

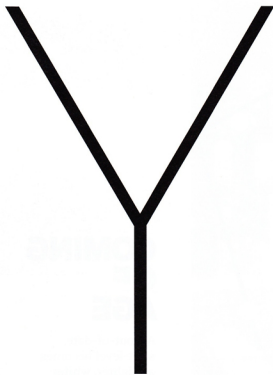


## COMING OF AGE

An out-of-date split-level becomes a brighter, whiter den of high style.

By CAMELA RAYMOND

Photographs by  
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YOU MAY KNOW PACIFIC PALISADES as the salacious setting of Aaron Spelling's 1997 TV series of the same name—a lust- and greed-ridden black hole of suburban Los Angeles philistinism. It made for great entertainment (for some viewers, at least). But to Kelly Zahoudanis and her husband, Alexis, Pacific Palisades was a real place. It was their home, where they spent the last 3 years of a 12-year stint in Los Angeles.

"And then we were just done," says Kelly, with a matter-of-fact flick of her wrist. A ginger-haired former real estate agent, Kelly, 34, shows me around her family's new Southwest Portland split-level. She's barefoot and dressed in sweats, the uniform of her new job as a stay-at-home mom. "We wanted a change of lifestyle," she says, "a place with values and ideals in line with ours."

Nowhere is less La-La Land than Portland, of course—a city that inspires not prime-time soaps and sitcoms, but treatises on *divitis*. So last February, Kelly and Alexis, a commercial-property developer, flew north. Over five cold, rainy days, they explored the Portland heartland, spending the majority of their time in those neighborhoods near downtown that proffer coffee shops on every corner and bike lanes on every street, hoping to claim their own little piece of wholesome Cascadian nirvana.

Instead, after slogging through what felt like every Irving-



Clockwise from above: The Zahoudanis family; (from left) Jack, Alexis, Peter, and Kelly; a new deck gives the front entry greater presence; decals by Blik decorate Jack's room; the kitchen, with a range hood-and-shelf combo designed by Jessica Helgeson.





Pale-green stone tile gives the master bath, which connects to the main bedroom and the study (shown), a peaceful, spa-like feel.

ton Victorian, Laurelhurst Craftsman, and Westmoreland foursquare on the market, Kelly and Alexis found themselves missing their home. Specifically, the flowing spaces of their midcentury-modern California ranch, a design that is rare to nonexistent in Portland's close-in historic districts. "We were somewhat charmed by all those Portland-style bungalows," Kelly recalls, "but the floor plans weren't conducive to open family living."

Moreover, Kelly and Alexis weren't sure they actually needed a coffee shop within walking distance of their house. After all, their real objective was to slow their lives down, find some peace and quiet, and give their toddling boys, 4-year-old Jack and 2-year-old Peter, plenty of room to play. Maybe they really did want to live on a cul-de-sac—just one without the dead-end suburban values they'd fled.

Midway through the house-hunting trip, Kelly and Alexis drove with their real estate

**"The house was such a dog," Helgerson recalls with a guilty laugh. "It had all these small vinyl windows. The kitchen was super-cramped. Inside, everything was mauve."**

agent through the looping streets of Southwest Portland's Bridlemile neighborhood, which is close to the border of Washington County, near Raleigh Hills. The planned midcentury development was, Kelly says with a mix of irony and genuine admiration, a place where the Cleaver family would have felt perfectly at home. And the rambling 1959 split-level they'd come to see actually held some promise.

The living space centered around an open great room, which was located on the main floor; a spacious upper-level master suite; and a daylight basement with three bedrooms and, perhaps most appealing, a sprawling rumpus room where Jack and Peter could spread out their toys. Furthermore, the 14,000-square-foot property was about triple the size of the standard inner-city lot. There was a parklike backyard for the boys to play in, and also a broad, sunny, south-fac-



## Study in Contrast

Bright colors aren't the only way to enliven a drab room. "I like a high-contrast space," says interior designer Jessica Helgerson, who chose white paint and ebony-stained floors for the main portion of the Zahoudanis residence. "People tend to go for beige, thinking it's light and safe. It's much more vibrant to have dark and light, next to each other."

Throughout the home, dark browns, grays, and blacks, which are juxtaposed against pale tints, create a feeling of energy and verve. In the powder room (A), black paint on the ceiling makes the closet-size space feel more expansive (as a rule, dark colors appear to recede from view), while bold patterned wallpaper turns a priming spot into a forest frolic. Floor-to-ceiling chocolate-brown drapery on the wall behind the headboard endows the master bedroom (B) with a feeling of drama. And slate-gray paint transforms a stair landing (C) into a focal point—and also puts the geometric pattern of a white-painted banister in sharp relief. So next time you redecorate, instead of beating yourself up for liking brown, just consider upping the cocoa content.

continued on page 160