



Country Manor Overhaul

Architect Richard Manion remodels a 1930s English country house in Holmby Hills, CA.

PROJECT: Private Residence,
Los Angeles, CA

ARCHITECT: Richard Manion
Architecture Inc., Los Angeles,
CA; Richard M. Manion, AIA,
principal

When Los Angeles architect Richard Manion met with his new client to discuss renovating a 1930s English country manor once owned by Louis B. Mayer's granddaughter, he saw great potential. "The original scope of work was to create a modest addition and remove an ill-conceived porte cochère that had been added mid-century," he says. But once Manion began looking at the old house, he realized that it needed much more. "My client, who is an arts patron, has a wonderful eye – she understood the house could become more stylistically cohesive," he adds. "Other additions that had been tacked on over the years did not enhance the house." Manion wanted to bring back the home's graceful 1930s style while updating the interiors for 21st-century living.

Manion has made his career out of coaxing old genteel houses back to life. About 40 percent of his work today is focused on renovations. A Columbia University graduate, Manion studied American and European architectural history under noted historians Howard Hibbard and Joseph Connors. He started his career in New York in the offices of two of the country's most prominent architectural firms – Robert A.M. Stern and Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown. He is a member of the American Institute of Architects, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Los Angeles Conservancy and the Institute of Classical Architecture & Classical America.

Richard Manion realised the full potential of a 1930s English country manor in Los Angeles, CA, with a renovation that blends old and new spaces and accommodates the client's modern lifestyle. *All photos: Erhard Pfeiffer*

Right: The intimate entry hall features a new stair and decorative inlay floor.

Below right: Manion designed all the moldings and cabinetry in the house, including those in the family room.

Manion begins his projects by researching what aesthetic might have existed regionally. “In the 1930s, many of the houses emulated designs from the East Coast as more people moved West,” he notes. “We wanted to keep the feeling in the house as intimate as possible – to keep the 1930s scale of the rooms.” Since there was no record of the original architect or original architectural drawings, Manion focused on a loose, modern interpretation of the work of C. F. A. Voysey, Wilson Eyre and other contemporaries adapted to Los Angeles.

“The design really evolved out of necessity,” notes Manion. The homeowner wanted to remodel to accommodate family members and guests. “We wanted the old and new spaces to blend together,” he continues. “The house was well kept over the years but did have some structural problems – we ultimately took the house down to the studs.”

To create new living areas and master suite baths, Manion enlarged the house considerably – 6,400 to 10,300 sq.ft. The end of the main axis of the house turned on an awkward angle so he took off a whole wing to configure a straight axis through the house. “In an older house, there are problems with the original design of the dining room, kitchen and service wings,” says Manion, who always creates opportunities out of problems. “These spaces are not suited for modern-day living. There were problematic step-ups in the kitchen and service areas – we were able to raise ceilings and lower floors in the remodeling process. We rebuilt entire wings and updated electrical and plumbing for today’s standards. The house also has all new windows and doors, which helped tremendously with climate control. You never know what surprises you might find in an old house once you open up the walls.”

To create a focal point for the front entrance, Manion removed the porte cochère and designed a new gabled façade that announces the entry. This is where the house gets its name – The Gables. Manion had no evidence of the original façade so he created a look in keeping with the 1930s period.

Upon entering the foyer, the house begins to unfold. “We didn’t enlarge the foyer – we wanted to keep it intimate,” says Manion. The original stair detailing was too heavy for the small reception area, so the architect designed a new stair in the same location. The original floors were uninspired 2-in. strip oak, so Manion designed a decorative inlay floor for the space to add interest. The window on the stair landing received interior paneling to help articulate the space and create more of a focal point. Manion also designed all the moldings and cabinetry in the house. For instance, the dining room panels conceal secret storage compartments, in keeping with original precedents. “We did replace all the hardware as well, which was too





Above: Manion expanded the house from 6,400 to 10,300 sq.ft.; the new wing includes his and hers bathrooms.

Left: The expanded kitchen is accessed via a new service entrance and hall and overlooks the pool. Bright new cabinetry updates the space.

diminutive,” he says. Manion chose a more substantial design from Baldwin Hardware of Reading, PA.

The new wing overlooks the existing pool and includes the family room on the first floor and his and hers bathrooms, walk-in closets and a study for the master suite on the second floor. “We raised the ceiling in the existing master bedroom and created a new fireplace mantel,” says Manion. “We also added a small balcony off the master bedroom, an

exercise alcove and office. The space is very private and the homeowner can come here and work in the study or use the elliptical.”

For kitchen access, Manion created a service entrance and hall. He expanded the kitchen to add a large conservatory/bay window for a breakfast area, which overlooks the pool. The windows flood the space with light and create a welcoming place for morning coffee. In the 1930s, this kitchen would only have been used by servants.



The dining room features concealed secret storage compartments and new hardware by Baldwin Hardware of Reading, PA.



Left: French doors from the new family wing to the pool and a rebuilt pergola blend the interior with the outdoors.

Handsome cabinetry that resembles furniture updates the space for modern use and it is now bright and cheery.

California living is very much based on the outdoors, and Manion worked to blend the interiors and exteriors whenever he could. French doors from the new family wing lead to the pool. A substantial pergola in poor condition was rebuilt to offer a shady terrace along the original main structure. Off the living room, sets of French doors lead to a terrace. Manion created a fountain and curved stair off the terrace that leads down to a gently sloped lawn. The chimneys were white washed to give them a soft patina. “Upon approach to the house, this is the first view you see,” Manion notes.

When asked about his client, the architect says, “She is a wonderful client and really embraced the evolution of the old house. She understood the value of expanding the program – and the challenge of how to make the design fantastic.” In the case of this remodel, Manion meets his design challenge by creating a graceful and inviting English country abode. – *Nancy E. Berry*



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