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PROJECT
Rice Residence
ARCHITECT
Buff, Straub and Hensman
RENOVATION ARCHITECT
Don Dimster
LOCATION
Los Angeles, California

View Finder

A new outlook for a Buff, Straub and Hensman gem perched high above Los Angeles.

Architect Don Dimster integrated a new roof deck and custom furnishings into Chris and Marjorie Rice's 1960s Buff, Straub and Hensman home in Los Angeles. In its previous state, the roof (inset) trapped and pooled water.





The house opens to the rear deck, which the original architects projected into the setback to maximize the outdoor space (left). All the doors are from Western Window Systems. As in his own home in Venice, Dimster added a clear railing to the roof deck, so nothing would obstruct the view. He also designed the sun shades.

Dimster pierced the roof with a glass box topping the new central stair (below). To the right of the entrance is the transparent buffer between the facade and the kitchen, where an old courtyard once stood. “We wanted to keep the idea of the courtyard,” says Dimster. “The frosted panels are a distinct feature of the facade.”

Marjorie Rice, who worked for NBC News in London before moving to Los Angeles, tackled house hunting with a professional’s intensity. “I was looking at about 40 places a week,” she says. Nothing fit the bill until she and her husband, Chris Rice, an agent at William Morris Endeavor (WME), came across a 1,600-square-foot post-and-beam high in the Hollywood Hills—exactly where they wanted to live.

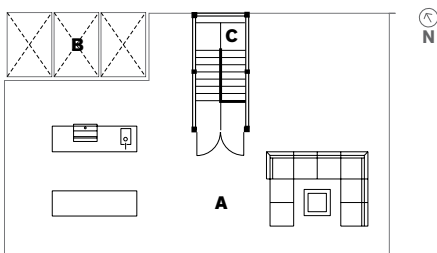
“We saw it on a Sunday morning in February,” Marjorie says, “and just knew.”

“Bulging eyeballs,” says Chris, whose job with WME brought the couple to L.A. three years ago. While a passel of agents and potential buyers milled around the inside of the 1960s home, designed by Case Study legends Buff, Straub and Hensman, the Rices climbed a ladder to the flat, puddle-covered roof and sat in the scrappy pair of lawn chairs they found there. The view reminded them of Strawberry Hill, the hotel in Jamaica where they first met as teenagers and where, after reconnecting in London years later, they married. “You’re in the hills and looking out over other hills dotted with all different kinds of houses,” Chris says. “The one downside of our property is that there’s not much of a yard, but as we sat on >

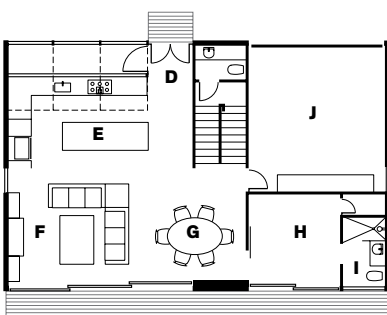




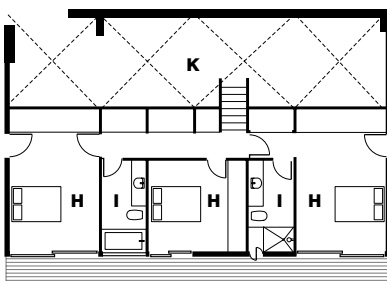
Dimster replaced and extended the original stair; the new version is in steel and glass and spans three floors (right). "The treads are open because we wanted to have as much light come down as possible," says Dimster. As shown in the floor plan (below), the stair became the unifying gesture of the renovation.



Roof



Top Level



Lower Level



Rice Residence Floor Plan

- A Roof Deck
- B Skylight
- C Central Stairway
- D Entrance
- E Kitchen
- F Living Room
- G Dining Room
- H Bedroom
- I Bathroom
- J Garage
- K Crawlspace

the roof we had this sort of naive idea: It would be really easy to deck the roof and turn it, basically, into a garden."

"Easy" may have been a miscalculation, but Venice, California-based architect Don Dimster, having created an innovative rooftop for his own house a few years ago (see *Dwell*, June 2014), was up to the challenge. He and general contractor Franklin Pineda collaborated with the Rices to tailor their new home to fit their lifestyle. The remodel included a larger kitchen, a fourth bedroom, and an upstairs >

"Before we bought the house, we climbed a ladder up to the roof. That was when we had the vision." —Chris Rice, resident



Dimster added new, two-story-tall beams to support the weight of the glass box topping the stair. "We were missing a grand outdoor space—that's where the roof deck comes into play," Dimster says. >

The old kitchen (right) became a bedroom that doubles as a study, and the new kitchen (below) borrowed space and light from the original courtyard (far right). The spirit of the courtyard remains with the buffer between the kitchen and the exterior wall. The cabinets are from Ikea, the countertops are quartzite, and the grill top is from Bertazzoni.



“We took it down to the studs, but it’s a very pure reimagination of the house.” —Don Dimster, architect



bath, as well as the new roof deck. “We took it down to the studs,” says Dimster, “but it’s a very pure reimagination of the house.”

Both Rices are dedicated foodies and Chris is an avid cook (sous vide machine, slow cooker, multiple wine fridges), so a contemporary kitchen with plenty of storage was paramount. By co-opting a front deck as interior space, Dimster was able to relocate the kitchen adjacent to the living room—making one large fluid space, ideal for entertaining. With white Ikea cabinetry, skylights, and glass windows that look onto the potted bamboo of a modernist sliver of a winter garden, the serene addition serves its practical function and also makes the living room feel exponentially larger. Marjorie trekked to more than 20 stone yards before settling on the river-washed quartzite for the countertops.

Dimster further customized the living-dining experience by recessing electric shades in the railing of a balcony that, accessed by a triple series of new sliding-glass doors, runs along the side of the house with the hill view. With the flick of a switch, the Rices can ration the amount of light they get during the day, and the amount of privacy they want at night. >

“There is a purpose to everything in this house. It isn’t just about the design—we wanted it to be really livable.”
—Marjorie Rice, resident

The team matched and continued the 1960s-era red oak floor into the living room, which gained an entire wall of new sliders from Western Window Systems. “We wanted to preserve the original intent of the house wherever we could,” Dimster notes. >





Marjorie takes a Brumby rocking chair on the deck off the bedroom, which is privatized by a forest of bamboo (above). In the dining room (right), artworks by Alan Davie (at left) and Martin Bradley join a Norman Foster dining table and Eames chairs.



The original L-shaped kitchen and pantry were reconfigured as an upstairs guest bedroom-and-bath combo that can be closed off from the living area with a sliding door. “When babies come,” says Chris, “we can use it for a playroom and hide the mess.”

The real magic of the renovation may be the roof deck, which added 1,217 square feet of living space; Dimster’s dramatic glass-cased stairway is the drumroll that precedes it. After a switchback landing made of double-layer tempered glass, the oak treads

rise to the ipe wood deck, unrecognizable from its former water-logged incarnation. Now a grown-ups’ playground, the roof hosts a bar with an integrated grill and sink, a fire pit, and a dining table, all of which Dimster designed incorporating the quartzite from the kitchen counters and the ipe from the deck. He also designed the teak seating. For days when the Southern California sun is brutal, shade sails can easily be moved and manipulated—and if that doesn’t cool things down sufficiently, a quick

dousing under the shower in the corner will do the job.

The Rices weren’t overly familiar with midcentury modern design before buying their home, but didn’t need a tutorial to appreciate its charms, especially the embrace of their site’s surroundings, as enhanced by Dimster. “We got the outdoor-indoor living that was really important to us,” says Marjorie. “At night the doors are open and you can hear the rustling of the bamboo and the coyotes. In the evenings it’s very sophisticated.” □