

SPECIAL HOME ISSUE

Town & Country

ESTABLISHED IN 1846

PLUS
20 COOL
DESIGN IDEAS

DESIGNS FOR FAMILY LIVING

L.A.
KEEPING
IT NATURAL

DALLAS
LOVING
THE MODERN
LOOK

**NEW YORK
CITY**
COOKING
FOR A CROWD

BERKSHIRES
RENEWING
A FAMILY FARM



OCTOBER 2009 \$4.50

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L.A. interior design
Alexandra
Michael Miscz
with son

Authentic is the
that best describes
Misczynskis, when
they're clowning
the yard with their
(opposite) or select
soft-spoken anti-
for their L.A. living
room (this page)
center are a French
wine-tasting table
Didier Abbe
in Antwerp; a Flemish
leather screen
Galerie J. Kugler
Paris; and a Solignac
Islands fish from Ga
Flak, also in France
FASHION STYLING
BY KELLY



THE NATURALS



LAUNCHING A BUSINESS,
STARTING A FAMILY,
RENOVATING THEIR NEW
HOUSE—MICHAEL AND
ALEXANDRA MISCZYNSKI
MAKE IT ALL LOOK SO EASY.

BY MARGY ROCHLIN

Photographs by *Matthew Hranek*



body who comes into the house comments on them.”

For their friends and clients with small children who covet the Misczynskis’ pale, elegant environment—a pocket version of what they offer to clients like Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes and Jane and Michael Eisner—the couple’s modest three-bedroom house is a potent example of how tiny offspring and valuable antiques can peacefully coexist. Sometimes the trick is in clever planning: the floor of Miles’s arts-and-crafts room—a narrow glorified hallway off the kitchen that he refers to as his “office”—might be made of *dalles de Bourgogne* (reclaimed French limestone), but stone by any name stands up nobly to Play-Doh and paint. Sometimes it’s all in the attitude: embracing what happens to a piece of age-old furniture when family meals are regularly eaten there. (“The patina is just getting better every day,” says Alexandra with a laugh, referring to the top of their long, faintly battered 18th-century refectory table.) And sometimes kids just need to have a place of their own. When Miles and Henry get antsy, the family heads out to the intimate garden behind the house for some games of no-points kiddie soccer or a dip in the pool. And at bedtime, the boys crawl into a custom-built sleeping alcove in

IF ONE WERE forced to choose a single item to illustrate the particular gift that Alexandra and Michael Misczynski, of the design firm Atelier AM, have for combining the rarefied with the rough-hewn, it would probably be the wooden floors in their 1920s Mediterranean-style home in the Hollywood Hills. The antique French oak boards are soft and weathered and have no doubt endured untold dropped sandwiches and spilled juice boxes courtesy of the Misczynskis’ two young sons—subdued Miles, aged four, and the more fidgety one-year-old, **Henry**. But somehow, even in a living room featuring a **Giacometti floor lamp**, **side tables** by Jean-Michel Frank and an earthenware horse from the Han dynasty, the old graying planks have no trouble holding their own.

This was something Michael first noticed three years ago, during the phase of a gut renovation when the floors were yet to be laid—and no number of test stains or finishes on the sample boards looked quite right. Then his eye fell on some untreated wood. “This is going to sound nuts, but let’s leave them raw,” Michael remembers telling his wife. “My idea was that there could be beauty in anything,” he says.

“We decided, let’s just try it, and if we run into a problem, we’ll finish them later,” adds Alexandra, the less excitable member of the design team. “They’ve been fantastic. Every-



ilk? Henry
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to a towering
-century Italian
board filled with
ster vessels
dols from Axel
ordt, in Antwerp.
que French
tone is underfoot
lisczynskis had
oom's cabinets
osite bottom)
ed of the same
oak as the
s in the living
(opposite top),
e a weathered
table holds
ran salt tablets
Galerie Flak.



For their small-scale living room, the couple chose a reduced palette of colors and materials, lending serenity to a space often busy with boys. The chairs at left are French 1930s from New York's Amy Perlin; other '30s touches include an Alberto and Diego Giacometti floor lamp, a Jean-Michel Frank gilt-plaster snail and a Frank gilt-bronze table, one of a pair.







“Not ostentatious” is how Belgian antiques dealer Boris Vervoordt (son of legendary antiquarian Axel) classifies their hard-to-define style. “As it plays out in the house, I think that they draw a lot of inspiration from what’s done in our part of the world, although it’s translated in a very Californian way,” he says. “There’s an easygoingness about it and a certain scale, a monumental quality, and then there’s the quality of the light.”

When the Misczynskis met—they were working on different projects for the same Manhattan-based client—their sophisticated aesthetic wasn’t yet developed. Michael, a native Angeleno with a degree in architecture from USC, was working for Richard Meier; Alexandra, an art-history buff from Bedford, New York, was with the late designer Naomi Leff. Their love of aging limestone and crumbling plaster blossomed when, after marrying in 2000, they honeymooned in Paris, Florence, Rome and Venice. “Before that trip, it was all about Richard,” Michael says. “But this was so real.”

After they opened Atelier AM, in 2002, it didn’t hurt that

their bedroom so that Mom or Dad can read them a story.

Back in 2005, when the Misczynskis found the 3,000-square-foot house, it cost far more than they had planned to spend, but they couldn’t help themselves. “Light is one of the most important things,” Michael says. “The house faces east, south and west, and so throughout the day, the light moves around the rooms.” That said, in order to Misczynski-ize it, as they might for a client, “every surface was touched,” says Michael. They took the structure down to its studs, removed a back staircase to open up the kitchen, used raw plaster coated with wax to give the walls a thick, creamy depth and fashioned kitchen cabinets out of the same pitted oak planks they used for the floors.

Michael’s friend and mentor Rose Tarlow believed in them so much that she repeatedly steered plum assignments their way, such as a Malibu beach house for then Disney CEO Michael Eisner and his wife, Jane. A delighted Eisner, in turn, promoted his brand-new design team to Chicago developer Neil Bluhm. “He said, ‘Neil, finding these people at this stage is like finding beachfront property when no one knows the ocean is there,’” recalls Bluhm, who hired the Misczynskis to transform a hulking retreat in Southern California into what Michael describes as “our house on steroids.” “You feel as if you’re in an old house in Provence that’s just so warm and beautiful, very elegant but understated,” says Bluhm of his plaster-walled haven. “In >163

At nap time, a terrace off the kitchen makes the perfect setting for a grown-ups' late lunch. The farmhouse table and chairs are from Axel Vervoordt. Alexandra (opposite) strung up the antique-bell-jar lanterns herself, using hemp cord. "Alex and Michael are full of youthful energy and creativity that is grounded in a great deal of experience," says their client Jane Eisner.





Family-Friendly Fabrics

The arrival of two sons didn't alter the Misczynskis' design aesthetic, especially when it came to selecting fabrics for the interior of their new house. Textiles woven from natural fibers stand up beautifully to kids, and the variety of textures they come in adds sophistication to the pared-down color palette the couple favors. These three rooms, which get regular use from Miles and Henry, are ready for some wear and tear.

Living Room Both the sofa and the love seat are slipcovered in heavy Connemara linen in Shaded White from **Loro Piana** (loropiana.com). "We love the look of upholstery," says Michael, "but slipcovers on the club chairs and sofas make everything feel just a hint looser. Before we have them made, we prewash the fabrics for shrinkage and softness—and kids." Of course, many slipcovers—linen ones, too—can be laundered at home. Pillows are made of two higher-

rics: Kashgar silk-linen blend in Shaded White, and Sherpas cashmere in Vicuña Chest.

Family Room In a space that doubles as a playroom for the boys, red replaces white as the dominant color. Slipcovers for the sofa and the large ottoman are again made of sturdy Connemara linen from Loro Piana (in Cowes, a vermilion); striped linen-blend Rigoletto pillows in Chianti from **Rose Tarlow Melrose House** (*to the trade, rosetarlow.com*) complement them. A hemp rug from **Mansour Modern** (mansourmodern.com) adds another texture when playtime extends to the floor.

Master Bedroom The king-size bed sports a coverlet of Loro Piana's Kashgar silk-linen blend in Cobalto. Silk may sound like a delicate fabric choice, but it's actually quite durable—as long as the kids don't bring snacks with them when they settle in for a visit. The ivory cotton sheeting is by **Muse** (musegroup.com for retailers), and the throw pillows are made from an African textile purchased at the antiques shop **Guinevere**, in London (guinevere.co.uk). When it came to seating, Michael says, "we slipcovered a club chair and ottoman in Dark Indigo Connemara linen [from Loro Piana] to contrast with a French walnut fauteuil upholstered in Pewter linen [from **Holland & Sherry**; hollandandsherry.com]."

ZOE G. SETTLE