



MASTERING MINIMALISM

The interwoven collaboration between an artist and architect yields a soft, contemporary dwelling.

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Architecture: Anthony Laney, Laney LA Interior Design: Anthony Laney, Laney LA, and Peir Serota, Humble Home & Decor
Home Builder: Robert Crockett, Jeff Wilson Construction





Architect Anthony Laney centered the atrium of a Manhattan Beach home around a brachychiton tree sourced from The Tropics and installed by the supplier working with Jones Landscapes. "We were striving for a warm feel with natural materials and a subdued palette of pale grays, tans, bone and white," notes Laney. The entry door is by Fleetwood Windows & Doors.

It all started with a tree. The graceful live specimen silhouetted within a Japanese home Peir Serota spotted in a magazine stuck with her. Presented with the chance of building a house from scratch for her husband, Jeff, and two children in Manhattan Beach, she immediately handed the worn clipping to architect Anthony Laney. "I told him, 'If it can be done, you're going to design something around a tree—that's a priority,'" Serota recalls with a laugh.

Laney, the adventurous principal of a fast-growing Hermosa Beach firm, takes an all-encompassing view of his projects, handling not just the architecture but often the interiors and landscaping. He fulfilled Serota's wish, placing a 16-foot Australian brachychiton tree—now fondly nicknamed "Brachy"—smack-dab in the middle of the atrium-style entry. It engages visitors the instant they step inside and causes comic double takes from passersby outside too. While undeniably visually arresting, it's also an organizing element of the home's layout, providing context for the central double-height space and acting as the pivot point for the primary living areas. And it's only the first in a series of bold choices that Laney and Serota undertook to create this striking contemporary home.

A former art educator and trained ceramicist with a keen interest in design and architecture, Serota dove into the design process with unusual intensity. She enrolled in an interior design course at Otis College of Art and Design to prepare, and ultimately launched her own interior design firm. "We searched for seven years for the right home, and I consider this my biggest life's work besides raising my children," she says. "I wanted it to be an expression of us, not anyone else. I thought it was important to be educated and not go into it blindly." As a result, she and Laney shared a creative partnership that transcended typical client-architect relationships, and she developed a tight friendship with Robert Crockett, who served as the general contractor's project manager. "We were the architects in every sense, but Peir—this incredibly engaged, well-traveled, design-schooled artist—was the primary driver of the palette and interior design, plus sourced and purchased all the materials," says Laney. "This home turned out the way it did because of her vision and exceptionally good taste."

Opting for a reverse floor plan for the structure—poised in the coveted Hill Section of Manhattan Beach—the team positioned the main living spaces upstairs to take advantage of the lot's sight lines out to the Pacific. To Serota, this seemed like common sense: Why waste great second-story views on bedrooms primarily used to sleep? A similar principle came into play with the sheer number of glass walls, windows, doors and skylights used: Why take anything less than full advantage of SoCal's abundant natural light? "We always held the conviction that the home deserved a soaring roof with deep cantilevers as well as a lot of natural light. The pocketing walls were the minor supporting element that helped us accomplish this," Laney explains.

The roof commands attention in itself. Dramatically cantilevered eaves and oversize decks ring the upper level, with fully retractable doors extending the social spaces seamlessly outdoors—a key component of Serota's desire to welcome in light and air. On the ground floor, the secondary living room's floor-to-ceiling glass doors pull a similar disappearing act, creating an unimpeded flow to a central courtyard entertaining space, sports court and pool. Laney labored to make every inch count with custom furnishings, shelving sized to display curios from the family's travels and even a fully kitted out ceramics studio.

Meticulously selected materials in a subtle, sophisticated yet earthy palette of bone, clay, linen, oatmeal and mushroom unite the home's various elements and speak to Serota's affinity for Belgian designer Axel Vervoordt's minimalist aesthetic and visual romanticism. "The simplicity of a minimalist design is peaceful and helps me stay centered," she says. Under her eye, repeated use of Bulgarian limestone, bleached hemlock, and white-oak floors nod to the variant tones found in the pottery she makes. "Peir was very disciplined about allowing the same material to be used in multiple places in different ways so that the whole space seems like it's carved from one mold," says Laney. "The effect is tranquil, calming and harmonious, without going too muted or monochrome." Adds Serota, "The intention in the design of our home was for it to be eternally contemporary, which is very Vervoordt. I want it to be relevant today, in 10 years, in 20 years. I think we achieved that." ■



Laney teamed with homeowner Peir Serota on the abode's interiors. Placed on a carpet from Exquisite Rugs, a Philippe Malouin for Resident coffee table from A+R centers the great room's custom sectional, covered in Chivasso fabric, and a Four Hands swivel chair from HD Buttercup. The fiber artwork is by Alejandra Aristizábal. A pocketing Sky-Frame door opens to a terrace.



Right: The family's cat, Bug, sits by the dining area's faux fireplace, which was inspired by an Axel Vervoordt design at The Greenwich Hotel. Nearby, a custom 96-inch square table and chairs by Klein Agency provide seating for up to 14 people. Abstract artwork by Melissa Herrington adds a pop of color.

Opposite: A Light & Green fixture shines on the Caesarstone-topped kitchen island. Because the space offers some of the best views in the house, the Form & Refine stools are popular seats. Emtek hardware accents the StyleLite cabinetry from Design Support. On the backsplash is Silestone from RioStones. The Thermador range is from Ferguson.





Right: Stone Source supplied the Cromie Polvere flooring and the limestone on the wall behind the Aquatica tub in the main bath. Sliding doors adjacent to the tub lead to a bridge that directly connects with Serota's ceramics studio. A ceramic, fiber and hemp artwork by Adriann Leigh hangs from a peg on the wall.

Opposite: In the main suite, Portola Paints and Glazes' Elephant serves as a soothing backdrop for the Croft House bed—dressed in Parachute linens—and night table. Hanging nearby is an airy fixture by Graypants. An Armadillo & Co. rug covers the European white-oak flooring from Finishes.





Above: Dubbed the "pool room," this ground-floor space functions as the home's main entertaining area. On the bar, the striking Antolini Tech gray porcelain runs as a counter-to-ceiling slab. Lining the shelves are entertaining basics as well as items collected from the homeowners' travels. The chairs are from HD Buttercup.

Opposite: A courtyard seating area makes for a comfortable, central spot for relaxation and entertaining. The sectional sofa by Harbour with cushions in a Perennials fabric abuts a Lumacast fire feature. A mix of stucco, glass and Bulgarian limestone from Thompson Building Materials defines the exterior materials palette. Laney and his team designed the landscape in collaboration with Jones Landscape.

