



HOME TOURS

Softness Permeates This Modern Spanish-Style La Jolla Retreat

Author: [Abigail Stone](#) — Photographer: [Shade Degges](#) / December 4, 2025

It all began with the primary suite closet. Perhaps that's an unusual first step for a gut renovation, but what homeowner Deborah Rosen had in mind as she was updating the Spanish-style La Jolla house she shares with her husband was major, notes designer Julie Smith. The resulting boutique-like retreat, which marries an existing closet and a former bedroom, "was the first thing we talked about, and became a jumping-off point," recalls Smith. The home's overall concept continues its luxurious, elegant, sensual vibe.

Fashion led Smith into interior design. She earned a degree in fashion design and business management, worked as a buyer for Saks Fifth Avenue and even designed clothing for big-name brands. Her experience in merchandising informs how she now approaches residential interiors. "I always think, how will this area flow, how will it be utilized? Because number one is functionality, then we make it sexy," she explains. "Rooms can't just be beautiful. They should be workhorses too." With this in mind, Smith modified certain elements of a floor plan established by residential designer Claude-Anthony Marengo, including rejiggering the home's entry to create a distinct hallway ("a pause point," she says), carving out space for a larger stair to connect a second-level office, increasing the size of a laundry room and softening several of the home's harder angles.

Home Details

Architecture:

Claude-Anthony Marengo, [Marengo Morton Architects](#)

Interior Design:

Julie Smith, [Jula Cole Design](#)

Home Builder:

Josh Herbst, [Herbst Construction, Inc.](#)



A copper tile Maya Romanoff wallcovering overlooks the great room's bar, crafted from Antolini onyx counters and fluted terrazzo Ann Sacks tile. The stools are WorkCo. Built-in shelving with a patinated-mirror backing and walnut trim showcases a GalleryL7 sconce.

Embracing the dwelling's curves, an essential part of its Spanish-style architecture, was important to both Smith and Deborah even as the renovation aimed to modernize the 1990s-built residence. The primary bedroom, for instance, features a curved window that "helps the space feel less like a box," the designer observes. The idea of playing up the home's swoops and adding even more rounded shapes in the form of arched doorways, windows and built-ins—all meticulously overseen by general contractor Josh Herbst—quickly turned into a theme.

Another theme centered on making the most of the location's west-facing ocean views. "That's what made my husband and I fall in love with this property," recalls Deborah. "It sits at such a cool vantage point but is a five-minute walk to the beach." Most rooms enjoy vistas, with furnishings oriented toward the horizon, but it's the massive glass sliders in the vast great room—a clean-lined, contemporary space with no room for errors, notes Herbst—that frame the Pacific to perfection. The main living space, 45 feet long with 12-foot ceilings, is unmistakably grand, so Smith took care to mitigate its scale with comfortable furnishings and warm neutrals. Creamy-white paint fills the walls, copper tile wallpaper accents an ivory bar, mixed wood tones add interest, and statement pieces like the dining area's oversize chandelier balance the high ceilings. True to form, curves predominate the designer's selections, from the bend of the sectional to the swoops of the swivel chairs, as well as the rounded edges of the bar and island countertops and the bespoke dining table. Small details, like the paneled refrigerator's sculpture-like asymmetrical pulls, add to an aura of quiet luxury that permeates the room, which flows seamlessly out to a deck and an inviting infinity-edge pool cantilevered off the hillside.

While ocean, treetop and garden views provide much of the home's color naturally, the interior palette contains a few surprises. The owner wasn't afraid of saturated hues, so Smith drenched the media lounge in a deep navy—an atmospheric departure within the residence that feels moody yet refined. Maroon swivel chairs in the great room and the bedroom's chocolate-brown headboard strike similar notes. Limewash adds depth to the primary bedroom and bathroom walls, too, creating a cocoon-like warmth that doesn't rely on bright pigment to feel impactful.

"Every detail feels like it's been attended to," concludes the owner, adding, "I've become nearly codependent on Julie at this point; I'm still asking her advice on little changes." Which the designer is happy to provide. Like that initial closet, the best spaces evolve.



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