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# Montecito Meditation



Clodagh translates the Spanish tone  
of a California house  
into purely contemporary terms





Interior designer Clodagh took a 1960s Montecito gatehouse and transformed it into a light-filled expanse of monolithic forms and neutral tones. **previous pages:** The house's exterior is marked by lush gardens and old Spanish tiles. **left:** The living room opens onto a patio and pool. A bamboo low table and chenille-upholstered furniture sit on a Tibetan wool rug from Michaelian & Kohlberg. **above:** The brick walkway extends into the entry and then transitions to limestone floors.





**above:** Clodagh's concrete-and-steel Mesa table lends strong sculptural lines to the dining room. The mica chandelier is by Stephane Pagani for Clodagh Collection. **opposite:** In the entry, a massive brass disk and a resin-and-steel bench are both from Vancouver-based Martha Sturdy.



**CLODAGH HAS LIVED IN NEW YORK FOR TWENTY-ONE YEARS**, but she was born in County Mayo, Ireland, in Oscar Wilde's house. "His name was scratched on my bedroom window," she says. Given her upbringing, it's easy to see how clarity, sympathy, a certain iconoclasm and an ability to speak to the heart of the matter—Wildean or otherwise—are all hallmarks of Clodagh's work. While the designer's home base these days is the East Coast, she has increasingly found herself in the West, where many of her clients share her affinity for interiors that facilitate personal reflection as well as the needs of family and social life. (Her clients include Robert Redford and Herb Alpert, for whom she did a restaurant in Los Angeles.)

The house she recently designed for a publishing executive and his wife in Montecito, California, exemplifies these considerations. "Montecito is delicious," says Clodagh. "It's a different quality of light and of life. They talk about a New York minute, but not a California minute. It's a different approach. In California, it's easier to be easy."

The clients had moved from a large formal house in Connecticut to be closer to their grandchildren. "There's an emotional audit when people move from place to place," says Clodagh. "A home has to stretch beyond its material properties and sustain our complex human needs. We like to help people celebrate their talents."

Surrounded by a walled garden, the residence, a 1920s-style Spanish gatehouse that sits on a former George Washington Smith estate, is cocooned in green. Many of the structure's details, including both the Spanish tiles that surround the swimming pool and entrance and the massive oak beams in the living room, are strong references to the era.

But contemporary elements were introduced throughout to invigorate the spaces. The entry was opened up to allow views of the fountain and to invite more light. "It's not about a grand entrance though," Clodagh explains. "It's about an experience. The grounds are utterly charming—you can hear the soothing sound of water from almost anywhere. Once you went inside, however, the house was a little shadowy, a little too discreet."

Now light pours through the main reception rooms. The living room's tall steel-and-glass French doors provide a direct connection to the patio and pool. The passage between the living and dining rooms now frames a massive concrete-and-steel dining table, designed by Clodagh, that anchors the space. The wall between the kitchen and dining room was removed to allow for casual entertaining. The kitchen itself was gutted and re-oriented to facilitate interaction with guests gathered around the table.





**opposite:** Venetian plaster walls throughout the house lend depth and texture. A custom metal cabinet conceals the living room's entertainment equipment. The chair is by New York architects Calvin Tsao and Zack McKown.

**above:** The master bedroom has an integrated upholstered headboard, built-in bookcases and wall-mounted reading lights, "which allow for minimal furnishings," says Clodagh.





For the furnishings, Clodagh wanted to lighten the load as much as she could to temper the exterior's colorful, intricate tilework and lush gardens. Although she used neutral tones—muted green, wheat, toffee, bronze—the textures and materials she layered seem to have a life of their own. In the living room, Clodagh mixed a chenille sofa and chairs with a dark-bamboo low table. The resin-and-steel Martha Sturdy bench in the entry stands out against Venetian-plaster walls and brick floors. A wool sisal rug softens the master bedroom.

Yet another layer was achieved with lighting, most often from upright sconces. In the long hallway off the master bedroom, where the original cabinetry was left as is, woven-wood sconces by Kasper Larsen turn a traditional space into a gallery of light and shadow. The dining room's mica chandelier mirrors the Venetian plaster walls while adding a gentle luminosity.

"There's no such thing as an inanimate object," says Clodagh. "Everything speaks to you. I try to incorporate something beautiful at every axis. It's reinforcing when you move through a space." The private areas of the house are serene and personal. In the master bedroom the bed is nestled under an original Moorish arch; the client especially requested the deep color of the walls, an interior note that brings to mind the sun-baked bricks outside. In the master bath, light streams over a large tub surrounded by tawny-colored Moroccan tiles. "I don't think I've ever designed a small bathroom in California," says Clodagh. "Bathing is taken seriously here, and its rituals are appreciated. In New York, they say, 'Just give me a big shower!'" +

**opposite:** In a corridor off the master bedroom, Kasper Larsen sconces and a painting by Charles Peters mix with an existing skylight and closets "to make a dramatic passage," says Clodagh.  
**below:** Tall acacia trees provide shade for the terrace and pool.





"The goal was to create a warm, contemporary environment using specialty finishes and carefully placed elements while highlighting the decorative details original to the house," explains Clodagh. An Alfred Rogoway painting above the living room mantel can be seen through French doors.

