

LEFT: An Indian kidney table inlaid with bone rests in front of an 18th century armoire that houses stereo equipment. Compliments of the homeowners' own art collection is an original living Penn photograph featuring his wife Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn in front of a Moroccan building.

FAR LEFT: Atop the fireplace mantle lies a 19th century Chinese Crane and Cloud sculpture, from Robert Kuo, Ltd., which represents longevity, happiness and good fortune. Adding more Asian flavor to the living room is a colorful Tibetan rug.

The ability to touch the imagination has always been the distinction of Cuban-born interior designer Orestes Suarez. Having come to the United States when he was just a toddler, he has divided his time between Miami and Los Angeles, where he currently resides. Though educated in music, his first love has always been design. As a child there weren't enough pens, pencils and crayons to keep him happy since he was always drawing beautiful things. At the age of nineteen, Suarez joined the team at the Miami design firm of Luminaire through which he was introduced to the furniture designs of Jean Michel Frank, as well as the methods of architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Richard Meier. He was hooked. From that point on, Suarez spent his time learning as he worked his way up the ladder in a number of design firms. With talent and experience on his side, Suarez started his own company, and for the last five years has been building a successful business.





“Your room should be really beautiful, but it’s sort of the back-drop. If you begin with a clean palette, you can build on it. My work is elegant, classic and serene. Your home should complement you, not the other way around, You feel like a star in there, You are the star:” Not wanting to fall into the trap of a hip, way-out house that may not maintain its appeal for more than a year or two, Suarez integrates both old and new pieces as well other ethnicities. “I figure we know so much about our own culture that we want to learn from other cultures:’

When high-tech executive Helen Lawrence, and her husband, music video director Frances Lawrence, needed an interior designer for their Spanish style Hollywood Hills home, the young couple turned to Orestes Suarez. The three agreed upon a classic approach with touches of modern, gothic and ethnic influences. Suarez began this two-year labor of love with the perfect balance of passion, dedication and expertise. His first acquisition, a nineteenth century Chinese crane and cloud sculpture from Robert Kuo, Ltd. on Melrose Avenue, set the tone and propelled him into a creative frenzy. ‘If you can find that one piece that will inspire you, not necessarily art, it can be a chair or a sofa, or in this case, when I saw the sculpture, I looked at it and thought that would be the theme of all that would happen here:’

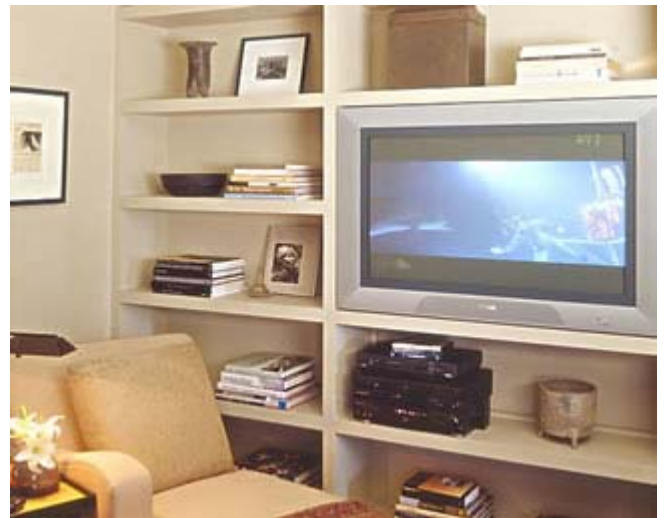
LEFT: Suarez completely refurbished a few neglected Art Deco chairs and recovered them with orange Clarence House mohair that, in addition to adding texture to the room, incorporates colors and themes from the adjoining Living room. A Christian Liagre lamp is suspended above a dining room table designed by Suarez. Creativity abounds as an antique bronze Indonesian drum has been turned over and adapted as a coffee table.





LEFT: An enclosed glass shower hidden by the entry door enables this powder room to function as a guest bathroom as well. The hanging fish scale Lamp, with the help of the recessed lighting, warmly illuminates in the evening while Japanese Shoji screen glass allows natural daylight to enter without compromising one's modesty. Designed by Suarez, the oak credenza and mirror complete this exquisite room

BELOW: In this sitting room, just bordering the master bedroom, practicality and beauty harmonize as the Philips flat panel television, linked to a computer in the adjacent closet, also serves as a monitor with a wireless keyboard.



The next obstacles to eliminate were some well intentioned but misguided renovations by the previous owners of the home. Suarez's initial objective was to restore the integrity of the house and reinstate an airy feel. With his incredible eye for detail—"I changed everything, oak floors, oak doors, windows, recreated the entry with a Moorish staircase: and even changed hinges and knobs..." He went so far as to swap out all the air vents for old Victorian gratings that he refurbished by hand. His attention to detail extended beyond the walls and into the backyard. To add an exotic feel to the swimming pool, he resurfaced it with a deep sea blue and replaced the surrounding concrete with aged silver pao lope wood planks to contrast, with the lush and tropical surroundings.

As his roster of Los Angeles clients expands, one might think it would become more difficult to meet at the intersection of taste and the client's wishes but Suarez disagrees. "My clients have all come to me with wonderful ideas. Sometimes a little offbeat, things that you don't really think of, like a powder blue room, but it has all worked. People have good ideas, They're not necessarily exposed to as many images as I am, and so sometimes I'll present a concept that they never knew existed and they'll appreciate it"

And what can we anticipate next from this diverse designer? Later this year, Suarez will introduce into the marketplace his own simple yet modern lighting fixtures that incorporate a melange of wood and metal. Referring to himself as a "visual person," Suarez sometimes take inspiration from most unlikely sources. One particularly imaginative lamp, motivated by a documentary film on the Padaung women of Myanmar, is reminiscent of the coded brass neckrings worn by the tribeswomen. His line of furniture featuring chairs, sofas, and tables will debut a short while after his lighting designs giving us all the opportunity to welcome the imagination of Orestes Suarez into our homes.