

home on the range

With the help of AD100 triumvirate Madison Cox, Annabelle Selldorf, and Jeffrey Bilhuber, a Texas twosome make a historic home in Marfa their own

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METICULOUSLY INSTALLED WITHOUT THE USE OF GROUT, MOROCCAN TERRA-COTTA TILE SURROUNDS THE POOL. AT A HISTORIC MARFA HOME, UPDATED BY AD100 STARS ANNABELLE SELLDORF, MADISON COX, AND JEFFREY BILHUBER, THE RUSH AWNING ON THE IRON PERGOLA WILL ONE DAY BE TAKEN OVER BY CREEPING VINES. FOR DETAILS SEE RESOURCES.



Reflecting on Marfa in 1985, *Donald Judd* wrote:

“The area of West Texas was fine, mostly high rangeland dropping to desert along the river, with mountains over the edge in every direction. There were few people and the land was undamaged.” Decades later, that spellbinding beauty and sense of exquisite isolation remain, albeit juxtaposed with the artist’s own legacy—the Judd Foundation (anchored by The Block, his former home) and the Chinati Foundation, the army base he transformed into a museum for contemporary art. Today’s Marfa is a contradiction: a tumbleweed town and an international pilgrimage site, where Judd’s visions of unified art and architecture reached their apotheosis.

It was that heady mix that set two creative New Yorkers, both natives of the Lone Star State, on the long drive to this one-stoplight oasis. “If you’re from Texas and involved in the arts, then all roads lead to Marfa,” says one, whom we’ll refer to as Cowboy for the sake of this western adventure. As his other half—let’s call her Cowgirl—recounts, “The moment I saw the town, I felt connected. It’s intangible...the big sky, the light, the breeze. Marfa is not one thing; it’s many things.”

Their plans to buy land and build a contemporary glass box were scrapped when they visited a 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival house for sale. Designed by Henry Charles Trost, a celebrated El Paso architect who cut his teeth in the Chicago School, the home occupied a hilltop plot not far from the center of town, with spectacular views and an adjoining empty parcel. Judd had even owned it once upon a time. Says Cowgirl, “It just felt true and beautiful and right.”

To reimagine the property, they turned to architect Annabelle Selldorf, whom they knew from New York and through Chinati. She updated the Trost house (whose original details had already been stripped away by the prior owner) through a series of deft interventions to the floor plan. On the

CUSTOM-MADE EBONIZED BENCHES AND BONACINA 1889 WICKER CHAIRS MINGLE ON THE LOGGIA. **OPPOSITE** TIMBER BOOKSHELVES IN THE STYLE OF DONALD JUDD LINE THE LIBRARY; CUSTOM-MADE SOFA IN A PINDLER FABRIC.





**“There is a minimalism that echoes Judd and is carried through in very strong but simple interventions.”
—Madison Cox**

RIGHT THE KITCHEN'S LARGE ISLAND CAN ACCOMMODATE SIX ON COUNTER STOOLS; ANTIQUE PENDANT. **BELOW** A RICHARD SERRA ETCHING IN THE DINING ROOM; MIRROR MASK BY KADER ATTIA. **OPPOSITE** TERRACED PLANTINGS OF RUSSIAN SAGE DESCEND FROM THE ENTERTAINMENT PAVILION TO THE POOL.



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main level, clusters of small rooms were combined to create a vast living space, with multiple seating areas, and a spacious chef's kitchen, where an enormous island can seat six comfortably. A tight, sculptural staircase now descends to the primary suite on the lower level, creating a sequence of compression and expansion. "You had to make the trip downstairs into something exciting," notes Selldorf, whose hand can be felt most clearly on what had been vacant land, where she devised a side-by-side guest casita and a garage/gym, as well as an entertaining pavilion up on another hill. "The architectural vocabulary is a simple series of volumes that speak to one another but feel distinct from the old architecture," she notes of the structures, clad in clay-colored stucco and aligned to create beautiful transitions.

ALONG THE WAY, Selldorf connected the clients with landscape mastermind Madison Cox, whom they visited in Marrakech well before Cox made it to Marfa. That first trip to Morocco was an aha moment: Their eyes widened as Cox welcomed them to Villa Oasis, introducing them to the work of designer Bill Willis, and guided them to sites throughout the region, whose landscape, building materials, and sensibilities reminded them of West Texas. In no time, an enormous shipping container filled with pots, zellige, and furnishings of all kinds was on its way to Marfa, where Cox conceived a series of outdoor spaces that blend the local vernacular with Moroccan traditions.



**“It embraces Marfa
fully, reinventing
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Marfa could be.”
—Jeffrey Bilhuber**

LEFT A TONY FEHER SCULPTURE HANGS IN THE STAIRWELL TO THE PRIMARY SUITE. **BELOW** AN OUTDOOR DINING AREA ON THE TERRACE BESIDE THE ENTERTAINING PAVILION.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE IN THE ENTERTAINING PAVILION, A DONALD JUDD DAYBED SITS ATOP A TUAREG RUG; ARTWORKS BY DO HO SUH (LEFT) AND ED RUSCHA. CREAMY ZELLIGE TILE SHEATHES THE PRIMARY BATH. A VIEW OF THE HISTORIC HOME, DESIGNED IN THE 1920s BY ARCHITECT HENRY CHARLES TROST.





IN THE PRIMARY BEDROOM, HEADBOARD OF FABRIC BY CHAPAS TEXTILES AND CURTAINS OF LINEN BY PENNY MORRISON.

Terra-cotta tiles line porches, walkways, and exterior stairs. Terraced terrain, fragrant with sage, descends from the pavilion to the pool—part of a larger strategy to limit lawns for water conservation. And iron pergolas devised with Selldorf offer shade thanks to rush awnings that will one day be replaced by creeping vines.

JEFFREY BILHUBER, the couple’s longtime decorator, completed the design dream team. “When the clients brought me on, they said the first thing to do is come and soak in what Marfa is, what Marfa gives,” he reflects with trademark flourish. “Over the course of the drive your mind begins to open, so that by the time you do arrive your mind is ready to receive.” The mandate for the interiors was to maintain that spirit of discovery. Vintage and antique finds from around the world mix with an assortment of textiles—Turkish, Navajo, Uzbek—and a collection of contemporary art, including pieces by Walead Beshty, Rashid Johnson, Jenny Holzer, and Do Ho Suh. Tilework inspired by Bill Willis enlivens bedroom suites, each one defined by a color scheme that nods to the

surrounding landscape. “This house doesn’t turn its back on Marfa,” Bilhuber reflects. “It embraces Marfa fully, reinventing the language of what Marfa could be.”

Nods to Judd are, in fact, few and far between. One of his daybeds can be found in the entertaining pavilion, sometimes positioned before the telescoping window walls that merge indoors with outdoors. Timber shelving in the style of the artist’s own lines the library. And privacy walls throughout the grounds recall The Block’s adobe perimeter. Yet Judd’s influence is unmistakable—evident in the refinement of every minimalist detail and the rhythm of Selldorf’s geometries. The greatest connection, however, may just be the clients’ commitment to Marfa. The home was a multiyear project, with more phases to come outside where Cox plans to expand the plantings based on what has thrived. At times the property even serves as an extension of the local cultural landscape, with art-world gatherings for upwards of 100. Neither clients nor dream team, however, seem fazed by the marathon effort. Says Bilhuber, “You have to take the long road—and a long road it is.” **▲**

THE GUEST CASITA’S BATH FEATURES ZELLIGE TILE FROM CASABLANCA THAT WAS LAID IN A GEOMETRIC PATTERN INSPIRED BY NAVAJO BLANKETS.

