

FRESH-FACED *and Flirty*

COSMETICS GURU DIMITRI JAMES' RESORT-INSPIRED
HOME GETS AN AGE-DEFYING MAKEOVER

By Linda L. Meierhoffer • Photography by Scott Van Dyke



When Dimitri James and his partner Jack Woods' newly renovated home was unveiled on the Palm Springs Modernism Tour last year, more than a few visitors remarked, "This is a modern home I could live in." The pair, who purchased the property just months earlier, gave Palm Springs-based designer Joel Dessaulles a Herculean task: Complete a color-splashed makeover on the house, built in 1969 but recently updated, by Modernism Week — and before James' Rat-Pack themed 50th birthday bash for 150 guests.

"I saw the house's personality the minute I walked in," says James, founder and CEO of SKINN Cosmetics. "It said elegant, sporty, lots of life, golf course and mountain views — every inch of the place is livable." Dessaulles' job was to incorporate the couple's love of color, comfort, and entertaining in elements of midcentury, Hollywood Regency, and European modern styles for the home's new 21st-century look. Rather than the often seen starkly self-important contemporary, the end result here is both livable and lovable.

A SEAMLESS SANCTUARY

"This room looks good on everybody," James says about the Moroccan-inspired, turquoise-accented cabana room as its funky, lighted wall sign directs visitors "OUT" to the pool, spa, and sun shelf. This playful room, featuring an original oil painting by Mia Luzajic, sets the mood. "My adult children are both married and come here with their friends in tow; they call our home their own private resort," Woods says. "My goal was to make the outside living area feel like a private swim club," adds Dessaulles. To accomplish that aura, the white slump block wall surrounding the pool has been fitted with custom-designed pale aqua gates that diffuse the light from concealed fluorescent bulbs, offering a wow factor from the street after the sun slips behind the San Jacintos.

Although the home emits a posh designer vibe, "bulletproof" indoor/outdoor fabrics cover furniture that may meet soggy swimsuits, and the goal was that the interior décor would never show (or tell) its age. The furnishings are a mix of vintage, custom, and estate sale finds. "Re-use, re-cycle, and re-purpose aren't dirty words," the designer says. Reasonably priced art is treated to the same custom framing as high end pieces. A stool in the master closet is reupholstered in Tibetan lamb, and the leftover plush fur becomes a luscious accent pillow. The deep aqua-colored dining room tabletop was cut from a mineral slab that Dessaulles calculated could also provide beautiful backsplashes for the bathroom vanities. While James and Dessaulles made the majority of the design decisions, Woods, a former hotel owner, managed the budget and completion dates — and oversaw the training of Drake, the couple's new Cavalier King Charles puppy.

BOUTIQUE CHIC

The plush Missoni-inspired master and two softly-appointed en suite guest rooms with their malachite-patterned accent walls sweeten the dreams of overnight guests like a stay at a favorite boutique hotel. "You get a buy one, get one free," says Dessaulles, referring to the complementary fabric on the reverse side of the duvets. He also provided a lot of look for the money with the colorful guest room lamps. "They have a Christopher Spitzmiller vintage vibe, but cost hundreds, rather than thousands, apiece."

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Designer Joel Dessaulles engineered the custom dining table base to gracefully hold the weight of the 1,200-pound exotic mineral slab top, providing a sense of heritage that's offset by the Sputnik chandelier, which features clear crystal spheres and round bulbs for a fresh pop of contemporary glamour. A one-of-a-kind vase by artist Daric Harbor from the Galleria in Palm Springs adds whimsy.



Above: Custom bamboo sofas feature Dwell Studio indoor/outdoor cushions and Larry Laslo Design fabric pillows with a starburst pattern. Three walls are draped in white linen to reduce acoustic noise while providing a rich texture and plush backdrop for brightly colored art. Below left: The vintage breakfast table base is made from lacquered parchment (goat skin) with brass inlay strips; custom Chinese Chippendale side chairs complete the sophisticated look. Below right: Designer Joel Dessales designed the bed in ebonized ceruse oak and softened the look with custom bedding featuring a zig-zag Martyn Lawrence Bullard print from Schumacher. The mirrored desk is paired with a clear Louis Ghost armchair from Kartell.



Vintage stools were re-plated in antique brass and covered with an indoor/outdoor Memphis Design-inspired print. Soft, ambient light from the Capiz shell pendants reflects in both the clear and inlaid antique mirror behind the bar.

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Dessaules says his goal of a “respectful renovation” kept the essential character of the house and allowed for unexpected twists: When a slump block masonry wall was discovered behind drywall in the master bedroom, he repeated the look in the living room and study; the new block is indistinguishable from the original even to the careful observer. Many of the furnishings, both indoors and out, were designed and fabricated by Dessaules. “The Edward Wormley-inspired velvet tufted sofa, flanked by a pair of satin black aluminum side tables with hand-pieced onyx tops reminiscent of Steve Chase, and paired with an Egyptian-inspired hand-carved daybed in the living room makes a one-of-a-kind statement,” he says.

Neighbors say the former homeowners had a life-size Elvis in the living room that could be seen from the fairway behind the home, causing golfers to do a double take. Elvis has left the building, but a Judy Ragagli oil painting of a sultry-eyed Barbie graces one wall of the office that’s outfitted with refurbished airport lounge chairs and custom-designed desk and shelves.



A fringe umbrella shades stainless steel chaise lounges. The pool deck features vintage mesh armchairs and custom chairs and a bench from Trina Turk.

A Robert Mars mixed media of Audrey Hepburn as Holly Golightly hangs over the living room fireplace.

Nearing the one-year anniversary of their move into the house, the couple has made it theirs. “Dimitri continues shopping at antique, consignment, and thrift stores to accessorize the house with period appropriate pieces,” Woods says. And although walls are painted a neutral cream, James’ gregarious, on-air personality can be felt in every room: Vibrant colors saturate the place via glass and ceramics, bedding, rugs and luxurious textiles. “I hate beige hair, beige make up, beige clothes, beige couch, and beige carpet! Color has vibration and the potential to change your mood,” James says.

On the star-struck night of James’ 50th birthday party last year, Hollywood legend Marilyn, in a sparkly column of red sequins, greeted guests. Sammy, Dean and Frank performed for the guest of honor who, as the pied piper of skin care on cable television, coos to his “girls” and sells thousands of shimmery eye shadows and pouty lip colors an hour. After 150 days on the road each year doing what he loves, Dimitri James is all smiles this night in his designer pants and blue suede loafers, joining a crowd that’s twisting and shouting to the music on the shiny white dance floor. He’s home, baby. ✨