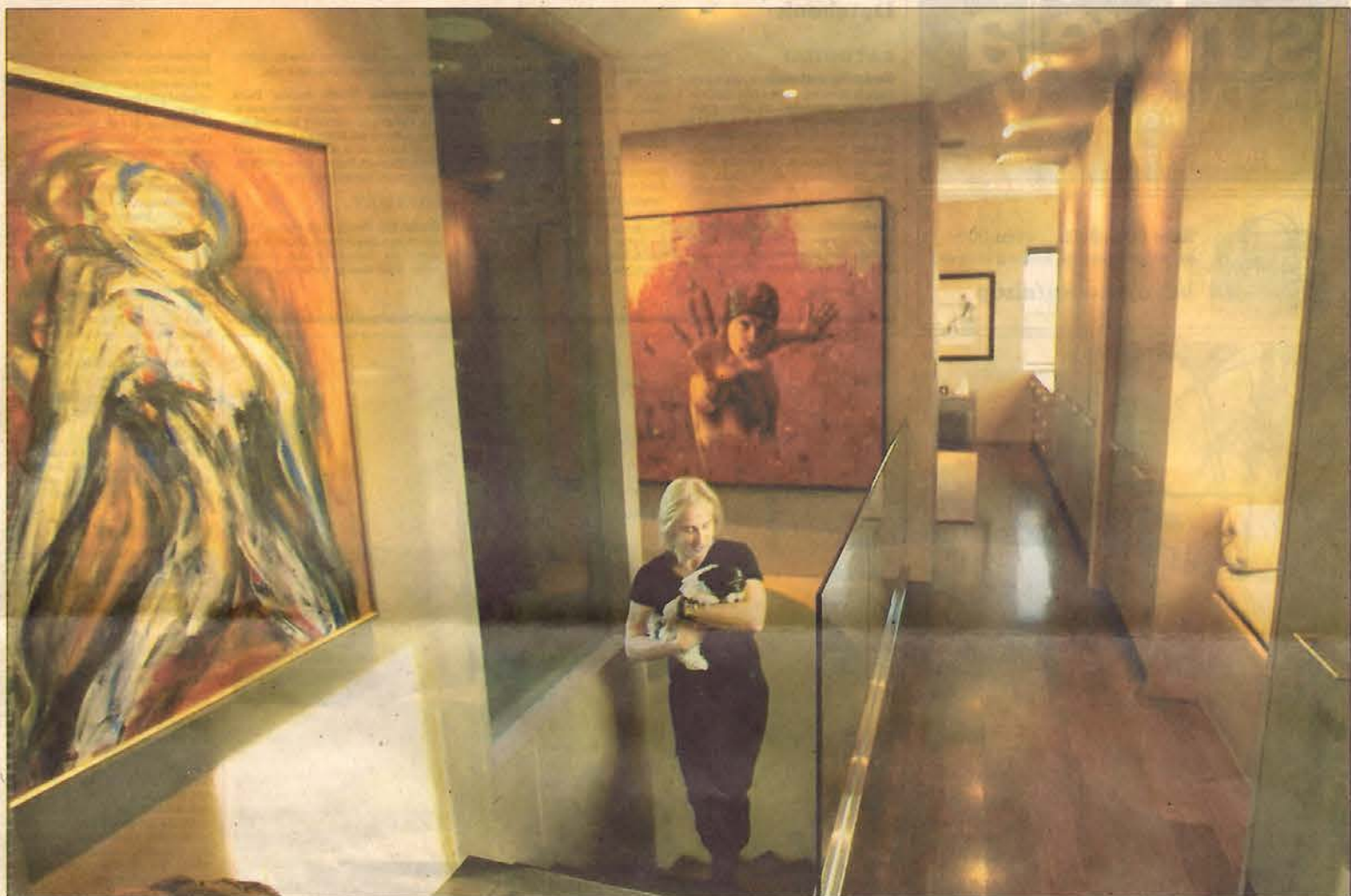


DESIGN



TONES: David Meister walks upstairs with his dog, Petey. Gray walls provide a backdrop for surprises, such as artwork and the bathroom window, to Meister's right. Photographs by GENARO MOLINA Los Angeles Times

A SUBTLE SPLASH

Enough with the color overload. Shades of gray give one couple an ocean of calm.

DAVID A. KEEPS

Women's fashion designer David Meister and Hollywood talent manager Alan Siegel live somewhere over the rainbow. Except for potted greenery and bursts of red in their artwork, almost everything in the couple's home high above the Sunset Strip is a shade of gray.

On the first floor, the rooms are painted entirely in Benjamin Moore grays—no fewer than five grays for the walls, two silvery tones for the trim and two cool grays on the ceiling. Even the built-in closets and dressers faced in quarter-sawn oak in the master suite upstairs are finished to a mushroom hue. Rugs, sofas, chairs, bedcovers and throw blankets are in colors best described as smoke, stone, taupe and the grayish beige that decorators call greige.

"I work with color and pattern all day long," says Meister, who has dressed Diane Lane for the Oscars and designed Valerie Bertinelli's vibrantly blue wedding dress, recently seen on the cover of *People* magazine. "We have such hectic lives, when I come home and shut the door, I don't want to see any color or print."

Or, for that matter, anything other than Petey, their black and white Havanese puppy, who has his own gray crate.

At a time when HGTV devotes entire shows to demonstrating how splashes of color can perk up a room, Siegel and Meister didn't want anything with pop or punch, thank you very much. For them, a carefully chosen palette of what they call "non-colors" keeps an emphasis on the views outside the window and the art on their walls. Thus, gray.

Citing the trend of chalkboard paint in cafes and residential kitchens, architectural color consultant Leesa Martling says that gray, which once seemed depressing, now makes an impression.

"Maybe we needed a new neutral to create a calming environment in these hectic times," she says. "The advantage of gray is that it fades into the background. White walls do not. White can be quite loud."

Gray, on the other hand, creates a "calm, considered background in a home," she says. Whether pale or dark, gray looks good when paired with vibrant or muted color, and it also looks smart and crisp when paired with white. "Sparkly objects such as mirrors and chandeliers look very exciting against muted shades of gray."

For Siegel and Meister, the celebration of gray started with a task that is as clear as black and white: containing clutter. Working with interior designer Timothy Guetzlaff of TMG Associates in Palm Springs, they installed a Boffi kitchen with pull-down tambour metal doors to hide small appliances. Elsewhere in the house, the designer created custom cabinetry to stash books, papers, belts and boots. (Meister places his shoes on shelves with one facing in and the other out so, the fashion designer says, "you can see what kind of heel height and toe shape you're working with.")

The result looks as sleek as a suite in a New York boutique hotel. Although some homeowners crave the layered, lived-in look, Siegel and Meister desire the opposite.

"Everything is put away," Siegel says. "You don't see any signs of life. It's very peaceful, and there is solitude and time for reflection. And when people come over, they go right to windows and say, 'Oh, my God, the view!'"

Facing south, the windows in the living room, dining room and kitchen afford vistas of the city from downtown to the ocean. Sie-



EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE: Socks, underwear and belts are compartmentalized in custom cabinetry in the bedroom to prevent clutter.

Going gray has its advantages

Obsessing over just the right shade of white or beige for your walls? Why not obsess over gray?

"It is not only chic but more forgiving than white, especially with kids and pets and that one guest who always spills," says Timothy Guetzlaff, the designer of David Meister and Alan Siegel's home. Guetzlaff calls gray a "non-color that changes over the day depending on sunshine and cloudiness." Because the tones shift, people can live with gray for quite a while, he adds, and if they get bored, they can change the furniture or accessories.

Other advantages: Neutral-colored walls lend a sense of serenity. They can leave the spotlight on views or prized possessions. They also allow you to play with texture without getting fussy or busy. Key points to consider in selecting a gray:

Undertones

To find the best color for a room, Guetzlaff suggests looking at the darkest shade on the fan deck or color swatch strip. That will help you determine what color undertones exist in the lighter colors that you're more likely to use on the wall.

Shopping

"Take that color card when you go looking for rugs, furniture, bedding, even towels," Guetzlaff says. "If it matches anywhere on that card, it is going to work in the room."

Finish

An eggshell or a satin paint will reflect its surroundings. On a window wall near greenery or a swimming pool, gray walls will appear greener and bluer. At night, incandescent light will make grays look warmer; halogens and LEDs will make them look cooler.

Yellow

Yellow-toned grays are warm and enveloping. "If you have a sunny bedroom in the morning," the designer says, "you would want to choose an ivory or yellowish color that goes with that light."

Green and blue

Grays with green, blue and especially purple recede, making rooms look larger. "At night, it looks even more dramatic," Guetzlaff says. The ceiling in the Siegel-Meister home is lavender-gray. "It's the most ethereal shade of all. During the day it looks white, and at night—at night it's the color of shadows."

Red

Reddish grays neither recede nor envelope, Guetzlaff says. "They define the surface of the wall." If you are thinking of painting a bathroom gray, he adds, pinkish grays are the kindest on skintones in the mirror.

— DAVID A. KEEPS

gel fell in love with the location and the killer views and bought the house in 1996.

"I remember taking Estelle Getty, who was my client, to see it and she said, 'What a view ... of everyone else's rooftops,'" Siegel recalls.

Meister was even less impressed. The

original owners had lived there until the late 1980s and then left it to a relative, and the house sorely needed an update.

"Nothing had been done. The carpets were shredding off the floor," Meister says. "I couldn't see past the ugly. I thought, 'Just give me a bomb.'"

Built in 1939, the 2,250-square-foot house was traditional for its time, a California Colonial with a Cape Cod bay window in front. The stucco exterior with clapboard siding on the second floor was painted a pale buttercup, the sash windows and shutters were white.

"It was so far from what we wanted, there wasn't anything to save," says Siegel, who describes it as the worst house in the best neighborhood.

The first improvement: knocking through the walls of a sun porch and integrating the window-lined space into the living room. They replaced a metal roof made to look like Spanish tile with seamed sheet metal, and they stripped away every piece of trim and molding, creating a smooth stucco exterior with glass front doors and new minimalist black steel-framed windows.

"I am a big believer in having a formal dining room and a living room to entertain," says Meister, noting that they retained the original floor plan of rooms that flow around a central staircase.

Five-inch-wide oak planks were installed for the floor. The fireplace was streamlined and clad in lagos azul, a fossilized limestone, which they also used for kitchen counters.

The Gaggenau- and Sub-Zero equipped kitchen is the least-used room in the house.

"Neither of them are big cooks," says Guetzlaff. "When HGTV did an episode on their kitchen, they didn't even know how to open the oven." (Meister says the kitchen was designed for looks. "I like being by beautiful, simple spaces," he says.)

Upstairs, Guetzlaff opened up bedrooms and baths to create a more simple, loft-like layout, removing doors and raising the jambs to the ceiling. A media room is tucked into one corner, and the rest of the space is a master bed and bath that flow into individual wardrobe areas. One eye-opener in the bathroom: a see-through shower with clear glass on both sides.

"When you're in it, you can see the Getty on one side and the Hollywood Hills on the other," Siegel says. (And anyone coming up the stairs can see who's lathering up.)

Naturally, the bathroom is also a symphony of muted tones. Guetzlaff says the gray palette enriches the clean lines of the home, making it look more sophisticated than white or beige. (See related article for why and how he selects his hues.)

The color scheme also drove the decorating process. Guetzlaff designed pieces with blackened steel and upholstered furniture in shades of oyster, pearl and pewter. Black lacquer and dark-stained natural wood pieces serve as accents. In such a setting, paintings, sculpture, tribal artifacts, flowers and even artfully arranged coffee table books command attention.

The couple wanted the house to be neutral and contemporary, but it had to have a polished, formal look without a lot of fussy details, Meister says.

"We will never wake up and think we are tired of this," he says. "It's simple, it's clean and it's modern. To me, it's about all these great luxurious finishes and textures playing off one tonality. That's a much tougher look to achieve than a hodgepodge of color."

Meister also believes that going gray serves another important purpose.

"Houses should really be the background," he adds. "If you have red rooms with orange furniture and lime-green carpet that becomes the focus, not the people in it."

Siegel puts it another way: "Our personalities are colorful enough."

See more than 100 past Homes of The Times at latimes.com/homesofthetimes.