

# CALIFORNIA HOMES

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## CONTEMPORARY SPACES

SAN FRANCISCO  
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IN 1982, BETTY AND ALFREDO UMANSKY left Mexico City for California to provide their four children with a better way of life. Being children of immigrants themselves (from Polish and Russian parents who emigrated to Mexico in the 1920s), they knew the importance of establishing a solid foundation for their family. The Umanskys' life in Beverly Hills began in an apartment and segued into an English Tudor house. Though not their dream home, the location was best for their children, scholastically and otherwise.

Fifteen years later, once the nest was empty, Mr. and Mrs. Umansky decided to create the house they had always wanted in the neighborhood they had grown to love. It would be a comfortable place where they could continue their tradition of weekly family dinners, but it would also be elegant and spacious enough to accommodate the art collection they had spent years building. There was no need to even look beyond their own brood to find the perfect intermediary for said creation as their second oldest son was, by now, an accomplished architect.

Leonardo Umansky, an alumnus of Southern California Institute of Architecture who furthered his studies in Japan, began his career working for a contractor. Upon gaining a better understanding of the mechanics of construction, he then became involved in retail design. In 1997, Umansky, with then partner, Ramiro Diaz-Granados, established his own firm, Arxis. A contraction of the words architecture and axis, Arxis refers to the resulting creative product.

**RIGHT:** Shallow and deep ends are defined by a diving wall. Securing the grandchildren's safety is a motorized nylon cover that can either extend across the entire surface of the pool or restrict users from venturing beyond the wading area.



A photograph of a modern, multi-level house at dusk. The house features a curved section with vertical wood slat cladding and a taller section with a dark, textured stone facade. Large glass doors and windows are illuminated from within, showing a dining area with a table and chairs. In the foreground, a swimming pool is lit with blue lights, and a paved patio area with some potted plants is visible.

# MY SON, THE ARCHITECT

ARCHITECT LEONARDO UMANSKY  
CREATES A BEVERLY HILLS HOME FOR TWO VERY  
SPECIAL CLIENTS—HIS PARENTS



ABOVE: From the formal living room one can see through the entry towards the dining room where the elements begin to play with one another. A Craig French sculpture from Laguna Beach's Sherwood Gallery dips in from above as Luna, an integral part of the Umansky's permanent collection, resides on the south wall.

UMANSKY'S PARENTS MAINTAINED that they wanted a Mediterranean style home but all of the images they presented to the architect seemed to be more modern and contemporary. Working closely together over an eight-month period, a traditional floor plan was combined with modern materials and design. Says the younger Umansky, "For this project, a strategy was established based upon fusing two polar aesthetic models. A collage was constructed using a Mondrian composition, which provided the rational and Cartesian, and a free-form sculpture by Mexican artist Leonardo Nierman, which provided the non-Euclidian and the whimsical. An existing rubber tree at the back of the house led to a layout of axes. Similarly, a series of four outdoor bronze sculptures were placed strategically in the yards creating a dialog with special or programmatic events throughout." Less than a year and a half after breaking ground, the dynamic structure was complete.

Inspired by traditional Japanese aesthetics and materials, Umansky's respect for nature is incorporated into every aspect of the property as primary materials of redwood, limestone, oak, and Bouquet Canyon stone are accentuated by both direct and indirect light. The family area's floor to ceiling retractable glass walls can disappear into pockets ultimately creating a seamless transition from interior to exterior. Going so far as to sandblast the reflective film off of a master bath mirror to allow natural light into a dressing area that would otherwise be dark, Umansky made sure that, aside from the wine cellar, there would not be a single room, regardless of how utilitarian, requiring the flip of a switch during daylight hours.



ABOVE: The main staircase smoothly reveals itself amidst sculpted walls and wood accents. Strategically placed sculptures create a dynamic interaction with their environment. The detailed connection of wall, column, and beam lead the eye to the outside. BELOW: A different view of the dining room showcases Umansky's extensive art collection.



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ERMEATING THE HOME is a sense of both permanence and warmth, as if the spirit of the house were as old as the grounds on which it was built. Be it the countless framed photographs commemorating both monumental and incidental life events, the artwork accumulated from all over the world, or even the antique Mexican modern coffee service received as a wedding gift years back, everything represents the past, present and future. In essence, it's all about the people Leonardo, his wife Eden, and their son Oa break bread with every Tuesday night. It's about family. When asked what they love most about this house, the designer's parents unanimously replied "Everything!" But, *entre nous*, perhaps they love the architect most of all. ☺

UPPER LEFT: As if in a Mediterranean villa, the office window boasts a view resembling narrow streets curving within an outdoor corridor. LOWER LEFT: Fanciful food sculptures parlay the Umanskys' warm spirit and sense of whimsy as the kitchen, large enough to play host to numerous guests, maintains a sense of intimacy. RIGHT PAGE: The bar, which separates the formal living room from the family room, is flanked by two eight-foot pivoting doors. When the doors are closed, each space is clearly defined. When open, a large gathering space is created.



to construct pergolas, punctuated by open pavilions, around the swimming pool and what would become the tennis court, turning them into outdoor rooms.

To balance these extensions, the architects built up the south façade of the house, remodeling the pediment to give it more authority, restoring the graceful south loggia—which the previous owner had enclosed—and extending the double staircase down to the garden. The west loggia was also reopened to create a secondary axis from house to pool. This generated a pair of breezy outdoor rooms that are linked by the



“Our goal was to bring the interior up to the quality of the exterior,” says Young. **LEFT:** The “low, pedestrian” living room was stripped to its bones. **BELOW:** “We heightened it several feet by creating an inset barrel vault.” The Art Déco club chairs, desk and desk chair are all by Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann.

