

Furnishings warm modern house

Gloria Swanson's granddaughter fills home with tradition, comfort

BY BARBARA THORNBURG

LOS ANGELES — Although Brooke Anderson was brought up in a modern milieu, she credits her famous "Grams," actress Gloria Swanson, for imbuing her with a love for the traditional.

As a young woman, Anderson frequently visited her grandmother's stylish apartment across from Central Park in New York.

"It was formal but very comfortable and filled with beautiful antiques with tons of books everywhere," Anderson recalls, adding that her grandmother always wanted to be an opera singer. "She had a baby grand piano in the living room where she would play and sing."

Today that green baby grand has a place of honour in Anderson's new Los Angeles home, a 1938 classic designed by Gregory Ain. Even though she fancies traditional, Anderson also is an ardent fan of modern architecture. The former gerontologist turned writer grew up in a 1950 redwood, steel and glass home designed by Los Angeles architects John Rex and Douglas Honnold and landscaped by Garrett Eckbo. The state-of-the-art residence, published in *Arts & Architecture* magazine's June 1956 issue, featured built-in furnishings, radiant floor heat and stainless-steel cabinets.

"I loved the sense of proportion and light in my parents' home. It was beautiful but cold," Anderson says. "I knew that if I was fortunate to have a modern home one day, I would fill it with friendly furnishings. I love modern architecture, but I love my comfort too."

Ain, a second-generation modernist architect, created Anderson's split-level home for pharmacist A.O. Beckman and his wife and two daughters. According to Anthony Denzer, assistant professor of architectural engineering at the University of Wyoming and author of *Gregory Ain: The Modern Home as Social Commentary*, to be published by Rizzoli in September, "it was not typical of Ain's pre-war houses."

Ain is perhaps best known for bringing cost-efficient, modern homes to the working classes. He



A spacious music room with a new cork floor was converted from children's bedrooms in Brooke Anderson's home. The baby grand piano belonged to her grandmother, Gloria Swanson.



Brooke Anderson's Los Angeles living room is an array of traditional furnishings in a modern setting.



Brooke Anderson in front of a photo of Gloria Swanson.

is also often credited as being one of the first architects to design a house that did not contemplate servants.

From the front door, Ain created direct access to the functional realms of the home — zones for sleeping, leisure and work. He placed the maid's quarters in the work realm next to the kitchen and laundry room. An office with its own entrance faces the street in the front wing of the house; children's bedrooms are down the hall. The dining room and kitchen, along with a glass-enclosed living room and upstairs private master bedroom, overlook the back yard.

Designed in a pinwheel shape,

the house ingeniously allows gardens on three sides. Bands of clerestory and large fixed windows offer garden views from every room and flood the home with natural light.

Anderson bought the mid-century gem six years ago. Out on a neighborhood walk from her Georgian-style home, she fell in love with the modest house nestled along a sycamore-lined street.

"They had an open house every weekend, and after six months of walking by," she says, "I finally bought it." She made small changes but lived for nearly three years in the home before calling in a friend, interior designer Joe Nye, to help with a

serious renovation.

"We wanted to be as true as possible to the modern home, but of equal importance was to make it comfortable," Nye says. "Comfort in a modern home seems like an oxymoron. Modern homes back then were all about effect — how did it look rather than how did it feel? — but it doesn't have to be that way."

Anderson's 2,100-square-foot residence feels comfortable indeed — as well as modern. Filled with an eclectic mix of traditional and modern furnishings, and with a peppering of memorabilia from her famous grandmother, the well-edited furnishings reflect a modern aesthetic.



Original mid-century patio chairs complement the pool-side area.



The rear of Brooke Anderson's home overlooks the pool. The house is designed around a pinwheel-shaped plan.

A down-filled sofa and club chairs sit atop original dark-stained oak floors in the living room. Nearby a pair of red Chinoiserie chests that once sat on top of each other in Swanson's apartment now serve as coffee tables — colorful exclamation points in a room awash in cream and ivory hues.

A Regency dining table, its warm mahogany surface polished to a mirror-finish, is at the end of the room. It doubles as a console and, when pulled out into the room, a more formal dining table. Upstairs in the plush wall-to-wall carpeted master bedroom, a cushy chaise longue in the corner of the room beckons.

"It's my favorite place to curl up and read," Anderson says.

Downstairs, Anderson's everyday dining is done at a contemporary, white-laminated table in Ain's open-plan kitchen. Nye

gave it to Anderson as a gift, then surrounded it with her vintage Chippendale chairs.

"I think beautiful old pieces against a modern setting make them more exquisite," Nye says. "It creates a much more interesting chemistry, don't you think?"

But just what would the mid-century great, who believed in architecture's potential to shape a more egalitarian world, say of this home, appointed with antiques, down-filled sofas and spa-steam showers?

"It's true Ain designed for the working classes and was more concerned about economy than comfort," Denzer says, "but Ain was not possessive about his work. It belonged to the people, and he understood that people would inevitably make changes."

Los Angeles Times

Eclectic design style gives custom-built home wow factor

A decade's worth of ideas included

BY KATHY MCCORMICK

It has what they call a "Starbucks" ceiling downstairs. Huge aluminum I-beams hold up the top of the peaked, 18-foot ceilings over the kitchen. A mesh wire railing leads to the stairs to the lower level. Brick is on an inside wall. Barn-style doors lead to the cosy TV room. Furniture is from numerous retailers, including Liquidation World. The striking entry feature is a giant concrete face meant for an outside garden.

"The great thing about this house is that the owner [55-year-old Johanna Thompson, along with her husband Dave, 57] did what she wanted," says Kelvin Choy, president of Matisse Homes, who built the home on an acreage northwest of Calgary. "She didn't care what others thought."

Indeed, says Johanna, "everybody thought I was crazy when I told them what would be in the home." But it works — and works grandly.

The 2,280-square-foot bungalow (with the lower level also developed) is a warm, contemporary home filled with interest, drama and cosy intimacy. It definitely has the wow factor.

The enthusiastic homeowner has been carrying around a well-thumbed copy of a June 1994 *Life*

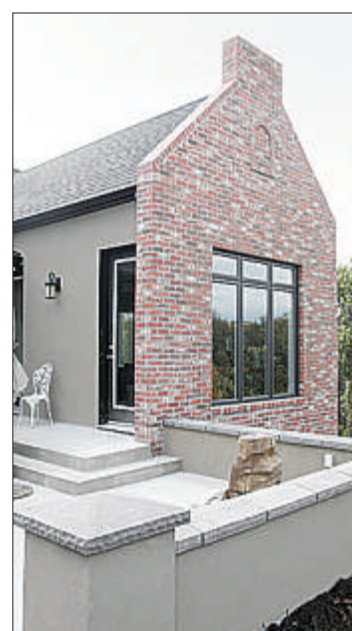
magazine for more than a dozen years, honing her dream.

In it, renowned architect Robert Stern designed a "dream" house — one that was "classic on the outside and remarkable on the inside — and affordable." The home, the magazine claimed, "can be adapted to suit your family and can be built anywhere you want." Little did the writer know that, indeed, it could be — 14 years later on an acreage in Bears paw, Alta., 25 kilometres outside Calgary.

"I like the floor plan," says Johanna about the magazine's dream home. "It's pretty practical and it's a house that works for us." The original certainly wasn't this modern, says Dave. "But the structure of the home is pretty similar, other than some additions." The floor plan of the *Life* magazine model was about 1,400 square feet, and it was a two-storey house.

"I wanted a bungalow," says Johanna. "This home is one we can live in in our old age, when we are not able to go up and down stairs." Just one bedroom is on the main floor, but it's a good-sized master suite with a big walk-in closet and full ensuite.

While the bones of the home design came from the *Life* magazine, "there were 15 other refer-



The house overlooks a forest in the community of Bears paw.



Dave and Johanna Thompson.

ences that were handed to the designer and he was told to 'work this in,'" says Dave with a laugh.

Johanna did her homework and knew what she wanted.

Once the imagination played out, then it was up to the designer to make the plan work and the builder to figure out how to build it.

Not an easy task, but a delightful one, says Choy, who has been building custom homes on

acres and infill lots in the inner city since 2004.

"I love doing anything out of the ordinary," he says. "This is one of my favourite homes I've ever done." Not without challenges, though.

The I-beams soaring to the top of the peaked ceiling in the kitchen are one example. Truly the focal point of the whole house, they're dramatic and eye-catching, packing a punch no matter which direction you look. But they weren't easy to put in.

The same stained aluminum beams are used to frame the floor-to-ceiling fireplace surround in the great room.

The "barn" doors are 114 kilograms so they too needed special metal tracks to allow them to slide open and still hold that weight.

Canwest News Service



PHOTOS BY CHRISTINA RYAN/CNS

The kitchen's open design features aluminum girders.



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