

Although it's just 924 square feet, Maria and Louis Gabriel's Los Angeles back house, designed by Jason Kerwin of OKB, packs in a lot of program, including a family room on the ground floor and an office and a guest suite upstairs.

## Breathing Rooms

A backyard dwelling gives a bungalow in Los Angeles some much needed extra space.







**“We didn’t want to wedge something into the site that was out of scale—everything had to just slot in.”**

JASON KERWIN, ARCHITECT

The couple chat with Kerwin on the home’s new deck (above). Lisboa chairs by Joan Gaspar for Design Within Reach surround a table designed by Louis. The ceramic vessel is by Pilar Wiley. A work by Victoria Fu and Matt Rich hangs across from a bookcase by Louis in the family room (right and opposite, bottom). The sofa and ottomans are from Room & Board. Blue Marcato tiles line the pool bathroom (opposite, top).



**Just off a busy thoroughfare and a stone’s throw from a major freeway,** Maria and Louis Gabriel’s street in Los Angeles’s West Adams district is an island of friendly normalcy—the kind of place where neighbors wave and kids ride their bikes and skateboards until the sun goes down. So when the couple outgrew the 1925 two-bedroom, one-bath bungalow they’d bought in 2010, trading up to a big house in the suburbs was off the table. “This community is so vibrant,” says Maria. “We decided to make our home a place we wanted to be in forever.”

The couple had a big checklist: Redo the kitchen, add a bathroom, improve the connection to the backyard, and, for some serious extra space, build a back house with a guest suite, an office for Maria, and a hangout area for the family. Though Maria is an architectural designer who owns a project management firm and Louis is a furniture designer, they were happy to hand over the reins to Jason Kerwin, a principal at OKB Architecture, while taking on general contractor duties themselves.

In addition to transforming the tiny kitchen and laundry into a roomy space with big sliders that open to a new rear deck, Kerwin designed a detached, two-story

structure at the rear. He positioned it to be mostly invisible from the street—no small feat on a lot that’s only 40 feet wide. Then Maria had an epiphany: They should add a pool, a boon for a family with two young sons. Kerwin revised his design, setting a slender pool to one side of the unit and replacing the originally planned roof deck with a roofline that slopes down toward the house. “Once the pool came into play, the deck became a very dangerous place that the kids might be tempted to jump off of,” says Louis. Large windows and tall doorways lend the volume an airiness that belies its size. “It’s only fifteen feet wide,” Kerwin explains. “I didn’t want the addition to engulf the house. I said, ‘Let’s make it a friendly alien that works sympathetically with the neighborhood.’”

With the upstairs of the back house now permitted as an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), the couple have a home that will evolve as the years go by. “The place really comes alive when we’re barbecuing and swimming and sharing drinks and stories,” says Louis of their socially distanced gatherings with friends. Adds Maria, “As the boys grow bigger, the same spaces will be there—they’ll just be activated in a different way.” ■

ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT

