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With
Brad Pitt

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Brad Pitt shows off his finally finished Hollywood Hills compound and reveals that his

"I go crazy if a corner doesn't meet right," says Pitt, posing in the 1950s studio he connected to a 1910-era stone house. Opposite: A 1934 Zig-Zag chair by G.T. Rietveld slides out of a custom-built wall unit.



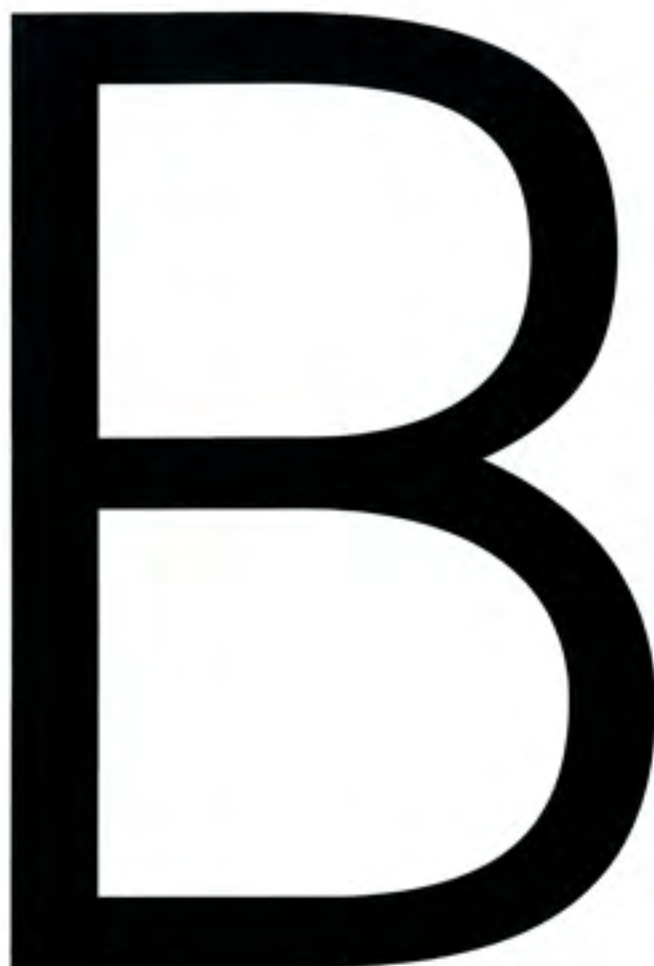
HOUSE OF BRAD

real turn-ons—aside from Jennifer—range from Gustav Stickley to Frank Gehry. **By James Reginato**

PHOTOS BY MARTYN THOMPSON



In its unfolded state, a light-box table descends from the wall, while the Piet Mondrian chair pulls out. Overhead, mica panels light the room and extend outside, far right.

B

rad Pitt is kicking back on the deck of his Hollywood Hills house, smoking a cigarette and recalling, in a devilish tone, a recent experience that was "just about as much fun as I've ever had," one that left him "salivating."

It was a visit to the office of Frank Gehry. This summer, when every other celebrity or VIP was busy wrangling tickets to a Madonna performance, Pitt pulled his strings to see the superarchitect, not the superstar.

"The perks for me aren't good tables or concert seats," he explains. "For me, it's getting to meet Gehry. It was just a thrill for me to see the working of his operation. Right now, Gehry's the voice, the pioneer. He's completely reinventing construction." As for the part that really got Pitt's juices flowing, it was the new materials department—tita-

nium foil, specially treated glass, etc. Marvels the heartthrob: "I got to see where it's all going."

Calling from his Santa Monica office, Gehry confirms Pitt's passion for the subject. "He's in love with architecture," Gehry says. "He was like a kid in a candy store. He had a gleam in his eye—and those eyes are pretty gleamy." But Pitt is not just a pretty face, the architect notes: "He's done his homework. He was very well informed."

Gehry adds with some amusement that the strings Pitt pulled weren't all that high-placed—the meeting was arranged through a mutual acquaintance at Gold's Gym, where the architect works out. According to Gehry, Pitt made a few indirect overtures through the friend. "He was rather timid about it," Gehry says. "Finally I told my friend, 'Just have him call me.'"

Pitt's design expertise is evident in these photographs of his Hollywood Hills house. The place is actually made up of two buildings that Pitt connected: a modest 1910-era stone house and a 1950s studio structure. Both were originally outbuildings to a rambling Craftsman-style main house on the estate. Pitt began reassembling the whole property in the mid-Nineties. His first thought was to quickly "fluff up" the smaller buildings before he tackled the big house, but he soon found himself captivated by the potential of the smaller buildings and the opportunities they gave him to experiment. In the end, he labored on them for more than three years. The most intensive period was during the yearlong hiatus he took after wrapping *Fight Club* in early 1999. "I had taken films kind of as far as I wanted to at that point, and I wanted to take some time off," he notes.

But Pitt didn't do it all alone. He enjoyed a happy relationship with what he refers to as "a collective" of talent. First among them was designer Kevin Haley, a former actor who has in just a few years built one of the most enviable client lists in town (Meg Ryan, Leonardo DiCaprio, Winona Ryder and Cameron Diaz included). Haley, whom Pitt describes as "invaluable," found the collaborative nature of the





In the kitchen of the stone house, designer Kevin Haley re-created the stone walls—original to other areas of the house—and laid a floor of antique French limestone. The large oak table, circa 1900, is from the Roycroft House.



job—along with Pitt's enthusiasm—inspiring. "He loves it so much it makes you want to do your best," says the designer. Other members of this collective included landscape architect Jay Griffith, Graft (a firm of young German-born architects) and Mike Cross, a colorful Irishman (formerly of Fort Hill Construction) whom Pitt describes as the best contractor in California, if not the world. Pitt says the group functioned very much in the spirit of the Bauhaus: "We were always trading ideas off each other and discussing things."

It was Haley, Pitt says, who provided the initial direction for the stone house, when he removed the interior paneling and found the living room lined with a warm mineral called howlite. The designer suggested a way to restore and enhance the stone, using a mortar similar to that found in Provence. Pitt liked the results so much he wanted to use it throughout the house. Unfortunately, the mine from which the howlite had been extracted had been closed years ago. Here, again, Pitt utilized his star power: The owner of the mine opened it up in exchange for an autograph for his daughter. "There is a soul to stone," Pitt says. "I truly believe there is a vibration to it."

And stone is by far the actor's favorite building material. He imported untold quantities of travertine marble from a mine outside Rome for other areas of the house, particularly the master bathroom. The bathtub was carved by hand by artist Jackie Del Forso from a 13-ton slab. Now shaped something like a dinosaur egg sliced open, it weighs about six tons.

The tub is just one highlight in what has to be the coolest bathroom in town. Just about everything is made of travertine, from the



Above: Hand-carved pagodas in the garden, designed by Jay Griffith. Right from top: In Pitt's bedroom, sliding stained-glass panels reveal the ground-level garden; fiber-optics light the garage, which doubles as a party room.



“My main thing here was a quest for harmony,” says Pitt. “Where this place really



Pitt, visible through the translucent glass wall of the studio bathroom, has a superb collection of 20th-century furniture. Chairs by Arne Jacobsen, circa 1960, furnish the library.

wins is in the soul, the feeling of being in it. I feel like there is music in this place."





Pitt took a special interest in the master bathroom, which features a tub carved by artist Jackie Del Fonso from a 13-ton slab of travertine. Aside from the custom-cast bronze fixtures, the entire room is made of the same stone. The whole room is also a shower basin: Instead of a showerheads water falls from a "rainhead" in the ceiling. Meanwhile, a sheet of water cascades down the wall.

walls (in huge, four-by-eight-foot sections) to the toilet. The whole room serves as a shower basin: Water pours from a "rainhead" in the ceiling (no showerhead here); the tub overflows onto the floor; and a glistening sheet of water falls down the length of one wall. The only items not made of travertine are the cast-bronze fixtures and the moonlike alabaster globe lamp on the ceiling. Custom-made by New York artisan Mike Adams—who did all the lighting in the house—the lamp can glow a variety of colors thanks to its fiber-optic light source.

Building the room was a herculean feat. To bring the tub in, a crew literally followed procedures used to build the pyramids. Since using a crane would have meant removing trees outside, a crew of 10 men brought the item in on a system of rolling pipes. But Pitt says the undertaking was well worth the effort, particularly because of the timing. "The bathroom was the first thing in the house I worked on at the time when Jen and I were really hooking up strong," he says, referring, of course, to his wife, Jennifer Aniston. "Things come out of those times in your life. Things are on your mind...and I guess I had a dirty mind at the time."

"It is a bit hedonistic in there. It is a sexy room." After a moment's pause he adds, "It works."

One of Pitt's other favorite rooms in the house is the stark white plaster-walled garage, which also functions as a party room. Multi-hued fiber-optic lights help set the mood of choice. "They look like some wild nuclear energy source," he says. "It's total playtime here."

Achieving a cohesive flow between the modernish studio and the more timeless stone house was a challenge. "It looks simple, but it's very, very complicated," Pitt says. "What I'm proudest of is the harmony of materials—the way steel meets plaster meets



An orange faux-fur throw covers Pitt's bed. Another view of the master bathroom, below, looking into the garden.

wood. It's flawless." It had better be. "I go crazy if a corner doesn't meet right," he admits. For his part, Haley helped to unify the two buildings by using similar textures and colors in both.

A central feature of the studio is an ingenious "toolbox" wall, from which a light box and rare 1934 Zig-Zag chair by Rietveld slide out. The piece was designed by a group of German-born graduates of Southern California Institute of Architecture (Graft, their firm, now has offices in Los Angeles and Berlin). Overhead, light comes from mica panels, which at night glow tomato red—a color Pitt says he was "jonesing on" at the time of construction.

The studio's bathroom is completely different from the one in the main house. Composed almost entirely of glass, it affords little privacy. Even though the glass walls are treated with a thin translucent film, one can see well enough through them. "It's all family and friends here," Pitt explains. "Nobody is embarrassed—or impressed."

The renovation process mirrored Pitt's "working through" the last century of design, beginning with his interest in the Craftsman school. "Ever since I've been making a little money, it's what I've been following," the actor says, referring to his superb collection of furniture and Tiffany lamps.

Intellectually, Pitt says he was attracted first to the Arts and Crafts style because of "its elegance and simplicity." But he finds himself becoming more and more contemporary. "As I work my way through it, I have become a lover of all architecture," he says. "I am fascinated and obsessed with where it's going. Like art and music, architecture reflects society and where society is heading." Besides Gehry, Pitt says he has "flipped" for Tadao Ando and Rem Koolhaas.

Whether working in vernacular or contemporary styles, however, Pitt says the goal is the same. "My main thing here was a quest for harmony," he explains. He feels he has succeeded. "Where this place really wins is the soul, the feeling of being in it," he says. "I feel like there is music in this place. I see the charts, I hear the notes."

Pitt even describes his design work as being "more creatively fulfilling" to him than his acting. "In films, it's not your voice, it's the director's medium," he says. "I here, you can get your voice in every medium. I get off on that." Not that





The mica panels, as well as all the lighting in the house, were designed by New York artisan Mike Adams, of Aurora Studios. Graft, a Los Angeles- and Berlin-based firm of young architects, designed the built-in units in the studio.



Left: The see-through bathroom in the studio. Below: The living room in the stone house. Haley custom-designed much of the furniture. The room is also decorated with Pitt and Aniston's guitars, including one autographed to Aniston by Melissa Etheridge.

he's ready to retire any time soon. He has two big releases this fall: *Spy Game*, a thriller directed by Tony Scott in which he stars opposite Robert Redford, out November 21, and *Ocean's Eleven*, Steven Soderbergh's all-star (George Clooney, Julia Roberts, Matt Damon) remake of the Rat Pack classic, arriving December 7.

Pitt is not designing for one anymore. But his wife "definitely has a love" for design, too, he says. Indeed, Aniston was supportive enough to give him a surprise weekend stay at a private Greene and Greene-designed house for his birthday last year. But it appears their tastes diverge somewhat. As has been widely reported, the couple recently purchased a six-bedroom \$13 million Beverly Hills house that's said to resemble a French chateau. When pressed, Pitt admits his wife may have slightly different ideas about decoration. "She has an—uh—more matronly take on it," he says gingerly.

However the new residence turns out, Pitt says he will "absolutely" keep this property. In addition to serving as a place for his meetings, it will be the couple's art studio. "We love to work with clay, draw, carve pumpkins here," he says. It's also a great party house. "It's a place made for late nights, fires, drinks, friends."

Of course, it's not like this couple has to choose between only two houses. They have lots of real estate between them—and more being added all the time. Pitt reveals he is already "working on a great project up the coast." The actor has acquired "a bunch of little hippie shacks," which he says are "kind of like a commune."

"This one is about keeping it really cheap and using all prefab materials," he explains. (His main supplier, he jokes, is the store he nicknames "Home Cheapo.") "We're seeing what you can come up with under those restraints." Mind you, according to sources, this project is set on a stunning plot of land—15 of central California's most glorious coastal acres.

Following that project, Pitt has more plans. "I want to start building something from the ground up," he says.

Which may be one reason Gehry says he is eager for a return visit from the star. "I hope he comes back—he's welcome," says the architect.

Gehry adds that he would rather have Pitt as a client than as competition. Given the actor's enthusiasm, who knows? "I was worried for a moment," says Gehry, "that he was going to change professions." ●



