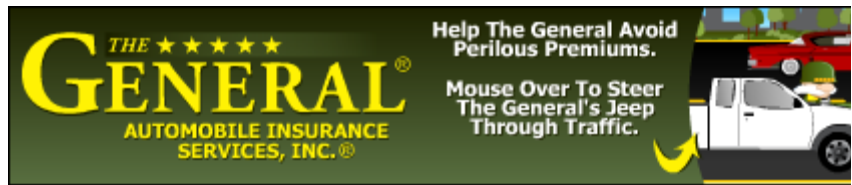


Los Angeles Times



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From the Los Angeles Times

INNER LIFE

His Silver Lake casbah

Who lives in that Moroccan-flavored fantasy? It's not who you'd think.

By Audrey Davidow

Special to The Times

February 21, 2008

EVEN in Silver Lake, where the prevailing architectural style is Anything Goes, the Priuses are slowing down to check out *that* house on Elevado Street. After 10 months of renovations, what had been a dreary Spanish-style four-plex is now a one-man Moroccan fantasy fronted by hand-forged ironwork, glowing mosaic fountains and a turret-like entrance topped with a mural of trumpeting elephants.

What passersby may not know is that the magic carpet ride continues inside. Around every corner, from the bold lime- and chocolate-striped hallways to the paprika-colored dining room, designers Karen and Guy Vidal have held nothing back, leaving visual surprises through each fanciful archway. Look closely, and you'll even find gemstones embedded in the tile work -- aventurine in the kitchen (to promote a feeling of well-being, they say), and amethyst in the master bedroom (to facilitate a good night's sleep).

Most surprising of all, however, just might be the guy who bought their funhouse: a strait-laced criminal-defense attorney with a bashful manner and a couple of pens poking out of his blue-and-white-striped-shirt pocket.

Edward Kelleher isn't exactly the type of guy you'd expect to find lounging around a pillow-strewn turquoise daybed. Yet he purchased the place just as the Vidals had decorated it, complete with silk velvet bedspreads and mirrored poufs.

Look at Kelleher and Karen Vidal, and it's hard to imagine the two connecting. She's artsy and creative, a free spirit in dangly earrings and flowing purple kaftan. He's reserved, buttoned-down and picky. Very picky. But the two actually go way back, to when they were two Irish kids lifeguarding on the shores of Salisbury Beach, Mass.

"I was always trying to get Ed to move out of his apartment and buy one of the places I was working on," Karen Vidal says. "But this was the one house I didn't even think of for him."

THE Vidals had remodeled the house with someone totally different in mind -- an Eastside rocker, perhaps. Or, at the very least, a music industry executive with a funky bent. "But Ed swung by the

open house and said he wanted to buy it. I mean, here's Ed saying he really likes something -- and for him that's a big deal," Karen Vidal says, still clearly attached to the project. "And of course, the added benefit is that we would still have access to the place."

For Kelleher, the draw was in the details -- the thousands of hand-cut Moroccan and Thai tiles lovingly pieced together by artist Patricia Callicott to create mosaics in just about every room, the atmospheric light fixtures that completely transform the spaces at night, providing a constant sense of discovery.

"I've lived here for nine months," he says, "and I still find something new to admire every day."

The layout of the 1925 four-plex remains largely intact. The 4,000-square-foot home still has five bedrooms, five bathrooms and three of the original kitchens, the fourth retooled into a laundry room.

Of course, some of the design elements, such as the downstairs coat closet that the Vidals converted into a wine cellar, are wasted on Kelleher, who doesn't really drink. "If I had known Ed was going to buy the place, I would have done a lot of things differently," Karen Vidal says. "I certainly wouldn't have built a wine closet."

Then there's the hookah pipe in the office, which has never been touched. And the main kitchen's \$5,000 Bertazzoni range, which is lost on a man who largely subsists on takeout and protein bars.

"My personal tastes," Kelleher says softly, glancing up at the pair of 3-foot-tall Indian wedding dolls standing sentry over his living room, "are generally a little more bland than this."

THROUGHOUT the house, in room after room, unexpected elements emerge as defining accents. A pair of turquoise pillars salvaged from an old Craftsman home in Silver Lake were used to help one bedroom visually read as the master. The cool copper sink in the master bathroom came from a salvage yard and was installed atop an antique Chinese cabinet. Some on-their-last-legs built-ins downstairs were refinished and repurposed as storage in the master closet. Light fixtures and other decorative pieces hail from Indonesia, India, Thailand, even Egypt.

"It's easy to call it a Moroccan fantasy, but really it's more than that," Karen Vidal says, adding that authenticity wasn't the goal. She and her husband never intended to replicate a particular place, culture or look, but rather create their own world -- an imagined retreat unlike any other, punctuated by Callicott's mosaics and decorative painting.

"Design can take itself too seriously," she says. "I'm not really for that. Foremost, this should be livable. People may look at Elevado and throw up their hands and say, 'How can you say that?' But it's really a livable house."

Though the owner turned out to be a lawyer, not a rocker, the house still functions as the designers intended: The upper floor -- reached through a vibrantly striped staircase -- is Kelleher's private realm, with the master bedroom, main kitchen, and dining and living areas that feel like their own retreat.

The lower floor is largely guest and work quarters, including an office area that the Vidals recently began renting for their firm, Design Vidal. There's a lounge area plus a bar that opens to an inviting outdoor living room with built-in benches and fireplace. "You can have 200 people over and they all want to be in that space," Karen says.

The house has proved to be a good fit for Kelleher not just in terms of function, but also, surprisingly, in terms of style.

"It's almost like they needed each other," Guy Vidal says. "Ed needed to exotify himself. And the place needed someone who would keep it as we envisioned it."

Kelleher has changed little of the design other than to turn one of the boudoirs into a media room. With Karen's help, he also added a mahogany armoire inlaid with henna-dyed bone for his TV in the master.

Previous homes were practical, he says. Basic. A reflection that his focus has been at work, not at home.

But over time he has come to realize that the look of his house does matter. Just as his clients see his business suits as a symbol of success, Kelleher's friends and acquaintances -- strangers too -- now see the house as a reflection of his priorities and personality, a relaxing place where it simply feels good to spend time.

"When the home was almost completely renovated and furnished, I decided that this was the perfect place for me: It looked great, felt comfortable and was certainly large enough for a family that I am still wanting," Kelleher says. "If this house did not have such an impact on me when I first saw it completed, I would still be in my apartment and not yet have realized how much of a change a well-designed home can have on someone's life."

The Vidals not-so-secretly hope some of that transformative magic rubs off on their friend. "He's ready to settle down," Guy says, adding with a laugh, "and he's going to need a bunch of wives to fill that place."

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A Moroccan-flavored remodel

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