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THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

In its second life as a home, a high-flying Boeing 747 comes down to earth in the mountains overlooking Malibu.

Written by Ann Herold
Photographs by Dave Lauridsen

TWILIGHT'S GLEAM
Every so often, the cool, white light from the aircraft's engines pierces the dusk. The Tower Air Fleet once operated the aircraft. An engine opening has been reassembled as a fountain, one of many examples of repurposed materials at this Los Angeles residence.
that a silvery bird of prey with a 125-foot wingspan has come to rest on a Santa Monica Mountains ridge. Home owner Francie Rehwald loves the comparison. "My totem is the red-tailed hawk," she says, and sure enough, one of the rust-colored reptiles looms over the horizon as she talks. In 2008, Rehwald famously brought in by helicopter pieces of a chopped-up Boeing 747 she had purchased for $40,000 from Mark Thomson of Aviation Warehouse in the Mojave Desert. Thomson supplied scrapped aircraft for films and TV but this was the first time a jetliner was becoming a residence. The design by architect David Hertz—Rehwald had asked for something "curvaceous" and eco-responsible—placed one wing atop the living area of the main house, while the tail stabilizer became the roof of a second-story master bedroom suite. Another wing covers the guest quarters and its sweeping terrace.

To decorate the house and landscape the grounds, Rehwald traveled to Bali and returned with thirty shopping containers of textiles, statues, wood artifacts, stone basins, colored rocks, and other items. She also rented the site looking for remnants from former owner Tony Duquette, the interior designer who never met a discard he didn’t like. Duquette’s original compound of 21 whimsical structures had burned in a 1993 wildfire. The Driveway is still lined with surviving bits of metal and ceramics that he had turned into sculptures.

Rehwald, whose family established one of the state’s first Mercedes-Benz dealerships, meets Duquette in the art of repurposing. Enclosing the 3.5-acre estate is a wicker fence with an elegant agave patina. It’s World War II runway material that’s held in place with pipes salvaged from a Bakersfield oilfield. She transforms found pieces of green glass in a cement mixer, placing the tumbled “rocks” in emerald rings around cactus. An entertainment center near the pool has counters and flooring of Syndecrete, Hertz’s patented lightweight concrete composed of recycled industrial materials. She still has plans to incorporate the fuselage into an art studio. When you’re a master of reuse, your work is never done.
PLANE DEALERS

A South Bay company recycles aircraft parts as stylish furniture:

When Dave Hall and Donovan Fell were working for an industrial signages company, Fell's hand-sanded and polished airplane propellers in his spare time. The pieces looked like luminous Branau sculptures, and he sold them for $1,000 each at the Rose Bowl flea market. Fell was happy with the extra cash. Hall saw an opportunity to make even more. In 2002, they debuted MotoArt, now a $4-million company in El Segundo that turns all manner of aircraft parts into polished satins or enamelled-coated home and corporate furnishings. Outfitted wing conference tables with glass tops, reception desks made from engine cowling, stainless steel bar stools. "It's the love of aviation," says Hall of the furniture's appeal. "It's green, it's recycled, it's deep-looking." And it's cool. They pegged one of their "Milo High" beds, made from two DC-9 rear star stabilizers and a C-130 inner flap, atop a golf cart to win a Burning Man Award of Excellence. MotoArt pieces can be pricey—wing desks start at $8,000. More affordable are picture frames made from a plane window ($345) and tank tops fashioned from pilot's ($90). Corporate clients (AOL, Go Daddy, Microsoft, General Electric, and Boeing) are the core of the business. MotoArt oversees fabrication in a shop hung with a WWI Fokker.
Anthony Toth's relationship with the 747 started when he was five and flying with his parents on a Pan Am jet. He gazed upon the walls lining the ocean—the airline's signature decoration on the passenger's seats in red and blue. Felt of cloth was the upper deck, reached by a sliding stairs. From that moment, the childhood of his life was defined by aviation; they were his only toys.

By the time Toth was a junior in college, he was working for United Airlines, and he was managing director for its Western Division. Toth has flown about every airline, but he never got into a Pan Am, which filed for bankruptcy in 1991. He assembled a decommissioned 747 fuselage in his Palos Verdes Beach garage and reconfigured it as a first-class cabin. The top score was when he auctioned a time of two pan Avion items, from decorations to fixtures, that were about to be discarded. What Toth couldn't buy he replicated: the seat fabrics and wallcoverings, the etched-glass partitions. He handed in the upper two, but city officials wouldn't let him build on his premises. So this year he moved his assembly to a City of Industry warehouse, tossed the upper deck, and has plans to construct an airport gate. That way when he walks through the doors, he's a jet again. /A