho Mirage getaway was a testing ground for bold ideas. She envisioned a showroom of taste and creativity where prospective clients could witness decorative marvels converging into a thoroughly modern, measurably feminine, desert-coded tableau that only whispers of the region's midcentury heritage.

"I wanted people to see what out-of-the-box thinking looks like," Dufresne says. "I took a chance on my house to show them what can be done if they take a chance on theirs."

Color-blocking the petite kitchen in two shades of green is among the more approachable risks that Dufresne implemented in the house. Working with the existing cabinet boxes, she extended the banks to the ceiling for the illusion of height and painted the right side in a pale mossy hue and the left in a

deeper verdancy that is defiantly of the forest rather than the desert. The shade reprises throughout the 2,625-square-foot home, commanding attention on tambour-style doors.

“I love color in tasteful doses,” says Dufresne, who bemoans the “bright, poppy shades” that often characterize Palm Springs design. “Desert houses don’t have to scream, ‘Look at me!’” she says.

Such strategic color continuity creates an easy visual flow that’s emboldened by other persistent design features: A spectacularly banded quartzite shows up in the kitchen as a backsplash and on the outdoor patio as a waterfall countertop. Vertical porcelain tile appears in a guest shower as tonal rosy stripes, then again as cladding for the bar and fireplace in an ivory hue. New terrazzo floors throughout the house offer a cooling counterpoint to warmer midcentury details, like brass lighting and hardware or even shag and shearling, as seen in the primary bedroom.

Her lakeview space — a cozy, mostly monochromatic cocoon — also features one of the designer’s more experimental works: a custom wood console wrapped in a Schumacher flame-stitch wallcovering. Applying this sisal textile to a piece in which curves feature prominently seemed implausible to the wallpaper installer, who required signed waivers before taking the job. “Who says wallpaper has to go on a wall?” muses Dufresne, who was so pleased with the result — notably, the masterful pleats rounding those worrisome bends — that she had the same technique applied to the desk in the main office, now covered in grasscloth.

Speaking of walls and the barriers they symbolize, Dufresne metaphorically demolished a few for the project’s peak examples of design derring-do. Much to the chagrin of her subcontractors, the walls of the primary bath are smooth stucco, of house-exterior fame. “That’s how you know it’s waterproof,” she says. “So why wouldn’t it work for a shower?”

When the wallpaper of Dufresne’s affection was indefinitely stalled in the sluggish pandemic supply chain, she rolled up her sleeves to brazenly trowel mastic mortar on the walls of a small guest room instead. Later, she sparingly spray-painted the rippled arches she had created in gold. “It’s a good thing I love the way it turned out, because mastic is a permanent adhesive,” she says. “There’s no going back.”

Such irrevocable prospects seem to beg an equally formidable response from Dufresne. Hell yes, they do.



clockwise from top left: Dufresne covered the Crate & Barrel desk in grasscloth. A wall treatment made of mastic gives the guest room its trademark texture. An entryway niche expresses the designer’s taste through books, pottery, and a framed tennis print by Slim Aarons.

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Rose-toned porcelain tiles give this extra-large shower a Marrakesh vibe. *opposite:* The monochromatic primary bedroom belies its spectrum of textures, from a Mongolian lamb shag bench to brass table lamps.

DUFRESNE'S
TOP 3

1. Set the stage. Dufresne's favorite nook in the house is a recessed niche at the front door with floating oak shelves that display objects and art, giving a preview of the style to come. "This kind of 'house summary' piques curiosity and draws people in," she says.

2. Repurpose, then personalize. In the kitchen, Dufresne worked with the existing cabinets, which saves time and money. "Not everything has to be ripped out, and not all cabinets have to be soft-close," she says. "Especially in vacation properties that aren't used daily."

3. Take a "Palm Springs minute." Even though Dufresne's home isn't overtly midcentury in style, the breakfast area — appointed with a vintage Warren Platner dining set below a gilded raffia pendant lamp — provides context for the region's design heritage.