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# CALIFORNIA COOL

Interior designer Amber Lewis has transformed a retro horror into a stylish family home full of colour and creativity

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRYCE COVEY TEXT BY NAOMI CHRISOULAKIS



Perfectly curated, open shelving holds treasured books, artworks and knick-knacks, while large baskets are the perfect hold-all for daughter Gwyneth's toys.



**X** The home of interior designer Amber Lewis might be just outside of LA, but the colourful, summery style could just as easily be found in Australia. The dining room features a simple IKEA dining table surrounded by classic Eames chairs, while an injection of playful colour is introduced with an assortment of cushions and a graphic rug.





**G**rape-hued wallpaper and green shag-pile carpet aren't exactly the stuff of open-house dreams, but when Amber Lewis and husband Mike stepped onto that lurid vintage pile, she knew she had found the house she'd been hunting for. "There was a real charm about it, even though the owners hadn't touched anything since they'd built it in 1964," recalls the interior designer. She also remembers mentally earmarking the single-storey space as both a perfect playground for their then one-

year-old daughter, Gwyneth, and an entertainer's dream. "I could see straightaway that it could become a great family space."

Of course, the fact that Lewis transforms homes on a daily basis helped her see beyond the garish decor of the three-bedroom home in Calabasas, California, just outside of LA. "Seeing potential is in my bones. Plus, my dad is a building contractor and I've always lived in houses that have been under some kind of construction, so that's what I'm used to – and I've learnt to never let a wall hold me back!"

Or several walls, as it turned out. Lewis created a huge open-plan space that combined the home's previous living, dining and family rooms, ripping out the carpet and creating an all-white space as she went. "The only thing that stayed in the same position was the sink. We literally moved everything, but the kitchen sink," she says, adding that thanks to her father's know-how, the construction only took six weeks.

◀ *swipe image* ▶



●●●●●● Graphic wallpaper by Australian designer Anna Spiro features in one of the bedrooms.



✕ Walls were removed to create one open-plan living space geared for entertaining.



Not that it was all smooth sailing. “I treated myself like a client, but I’m the worst client to have! I change my mind about 14 times a week,” laughs Lewis. “But the best part was that I got to start over, with brand-new everything.” Lewis didn’t, however, deviate too far from her signature style: neutral bases with pops of colour.

“That’s my calling card, although it does evolve,” admits Lewis. “My life goes hand-in-hand with my design choices. I used to design for a single girl, then I got married and I designed for a couple who’d just got married, and then I had a baby and now I’m designing for a family. I’m very eclectic, style-wise, and I like to live around interesting, beautiful



✕ The master bedroom is a study in texture and pattern.







things that you can't necessarily just go into a store and buy off a shelf. I feel the same way in what I wear; I go to flea markets, I buy on Etsy, I love finding one-offs."

Unique treasures fill the airy home, tokens of years spent travelling the world with her musician husband. "We were around a lot of music in different countries and it was always just so new and amazing," she says. "I'm very inspired by foreign places, like Morocco and Turkey, and textiles and techniques that have been around for hundreds of years. But there's no formula. If I see it and love it, that's it."

As long as it fits her functional vision, that is. "I always had the way my family lives in mind as I was designing the space," she says, pointing to the kitchen as one particularly pleasing example. "I love that huge

island and the fact that everything is open. I can entertain with everyone in the same room, which is great because I have a giant family. We entertain every weekend and often during the week when friends come over for a drink while the kids play."

Enjoying such an idyllic lifestyle means saying goodbye to the home – the couple just sold – has been bittersweet for Lewis. "The house was the catalyst for starting my own business. I started blogging about it, and when I found myself getting some attention, the lady who I was working for – who is still my mentor – told me I needed to go out on my own," she smiles. But the success the house spawned means Lewis now needs more space for her home-based business. "We're sad to leave, but I'm super excited about starting all over again!"





### SOFTLY DOES IT

Almost every soft surface in Amber Lewis's house is geared for comfort, with an abundance of batik and embroidered cushions, many of which are sold through interior designer Amber Lewis's shop. For similar, visit [shoppe.amberinteriordesign.com](http://shoppe.amberinteriordesign.com).

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# the edit

## MIX, DON'T MATCH

Coloured glassware and patterned ceramics lend a relaxed feel to the Lewis home. For similar, try Amalia Flower Pasta Bowl, \$59.90, Sola Coffee Cup, \$18.90, and Blu Marine Pitcher, \$29.90, all at [www.cittadesign.com](http://www.cittadesign.com).



Högsten Armchair, \$149, at [www.ikea.com.au](http://www.ikea.com.au).



Follow Amber Lewis's lead and splurge on designer classics, while saving on pieces that are big on style, but small in price.



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