



ROOM

DESERT LAYERS

Set in Los Angeles, this family home by Rachel Kaye draws on Mediterranean heritage to create a warm, layered environment designed for gathering, longevity, and everyday life.

TEXT MARIA AZIZ NAHAS. PHOTOGRAPHY TINA MICHELLE. DESIGN RACHEL KAYE DESIGN.
PHOTO STYLING EMILY EDITH. DEVELOPER/BUILDER DAVID ELLIOT BUILDERS.



The project was conceived to integrate seamlessly into its surroundings rather than assert itself. Its exterior presents a restrained interpretation of California Mediterranean architecture, where cream-toned stucco, a traditional tiled roofline, and carefully balanced proportions are expressed with a sense of contemporary clarity. Rather than relying on ornament, the architecture is defined by its precision and calm presence. The landscape plays an essential role in reinforcing this dialogue with place, incorporating native plantings, textured greenery, and natural stone pathways that anchor the structure within the specific light and terrain of Los Angeles, allowing the house to feel settled from the outset. The design brief centred on creating a home for a highly social family whose daily life revolves around togetherness. The clients regularly host gatherings of varying scales, from informal weeknight dinners to larger celebrations,

and the house needed to accommodate both with equal ease. Flexibility became a guiding principle, with spaces designed to adapt seamlessly between everyday family use and moments of entertaining. At the same time, the interiors were envisioned as a long-term setting, one that would support the family as their children grow, favouring a sense of permanence, warmth, and layered character over anything trend-driven or temporary. A key challenge emerged early in the process. The designer was initially brought in to resolve an awkward ground floor layout in a house that had already been fully framed. At its centre sat a formal dining room that divided the plan, separating formal entertaining spaces at the front from more relaxed family areas at the rear, while functioning primarily as a passage. Rather than removing this constraint, the approach was to reinterpret it. The dining room was reimagined as a central, courtyard-inspired space, drawing





on the typology of Mediterranean homes. This shift transformed circulation into experience, allowing the room to act as a connective and atmospheric core, and establishing a new architectural logic that informed the rest of the house.

Throughout the project, many of the defining elements were first developed through hand sketches before being translated into built form. The living room fireplace extends into the ceiling plane, while the sculptural staircase balustrade, the kitchen hood, and the secondary fireplace introduce a sense of crafted presence. Lighting was approached as an architectural layer in itself. A three story staircase is animated by a vertical installation of delicate rice paper pendants, creating a soft, floating effect that connects the levels, while the dining room is defined by a

canopy of hammered brass lights that reinforces its courtyard like atmosphere.

Materiality further deepens the narrative. Fossilized stone tiles line the dining room walls, evoking surfaces found in ancient Mediterranean villages, while a marble and limestone checkerboard floor strengthens the sense of continuity between interior and exterior.

Limestone slabs and mosaic detailing define the staircase, and the entry hall features inlaid rugs composed of hand glazed terracotta tiles. Custom finishes, developed through extensive testing, bring texture and nuance, from subtly pitted walls to softly patinated surfaces that respond to light.

Balancing California architecture with Eastern Mediterranean influence, the house offers a serene, grounded environment shaped for both everyday life and collective experience.

