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Pitch Perfect: Andrew Bird and Katherine Tsina at Home

For this creative couple, a one-of-a-kind hideaway in Los Angeles provides the ultimate retreat for inspired living

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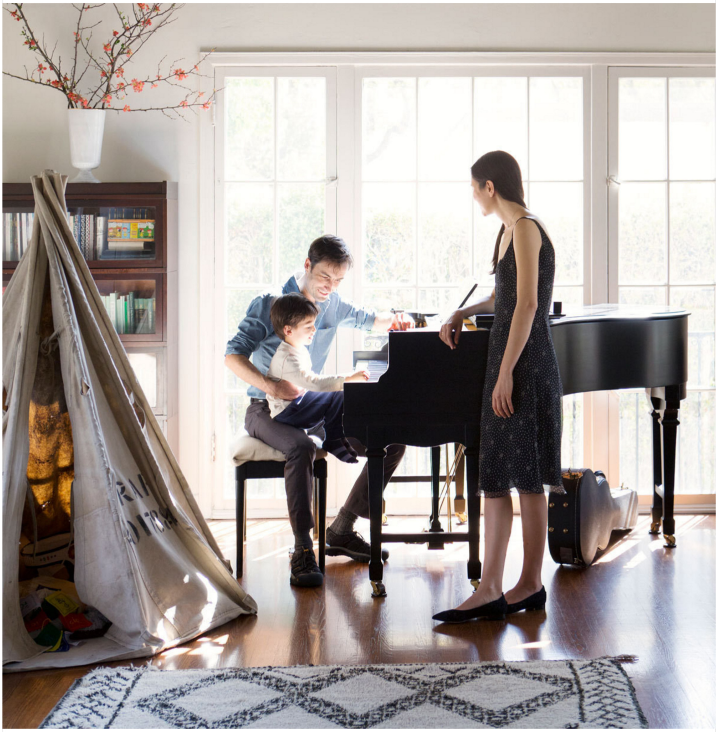

Andrew Bird, Katherine Tsina, and their son, Sam, in their Los Angeles residence. Prop styling by Britt Browne.

When you have a design sense, it's almost easier if your house starts out not right," says Katherine Tsina. "It helps to look at a space and think, 'We can begin again.'" Sitting on a Milo Baughman sofa under the soaring redwood ceiling of the great room in her 1920s-era residence, it's hard to believe that anything was ever off about the place.

But when Tsina, a classically trained dancer turned fashion designer, and her husband, singer-songwriter Andrew Bird, first set eyes on their home a year and a half ago during an impromptu house-hunting weekend in Los Angeles, they were struck by the need to lighten things up. "The vision was to go against the heaviness of the wood ceiling and some of the more gothic-looking features," says Bird, a man known for his brainy lyrics, innovative electronic looping, and supernatural whistling ability.

The couple had moved west from New York City with their now

Madewell

almost-four-year-old son, Sam, in pursuit of the golden work/life ratio. "I'd come to L.A. to finish records, and I'd see producers or musicians who had a converted garage as a studio and could work normal hours and have dinner with the family. That seemed pretty ideal," says Bird. He and Tsina, who designs a womenswear line called Avion, had met through a mutual friend in 2009 and married the year after.

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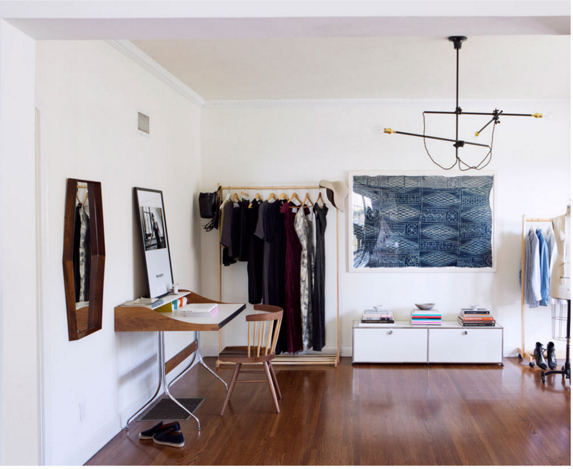
The fashion designer in her home studio.

Tsina, a classically trained dancer, was previously a fit model.

> I THINK YOU NEED A CLEAN SPACE IF YOU'RE TRYING TO MAKE SOMETHING NEW IN IT.
>
> —*KATHERINE TSINA*

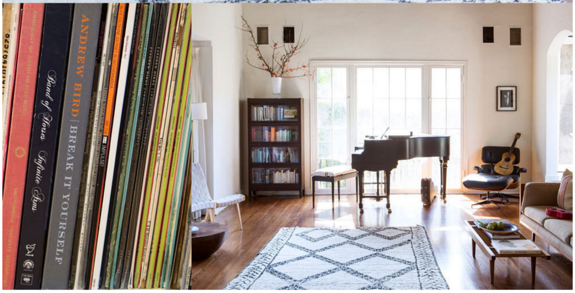


The age-old craft of indigo dyeing looks right at home with midcentury and contemporary pieces in Tsina's studio.

Their West Village apartment served as a test site for navigating a complementary decor aesthetic between Tsina's "destitute-Parisian" inclinations (Bird's tongue-in-cheek assessment of his wife's sensibility) and his weakness for industrial pieces. "I'm more particular than I think I am," he admits. "For a whole swath of my twenties I had this idea that [design was] materialistic and I didn't care about those things...but that kinda came back around." The two pride themselves on having successfully honed their look. "We've had to find our taste together," says Tsina. "We've both always liked a lot of midcentury furniture, but it was about balancing it with more rustic vintage pieces."

Having decided they'd be putting down roots in California, the couple took their time laying the stylistic foundation of their home, seeking to highlight its innate character—from the Mediterranean archways to the early 20th-century moldings. They began by gutting the kitchen, painting the walls a fresh white (Pointing by Farrow & Ball), and curating finishing details: Moroccan tile in the bathrooms and minimal graphite-and-brass fixtures from Waterworks and Liz's Antique Hardware.

Curiosity and Method
Ten Years of Cabinet Magazine



The dining room became Tsina's studio, which called for a clear delineation of spaces. The pair commissioned Culver City woodworker Mike Fair to build a sliding barn door with an ebonized wash to complement the adjoining great room's ceiling. A drafting table, an elemental multiarm chandelier from Brooklyn-based Workstead, and an indigo textile from Cameroon add interest to the pared-back environs. "I think you need a clean space if you're trying to make something new in it," Tsina explains. A rack of her latest designs—including a stunning backless floor-length silk-crepe gown and an embossed-silk cocktail dress with a network of ribbon closures—stands nearby, an elegant case in point.

Statement pieces are selected with the same thoughtfulness as a potential roommate. In the kitchen, a long John Derian field sofa in indigo denim was the result of a months-long search for the ultimate hard-wearing yet inviting lounger. The biomorphic wood coffee table in the front window is no ordinary tea-time resting spot—it was crafted by sculptor Alma Allen.

Art is equally considered. “It’s got to be personal,” says Bird. “Don’t put a piece up unless it means something to you.” The resulting collection includes a series of black-and-white still-life studies of napkins by close friend Addie Juell, and a painted copperplate figurative etching by Bird’s mom, which hangs in the upstairs guest room. A darkly romantic etching by Audrey Niffenegger—an artist turned best-selling author who also taught art to Bird’s mother—is installed in the stairwell. The piece, which previously resided on his parents’ Illinois farm, was gifted to them after only a slight bit of prompting. “We were there one summer, and I was like, ‘You know where that would look so nice?’” the soft-spoken Tsina confesses.

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>
> —ANDREW BIRD

The couple's professional endeavors have flourished in their new home. Tsina recently launched a unisex line of shirting and is putting the finishing touches on a small women's collection for FW 15/16. "I'm always thinking about architectural shapes and balancing them with how the fabric moves on the body," she says, noting that she's been playing with a peony-print Lurex and layering delicate textures such as lace and silk. The shirting collection will be stocked online (avionclothier.com) and in select boutiques (including Christina Lehr in New York's Tribeca), but her dresses are made-to-measure. "I have a studio here and one in New York, so I take appointments and work directly with the client," she says. "It's a different kind of model, but it works."

Bird, meanwhile, has an as-yet-untitled album due out in winter 2016, featuring original material and marking his first bona-fide studio effort since before Sam was born. "My last four albums have been fairly scrappy affairs—rough around the edges with not too much production," he says. "I'm trying to balance what I've learned from the scrappiness but have it be a little more hi-fi." Though the LP is already written, he is in the process of putting together the right band, and speaks abstractly about his plan for the record's sound: "I've been on this old-timey detour, but this one will be in the 'none of the above' category. Lyrically it's a little more direct, where in the past I'd maybe dance around the subject a bit." True to his original West Coast dream, he now composes in his studio in the converted garage. His last release, 2014's album of Handsome Family covers titled Things Are Really Great Here, Sort Of..., was recorded in the great room.

"You feel compelled to fill the room with sound—it keeps you from getting too precious with your voice," Bird says. "I've always felt that high ceilings and openness encourage optimism, which is good for creativity."

A light touch with the interiors brought grace and modernity to the home's 1920s architecture.

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