



Wild Side

A prime Pacific Palisades property with a storied Hollywood past gets a designer-scripted sequel.

By Andrew Myers
Photography by Jennifer Cawley

"There's no place like home" might be too parochial a mantra for designer-developer-homeowner Meryl Georgi, who's far worldlier and more sophisticated than even the most over-the-rainbow, thoroughly modern Dorothy. Nevertheless, there is a fairy-tale aspect in her return to Wildtree, the house she shares with her two preteen boys in Pacific Palisades.

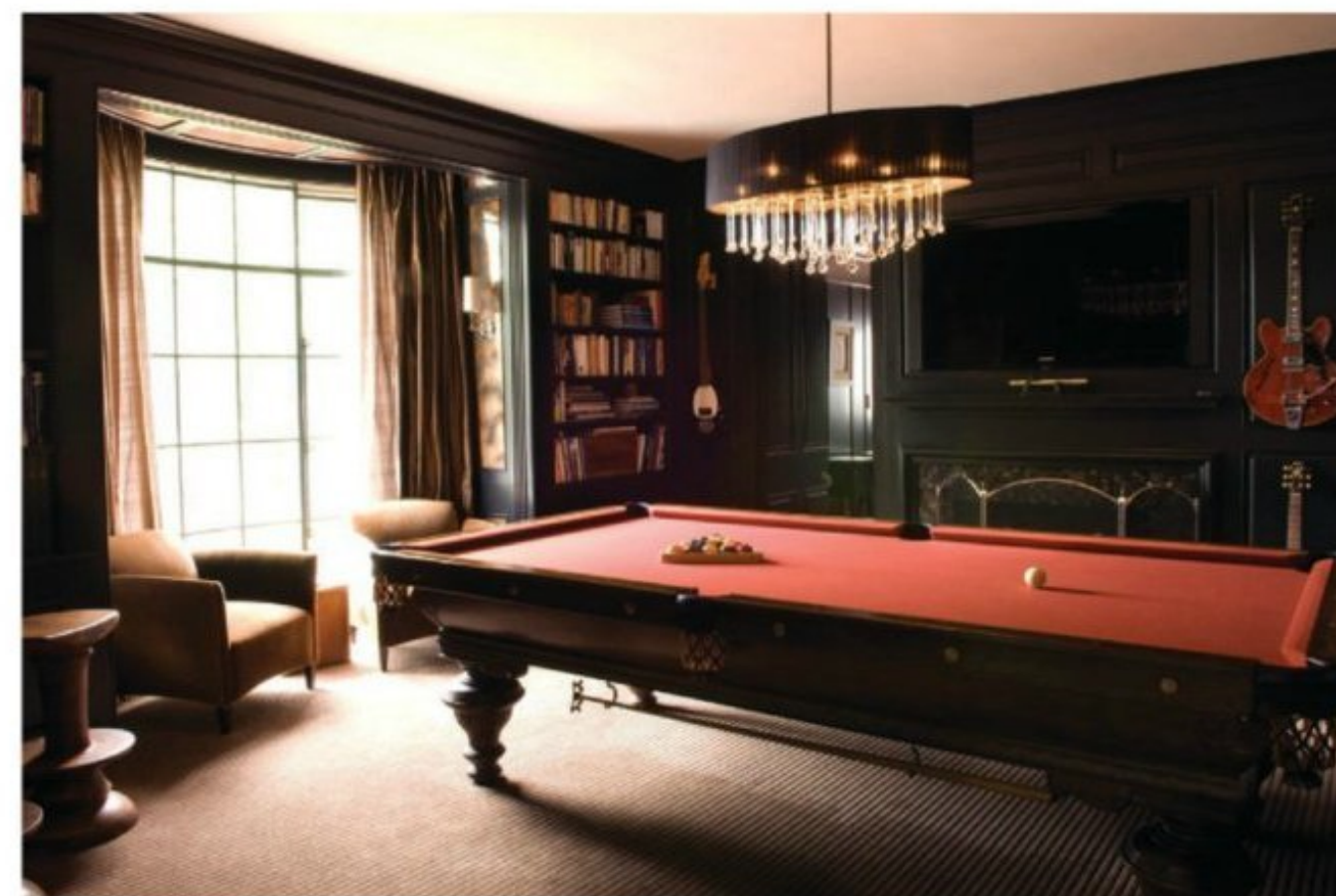
"Return" is the operative word, because before moving to Los Angeles nearly seven years ago, she had never heard of Wildtree. The founder of Anymatic, a company that specializes in customized printed activewear, and which counts Yogamatic (the maker of custom and limited-edition exercise mats, which Oprah went loose and limber over on her show last year) under its purview, Georgi grew up in Bucks County, Pa., and had most recently lived 12 years in London.

Upon arrival in SoCal, she had intended to build a modern house with an ocean overlook in the Palisades. In fact, she had even purchased a property, commissioned an architect and had plans in hand. But apparently these plans were not part of The Plan. After comparing construction costs to the overall investment, Georgi decided to compare similarly valued properties in the neighborhood.

GREEN DAY Homeowner Meryl Georgi kicks back in the sunroom of her Pacific Palisades home. Randy Powers' Star Lantern, purchased through Circa Lighting, hangs above a pair of Fendi sofas.



HOOKED ON CLASSIC
From top: Georgi maintained the home's exterior but added zinc shrouds to all seven of the home's chimneys. The library was converted into a billiards room. A Pendant light from Interior Illusions hangs above. Left: Many of the home's original features were restored, including wood paneling in the living room, where an Interior Illusions sofa rests on a rug by Fort Street Studios.



Enter Wildtree. Designed by architect Herbert Riesenbergs, the house was built by film actress Virginia Bruce in 1938, the manifestation of Bruce's desire to give herself and her family a bucolic escape—or to quote Bruce's own words in a February 1940 article from *House and Garden*, which Georgi subsequently discovered, to leave the "big city" of Beverly Hills in favor of a dream house in "the country." Predominantly Georgian

Colonial, the grandeur of its style was tempered to cozy by "a little bit of Cape Cod Colonial sprinkled in," says Georgi. "Everyone comments on that feeling here."

More particular was how the house resonated with Georgi personally. Its architecture reminded her of the elegant, traditional homes she knew as a child in Pennsylvania's picturesque Delaware Valley. Its small, quirky and charming "British pub," with



a hidden staircase to the master suite, evoked her London years. And its ocean view anchored her firmly in Southern California, her newest chapter. “The three major periods of my life combined in one house; it was a perfect fit,” says Georgi, who kept returning to the house after discovering it. “I felt as though I were having an affair with the property and I had to make a choice—which of course I did.”

Less apparent was how the house dovetailed with Georgi’s own family history. “Virginia Bruce starred in the movie *The Garden Murder Case* with my grandfather, Edmund Lowe [best known for *Dinner at Eight*], in 1933,” says Georgi, adding that Bruce’s biography says the two were very good friends. “He was very likely in this house—and often!”

Fairy-tale fate, however, does not a reconception and renovation make—nor does it ensure a happy ending. For this, Georgi turned to project manager Billy Lehman,

founder of Aeries Development (a unique, one-stop, turret-to-toothbrush design and development firm), and his architecture and design partner, Karen Putman. Rounding out the team was contractor Paul Morrow.

Conception to completion was a single year, explains Putman, but “the scope was the usual ‘everything,’ the entire floor plan was remade and the grounds redone,” says the Princeton- and Yale-educated Lehman. Among the changes and additions were what Lehman calls a new and “heavily engineered pool and pool area,” a new lawn created by the pool’s relocation and refurbished koi ponds, all set amid fruit groves, wild ducks, chickens and indoor-outdoor dogs. “Maryl really *lives* in her house,” says Lehman.

Inside, Putman ticks off the multiple spaces—“maid’s quarters, a family room added in the ’70s that incorporated elements of the earlier terrace, like the masonry fireplace and grill”—that were combined

MOODY ROOMS In the kitchen/breakfast area, Georgi reused the top of an antique Belgian dining table as the kitchen island. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: A cast bronze sculpture by Donald Barchler rests at the bottom of the staircase; painted wood artwork from Heidi Keir Designs in Pacific Palisades; the pub area is original to the home and much of the barware was left by the previous owners; antique mirror mosaic tiles from Waterworks in the powder room





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to expand the low-ceilinged original kitchen. Additionally, two master bedrooms, baths and sitting rooms were converted into one master suite comprising a bedroom, a dressing-and-bathing room (replete with a tub in front of the fireplace) for Her, and a dressing-and-bathing room for Him. A small walkway off the kitchen was expanded to make a generous deck, an al-fresco movie screen was added to a second-floor patio, and the library was repurposed to a billiards room.

"My intention of restoring the house was to maintain the language of the architecture inside and out, while updating it for our current style of living, and incorporating our treasures and finds from the last three cities we lived in: London, Paris and New York," says Georgi, explaining how chairs from Paris

flea markets were reupholstered, her erstwhile Belgian library-cum-dining table became the countertop of the kitchen island, and an old church pew became shelving—all intermixed with new midcentury pieces and ones from London inspired by the family's new life in California and the open, breezy feel of the beach.

More decorative details included the paneling, which was kept entirely intact, merely repainted in colors more soothing. Georgi had the bronze hardware plated polished nickel and added many types of glass—antique mirrors, mosaic mirror, silver and bronze leaf mirrors. "It notches up the glam quotient," notes Georgi, to say nothing of the erstwhile coat closet off the living room, which was refashioned as a photo booth: "Modern living!" ■

PERMANENT FIXTURES
Opposite page: The master bedroom bathroom features a Waterworks bathtub and a Fort Street Studio rug designed by Janis Provisor. Above, from left: The original door leads to the pool area; Georgi designed the snug twin-bed alcove. The rocking chair is a family heirloom.