

AD

SHONDALAND!
AT HOME IN
LOS ANGELES WITH
TV HITMAKER
SHONDA RHIMES

CITY LIVING
FAMILY STYLE
IN MIAMI, NEW YORK,
LONDON,
AND STOCKHOLM



BLOCKBUSTER

*Michael S. Smith
masterminds
the Los Angeles
home of
TV impresario
Shonda Rhimes,
and the result
is a smash*

TEXT BY **SHONDA RHIMES**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MICHAEL MUNDY**
STYLED BY **LAWREN HOWELL**

SHONDA RHIMES, WEARING A
CHANEL SWEATER, IN THE
KITCHEN OF HER LOS ANGELES
HOME. RALPH LAUREN FOR
VISUAL COMFORT CHANDELIERS;
CALACATTA MARBLE ISLAND; ON
FLOORS, CUSTOM TILE BY NATIVE
TILE & CERAMICS. FASHION
STYLING BY DANA ASHER LEVINE.
FOR DETAILS SEE RESOURCES.



HAIR BY VERNON ANTONIO
MAKEUP BY JULIA JOYONE



off-kilter to be considered quirky and too confusing to be deemed eccentric. Things were only slightly better inside. With their original doors and moldings, the living room and library were stunning. But most of the rooms were devoid of sunlight and had doors in problematic places. Wrong, I muttered to myself. And ugly. Why would I want this wrong, ugly house?

Because I did want it. I wanted it badly.

As someone who spends most of her days crafting stories for television (*Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, etc.), I can only explain it like this: The house felt like . . . good story. And every inch of me wanted to write it.

That's my problem. I love a good story. I get seduced by story every time. So even though I was a busy single mother with three kids, four television shows, and a company to run, and I should have known better, I didn't stop myself. I bought the house anyway. And then I simply decided to assume the story would have a happy ending.

To begin, I worked with architect Bill Baldwin of HartmanBaldwin. We got lucky. Bill found out that sometime in the 1950s or 1960s, an overenthusiastic homeowner had recklessly removed the home's original façade and replaced it with the out-of-sync one. We also learned that the home was actually built in 1923, the work of Elmer Grey, the famed architect of the Beverly Hills Hotel. With a little research, I located photos of the original exterior. They revealed the front as Grey had intended—

a beautiful Italianate villa with an intricate stone-carved balustrade. I live in a Historic Preservation Zone, and somehow the house had mistakenly received a historic designation with this fake Santa Barbara mission front on it. So the first thing we did was ask the Office of Historic Resources staff to research and correct the issue. Once that was done, we were able to get down to the business of restoring the house to its original glory. The old photos we had found were sent to a stonemason in Chicago, and he re-created every detail of the original front exterior.

Enter Michael Smith. I'd had the opportunity to visit the White House residence during the Obama era, and I had been impressed by how warm, comfortable, and elegant it was. I was especially enthusiastic about President Obama's private office—the colors, the style, the vibe. I wanted to sit and write in there. (I didn't.) Anyone who can make a writer feel more like writing is someone special. That ability to connect with whatever creates sparks in a person is part of what makes

y first thought was that it was ugly. And wrong. The house was ugly and wrong. Six years ago, standing on the curb, a baby on each hip, a ten-year-old by my side, in the shade of a FOR SALE sign, all I could think was: What an ugly, wrong house.

A rambling 8,400-square-foot behemoth the color of pea soup, it was a mess, an illogical pairing of design styles. The front had a Santa Barbara mission façade, complete with hulking dark-wood balconies. The back was light, distinctly Italian with ornate archways and carved stone. It was as if the powers that be had, on a whim, sliced two different homes down the middle and glued opposing halves together. The result was too

IN THE INNER COURTYARD, A SOFA AND CHAIRS BY JANUS ET CIE WEAR JASPER FABRICS. TABLE BY CENTURY FURNITURE. OPPOSITE CURTAINS OF A PRINTED LINEN BY PIERRE FREY HANG IN THE FAMILY ROOM. TABLE AND CHAIRS BY FAO SCHWARZ.





A PAUL FERRANTE CHANDELIER HANGS IN THE LIVING ROOM. CLUB CHAIRS BY JASPER IN A CUSTOM FABRIC FROM STUDIO FOUR NYC; COCKTAIL TABLE FROM JF CHEN.

Michael such a gifted designer. Working with him was a truly collaborative experience. Despite my lack of time, I ended up being deeply involved in the process. The home we've created feels classic California—if a little bit romantic.

First Michael worked with everyone to deal with my biggest concern: the lack of sunlight. To start, HartmanBaldwin blew out the roof of the first-floor loggia, creating a two-story gallery along the back that fills the whole space with light and air. The gallery is lined with big glass-and-iron doors. Previously those doors opened into the house; now we've turned them so that they open out onto the patio. This adds about three feet of furniture space to the room, lending it a sense of spaciousness. My favorite thing to do when entertaining is open all of those doors and enjoy an indoor/outdoor dance party. We also changed the feeling of the front hall, which had been cavernous and dark. Michael persuaded me to replace the wood front door with a glass one, which means that sunshine streams in every morning. The last and biggest thing the team did to address the darkness issue was to add skylights with custom hand-blown glass up and down the second-floor hallway. Now every inch of the home is infused with light.

Michael and I also made some other important choices. I wanted to maintain what was original—the library, living room, front hall, and stairs—with some improvements. I'd found photos of the living room showing that it had had a coffered ceiling, so Michael painstakingly re-created that look. In the library, the television was removed from the cabinet and extra shelves were built in to give me more space for books and my vintage record-album collection. The flooring in the front hall was replaced. The new marble floor is beautiful, and to my continuing delight, it is also heated.

A big kitchen was key to the comfort of this house. My family is a kitchen family—I host holidays at my house, and on a daily basis my kids and I can be found hanging out in here. So I needed a big, comfortable kitchen we could relax and spread out in. Bill imagined it as a seamless addition to the home with a family room next door. Michael designed a large, airy space, adding black-and-white tile from Native Tile and a BlueStar Heritage 60-inch range. The end result is the kitchen of my dreams. I don't even complain about washing dishes in this kitchen. How can anyone complain in this much beauty?

I very much wanted a home that not only felt like a home for real family life but functioned like one as well. I thought, What is the point of a house my kids can't be themselves in? I was militant about it. But everyone had a hard time understanding what I meant when I said the words "child-friendly." I remember one morning Michael sent over photos of two beautiful 18th-century French chairs. He asked if I thought they would be right for my new family room. These were gorgeous antique chairs being sold at auction. I stared at the photo and then I wrote back: "My daughters are right now at this moment in my family room standing on the chairs with pillowcases and brooms taped to the sides as masts and sails, singing at the top of their lungs, playing *Moana*. Can they

This is a place where kids can play pretend and spill things, and I do not ever stress about something expensive and antique being stained.



ABOVE A PAINTING BY LLOYD MCNEILL HANGS IN THE ENTRY. CHANDELIER BY HELENE AUMONT. **LEFT** JASPER SOFAS IN ROSE TARLOW MELROSE HOUSE FABRICS FACE OFF IN THE FAMILY ROOM. **OPPOSITE** IN THE DINING ROOM, SCDS LAMPS FLANK A WORK BY WALTER WILLIAMS.



stand on these 18th-century French chairs and tape brooms to the sides?" That was the end of the 18th-century-chair photos.

There are a lot of creative choices made to accommodate style and a family at the same time in this house. The fabric on the furniture is easily cleaned. The tables don't get water stains. But the large William and Mary seaweed marquetry cabinet on a stand is from Holland circa 1690—and note that it is jam-packed with the kids' favorite puzzles and board games for family game night. So you might not be able to tell just by looking, but this home is a place where kids can play pretend and spill things, and I do not ever stress about something expensive and antique being stained. I love that these spaces have turned out to be as functional as they are beautiful.

It is important to me that objects in my home are meaningful treasures. Michael worked with me to pull out the pieces from my collection that have personal stories attached, and he displayed them in ways that make them stand out. Now my home has the feel of a carefully curated journey through highlights of my love of art, my history, and my education. For instance, I've been collecting works by the artist Hughie Lee-Smith for years. His surreal paintings are an obsession of mine. The walls of my living room and library are now dedicated to showcasing his extraordinary work. There is a Phoebe Beasley



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LEFT EMBROIDERED CURTAINS BY THE GUY GOODFELLOW COLLECTION EDGE THE DOUBLE-HEIGHT GALLERY. ABOVE THE POOL DECK FEATURES CHAISE LONGUES BY JANUS ET CIE. IN FRONT OF THE POOLHOUSE, RATTAN SOFAS BY LANE VENTURE IN A PERENNIALS ACRYLIC.



painting that once belonged to Maya Angelou hanging in my front hall. I keep it there to remind me that there is always a way to be a better writer and a better woman. Some of my favorite books are tucked all over the house—I'm a big believer in books. You can never have too many.

One part of the property that did not need much change was the grounds. The house is perfectly placed on more than an acre of stunning land in the heart of metropolitan Los Angeles. The ugly behemoth I bought sits on a work of art. Smooth lawns flow into a sport court; a pool stretches over to wide bougainvillea-covered trellises; fountains bubble along winding paths revealing the entrance to a secret rose garden. When you stand on the back patio, the views of towering trees and wide lawns and garden make it easy to imagine the house is somewhere in wine country instead of five minutes from Hollywood. Stephen Block of Inner Gardens made subtle but impactful changes in the landscape design—adding paths, reshaping beds. The pool and the sport court were resurfaced. He and his team worked to heal the larger trees that had not been well cared for in the backyard. One great change they made was to swap out many of the plantings and trees in the front with choices that give the house a more warm and welcoming view from the street.

Renovating a house in real life is not like it is on TV. On TV, the home renovation takes place during a clever 30-second montage while a Stevie Wonder song plays. The actor playing TV Shonda holds up swatches and nods, peers at tiles and nods, uses a sledgehammer on a wall and smiles . . . and never loses patience or the will to live.

That is not how a renovation works. This was no 30-second montage. There are a lot of change orders. There are permits. There are delays. There is still tile arriving from Morocco, broken, that has to be sent back.

When we began, I had a baby on each hip. Now those babies are in kindergarten and first grade, and the little girl who held my hand as we stood at the curb is driving. It took five years to transform this house into my family's home.

But the story . . . I was right. This house tells good story. Or it *will* tell good story. My girls will grow up here, become women here. Life will happen here. Laughter will happen here. Love will live here. Wrong and ugly judgments have given way to a deep and lasting bond. I love this house. As hard as the house was to renovate, I love it here. We have been on a journey. Weaving our way into the story of this house has been the trip of a lifetime. This formerly wrong and ugly house and I, we are family now. We are home. **AD**