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HOME

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Soul Connection

The Kushner family melds South African roots with California cool to create a personalized pad like no other.

WRITTEN BY TANYA MONAGHAN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROGER DAVIES & LAUREN PRESSEY



Warren Kushner was born and raised in South Africa. He traveled the world—first as a pro surfer and later as a world-renowned commercial and film director. But his roots always remained strong, and South Africa just felt like home.

Warren's wife, Dana, grew up in SoCal but also fell in love with South Africa on their many trips there—including the one when they got married. The couple imagined a unique space in California that would feel like a home from the motherland.

They created a soulful, architectural dream—both organic and sophisticated—with an effortless charm that embraces an outdoor lifestyle. Their home invites you in with the warmth of a close friend but leaves you in awe as you marvel at the skillful blend of earthiness and high design.

The Kushners and their three children travel extensively, usually following surf around the world. Their eldest son, Kai, has already made quite a name for himself in the sport. So it was no surprise that this shared love of surfing was a heavy influence on the design of their home.

Once their youngest child, Josie, was a few years old, they decided to look for a larger property in Manhattan Beach and bought a two-lot teardown on a walk street. Then began the Kushners' search for an architect who could make their dream house become a reality.

Though South Africa was the source of their inspiration, they also admired an incredible house in Laguna Beach's Emerald Bay designed by Grant Kirkpatrick of KAA Design Group. Once they met him and found out that Grant was also a Manhattan Beach local, they knew he had to be the one to build it.

For more than 30 years, Grant has been creating unique homes custom-tailored to his many clients' lifestyles. He is a third-generation Californian who learned much from his father passionately taking care of his family's 2 acres of land in Palos Verdes. He attributes how he sees beauty to his deep connection to nature and being able to read the land.

"It chose me when I was a young kid and my parents remodeled their traditional ranch house on their property," Grant explains of his road to a career in architecture. "One night I borrowed the contractor's plans and drew all over them. The next day, after a stern lecture, my dad introduced me to two elements of what would become my whole world: a drafting table and stool. That was it. Architecture would be my manifestation of beauty."



The Kushners' initial design process started on a scrap piece of parchment paper drawn in Grant's office. Grant admits he was nervous in the beginning. "The South African aspect was real and authentic to the Kushners, but my challenge was how to bring that aesthetic to the California coast. My greatest sense of pride in this project is infusing the South African lifestyle into a California beach house."

With an aggressive amount of square feet but a tight budget, Grant and his partner Eric Evens got to work. Since the property is situated close to the beach, a key objective was to maximize the stunning sea views. The main obstacle was to get above the big structure sitting in front of their lot.

Grant and Eric came up with the idea to boomerang the structure out to the sides so they could get better access to those coveted ocean views. The whole concept was financially, technically and structurally challenging. In need of additional expertise, they brought in structural engineer Ken Niver and executive architect Luis Murillo of LM Design & Associates to realize the plan.

The street-side entrance is flanked with limestone pillars and a custom South African wood screen acting as a natural curtain. Beautiful, natural green landscaping with sprinkles of wild lavender border the stepstones to the door.

Once the grand, one-story reclaimed wood door opens, you step into a modern version of a safari beach house. A rustic, woven light fixture hovers over floating stairs, with a 5-foot wooden giraffe at the base. The giraffe is a nod to the South African aesthetic carried throughout the home, and it is also sentimental—it's the very same giraffe that Warren grew up with in his childhood home.

The top floor offers a living area for the family boasting an indoor/outdoor flow and a stunning roof deck pool surrounded by real grass. Although artificial turf might have been a more practical solution, the choice demonstrates the authenticity of the Kushners' vision of staying true to a house made completely from natural elements. Warren nostalgically remembers the welcome sensation of cool grass under his feet after walking on the hot desert sand in his hometown of Oudtshoorn, in the Klein Karoo desert area of South Africa's Western Cape.



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Many aspects tie in both aesthetically and structurally. The living area is elevated and offers its occupants an open-air penthouse living experience, with a bridge that goes across the entryway and grants access to the master bedroom.

The second floor consists of the kids' bedrooms and communal play area. The ground floor comprises a separate, exquisite suite that can comfortably board six guests—a haven for the Kushners' visiting friends and family. It opens to an outdoor hangout area, bordering the walk street that leads down to the beach.

And, of course, this tribe of surfers built an impressive surfboard room on the ground floor that houses their endless array of surfboards and surf trophies. The family's beach lifestyle made an outdoor staircase and shower a necessity so they can easily run straight from the surf to the pool and spa on the top floor without going through the house.

The materials and textures used in the home were similarly well-thought-out. The polished concrete floors anchoring the airy rooms with a perfect shade of grey complement the wood and stone elements. The concrete was poured and ground to reveal the aggregate within its composition.

Safari lodge pictures inspired the bamboo that can be seen woven throughout the house. In South Africa, eucalyptus dowels are used as insulation to keep houses warm in winter and cooler in the summer. Warren still remembers the exact footage of the seven 210-foot dowels filling the containers that came directly from South Africa. The entire top floor roof is made from this



eucalyptus and helps filter the light that streams through.

The “Nevada gold” limestone used in the design proved to be challenging, as California has restrictions with stone due to earthquakes. Because the Kushners wanted it to look raw as it does in its natural element, Grant decided to “over-grout” it to make it look more organic. He treated the stone in a monolithic manner, not as separate pieces—going so far as to carve and taper certain areas to create movement for the eye.

The stone element was also strategically brought inside in certain areas. They also chose to expose and celebrate the structural steel beams that hold up the home inside and out. Both the steel and eucalyptus columns play a role in joining the structural with the aesthetic and enhancing the authenticity of the design. Thousands of eucalyptus reeds become a blanket of natural texture, with hanging lights dropping down from the surface.

The indoor/outdoor flow carries through to the couple’s sanctuary, a master suite that boasts a spectacular view of the Palos Verdes Peninsula. The bedroom exudes warmth with wide white oak floors, custom-made white oak cabinetry and Caesarstone on the sink. A lone standing bathtub creates the focal point of the room.

Many of the individual South African design features, including all the lights, were sourced by Dana at Malibu Market & Design, owned by fellow South African Eytan Levin. Even their Roche Bobois couch in the living room was bought in Cape Town. As the indoor/outdoor flow didn’t leave much wall space for art, they focused instead on the play of textures and textiles—all conforming to an earthy color palette throughout the home.

The entire kitchen is framed in 250-year-old reclaimed white oak barn wood sourced from the East Coast. The outdoor area acts as a dining room, but when the weather is not cooperative, their custom-made breakfast nook gets plenty of use. Lovers of the outdoors, the family regularly entertains on the open top floor, and Warren in particular shines as a master on the “braai”—South African for BBQ.

The house truly reflects the warm, soulful nature of the Kushner family. They care deeply and attend to every detail, while maintaining a relaxed, welcoming, friendly home that is as authentic to their roots as it is impressive to behold. ■

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