

REMAKING SUE MENGERS' ICONIC ESTATE

An exclusive peek inside the home of the late superagent, re-envisioned by an A-list design team for new owner, power lawyer Allen Grubman
By Alexandria Abramian

WHEN ALLEN AND Deborah Grubman purchased Sue Mengers' Beverly Hills home two years ago, the

socially to her dinner parties and talked to her about the house. She told me never to let anyone tear it down, and after she passed, Evans insisted I sell it to someone interesting."



Mengers

jewel box-like house located just behind the Beverly Hills Hotel was virtually untouched since the famed agent's death in 2011. There was the Biedermeier furniture, the hanging Aubusson tapestries and the silk shantung wall upholstery. "And there were joint blunts everywhere, in all the ash-trays," says architect **Scott Mitchell**,

Allen, an entertainment lawyer with some of the very same high-profile clients who frequented Mengers' dinner parties during the '70s, '80s and '90s, and Deborah, a high-powered New York realtor, proved to be the perfect heirs to the home (reportedly they paid just over \$6 million). And in an endlessly

who accompanied the Grubmans to the home that was as well known for its constant, salon-style get-togethers of Hollywood's who's-who as it was for its iconic **John Woolf**-designed architecture. "Everything was still in place, like one of her parties had just ended," says Mitchell. "Sue had taste and there were some gorgeous antique pieces, but the house definitely had an '80s vocabulary: It was all emerald green, mauve and apricot."

self-referencing world of intersecting Hollywood lives, their first official visitor to the house was Grubman's longtime client **Bette Midler**, who now is starring in the one-woman play *I'll Eat You Last: A Chat With Sue Mengers*, at the Geffen Playhouse (through Dec. 22), less than 4 miles away in Westwood, after an acclaimed run on Broadway. "Deborah and I were lucky enough to acquire this home," says Allen. "And all of a sudden I find that Bette, my client, is doing a play that takes place in my living room. It was such an interesting confluence of circumstances."

But instead of demolishing the 4,400-square-foot home and building something massive on the half-acre lot—which sits directly next door to the former **Harry Cohn** spread, a 2-plus acre estate purchased by **Jerry Bruckheimer** earlier this year for \$23 million, and behind the 21-bedroom former **William Randolph Hearst** estate, currently listed with Hilton & Hyland for \$115 million—the Grubmans were intent on keeping its quirky shapes and Hollywood Regency style intact, while modernizing certain elements (many of Mengers' pieces were sold at a Bonhams auction in 2012).



Grubman

"A lot of people wanted to buy this house and many of them would have scrapped the entire thing," says **Kurt Rappaport** of Westside Estate Agency, who represented both the Grubmans as well as Mengers' estate, of which **David Geffen** was the trustee. "I'm very close to **Robert Evans**, who was probably Sue's best friend and confidant, so I had been there

Just as important as continuing its heritage, however, was maintaining the home's high Hollywood Regency style. The Grubmans tapped Mitchell along with interior designers **Sandy Gallin** and **Clint Nicholas** to bring about the renovation. "I had this fantasy of what John Woolf had intended from the beginning, and I tried to get it back to its sculptural essence," says Mitchell, who has teamed with Gallin on many large-scale projects, including **Marilyn** and **Jeffrey Katzenberg's** Trousdale home and **Jimmy Iovine's** Holmby Hills house. Here he preserved the home's original oversize columns and kept the shape of its triple-height, extra narrow front doors, which are now glass and bronze instead of the previous hunter-green-painted wood. "That change means



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→ **Designing Duo**
Architect Scott Mitchell (left) and interior decorator Clint Nicholas

→ 1 Hollywood's ultimate salon/living room, where the late uber agent Mengers entertained an eclectic mix from Barbra Streisand and Michael Caine to Jennifer Aniston and Tina Fey, has been restored as a light-filled, indoor/outdoor space. → 2 Julian Schnabel's *Boni Lux* brings a punch of color to the neutral-toned palette. → 3 Midler stars in *I'll Eat You Last: A Chat With Sue Mengers*, set in the living room of the agent's (pre-renovated) Beverly Hills home. → 4 In the den, Nicholas paired a custom-made sofa upholstered in Kneeder Fauchere fabric with a macassar ebony veneer coffee table made by L'Artigiano Studio. Glass doors open on to a garden area where a fountain, original to the house, remains. Artist Mel Bochner's *Head Honcho*, 2011, hangs above the sofa.



→ 1 An egg-shaped pool was removed from inside the arcaded column area and replaced with lawn. A rectangular pool was installed at the back of the property. → 2 “The kitchen was a funny little nave of rooms,” says Mitchell, who opened and brightened the space with a series of skylights and Carrara marble countertops. → 3 Nicholas lined the home’s original built-in bookshelves with eucalyptus. A Jasper Johns painting hangs above the living room fireplace. → 4 Mitchell kept the master bathroom’s dramatic elliptical shape, had the curved cabinetry rebuilt and installed skylights to flood the room with sunlight.

that the entry, which used to be so dark, is now flooded with light,” says Mitchell, who also added a series of skylights that bring in lots of natural light throughout the home.

One of the most provocative alterations Mitchell made was to move the swimming pool, which originally seemed to lap right up to the living room, to the back of the property. “That is definitely the biggest programmatic change to the house. It allows the garden that is enclosed in this elliptical arcade of columns to become the epicenter of the house,” says Mitchell. “With the pool in the back of the property, it not only draws the eye further into the garden but it creates a better flow between the interiors and exteriors.”

Nicholas focused on unifying and upgrading finishes, and creating a soothing and textured palette of furnishings. Out went the wall-to-wall carpeting and apricot paint and in came soft Venetian plaster walls, paper-backed linen wall coverings and reclaimed white oak floors.

“The goal was to make this as comfortable and inviting as possible,” says Nicholas, who cites Gallin as his mentor on the project. “We put in glass doors in the living room and now this house really flows outside. Allen and Debbie have really kept the tradition of having people over constantly when they’re in town. We made everything a little more minimal, but it’s still a truly feel-good house.”

So would the queen of intimate, low-key Hollywood hobnobbing approve of the Carrara marbled kitchen with a trio of Sub-Zeros and the neutral-toned take on quiet elegance? “There are so few pure houses with Hollywood history left,” says Rappaport. “Scott basically took this apart, put it back together again, and kept the glory of what was there.” **THR**



→ **Column Comeback**
The home’s original Doric columns have been restored and refinished.