



Photos: Brian Pink



Modern Barn Is

A Work of Art

In Santa Monica, CA, a sprawling residence achieves moodiness and mystique

BY LEONORA DESAR

A tranquil body of water near the façade acts as a reflecting pool, welcoming visitors inside.

Opposite: Steeply pitched, 60-deg ceilings posed a design challenge.

When you hear the word barn, you probably envision a rustic, bucolic setting, complete with cows, horses and perhaps a wheelbarrow or two. A newly renovated residence in Santa Monica, CA, dubbed the modern barn, defies this kind of thinking. With its vast 15,000-sq ft interior and state-of-the-art lighting system, the residence straddles the best of both worlds—a contemporary aesthetic coupled with the steeply pitched ceilings found in farmhouses and traditional homes.

“This house was really about the drama and the moodiness and making it feel really com-

fortable and warm,” says Erin Erdman, owner and principal of eSquared Lighting in Redondo Beach, CA. “The other big factor is that the client is an art collector. We had to design a museum-grade way of lighting the art while dealing with some challenging ceiling conditions.”

ECLECTIC ELEGANCE

In the main living room space, the ceilings are two stories high and pitched at a 60-deg angle, making recessed lighting impossible. To come up with a solution, Erdman worked with the architect, Rios Clementi Hale Studios in Los Angeles, to

introduce long, linear tracks. “We used one piece of surface-mounted recessed track on each pitch of the roof to keep it clean and modern,” Erdman says, “and we ran the track the entire length of the ceiling. We didn’t break it into segments because we wanted it to look just like a slat, a very thin slat all the way across the ceiling plane.”

The solution gave the team flexibility to put fixtures wherever they needed to light the client’s collection of eclectic, modern art, and to illuminate the living space. The track lighting also avoids hotspots and reduces contrast ratios, while preventing light from hitting the ceiling

plane. “It’s very unflattering if you get stray light that hits the ceiling from the track heads,” Erdman says. “We were able to make sure that didn’t happen by cross-aiming the fixtures.”

To complicate matters, the pitched ceilings vary from double-story to single-story height. For the double-story ceilings, the team used MR16 lamps with spot optics, allowing them to light from a distance, and changed to a narrow flood optic in the single-story spaces. “The track solved a lot of our problems,” Erdman says.

The interior is a hybrid of MR16 and LED recessed fixtures, the latter used to achieve Califor-



The owner's eclectic collection of modern art is illuminated by MR16 fixtures.

nia Title 24 compliance in select areas. The team was driven in part by budget, as the MR16s were less costly than specification-grade LEDs. The MR16s were also ideal for highlighting the art. “They give you many more beam-spread options than the LED fixtures,” Erdman says. “There were small pieces of art, there were large pieces of art, and the client will also rotate his collection. The flexibility was better.”

Several layers of illumination—provided by downlighting, track lighting and decorative lamps used to soften up the spaces—can be combined into different preset scenes and moods. “A house-wide control system allows the owner to toggle between any lighting scene so that he’s not adjusting 10 different dimmers every time he goes into his living room,” Erdman says. “But

on a normal, everyday basis, he lives in a lower, moodier light setting. We designed the system to accommodate these requirements.”

MAGIC IN THE MOONLIGHT

The exterior is no less ambient and dreamy. As one walks to the front door, the eye is drawn to a serene pool of water, which was left unilluminated so that it would act as a reflecting pool. The team only integrated light below its walkway, a linear LED that makes the structure look as if it’s floating. “The reflecting pool is black, so it’s a very subtle effect,” Erdman says.

At the entry, 17-ft tall metal vertical fins add depth and texture to the building façade. The team placed a small-scale LED uplight with a spot optic between each fin so that light grazes all the



At night, the residence achieves a lantern effect, with its softly lit windows and glowing olive tree.

way up, and the center beam hits the top of the building. “They became such a beautiful media to light,” Erdman says. “The fins are a dark gray, so the impact is subtle. The [gray] color of the building also dampened the light, so it doesn’t feel overwhelming.” A visitor at the entry would not only see the fins, but the glowing house beyond, which achieves what Erdman describes as a lantern effect. “When you go camping and have a lantern, it has that nice, soft glow to it,” Erdman says. “The house has that same impact at night—all of the windows are pushing light to the outdoors.”

Adding to the moodiness is a stately olive tree, illuminated with burial uplights. The lights show off the tree’s sculptural silhouette and pick up on the dark green color of the leaves. The designers used tree-mounted downlights to illuminate the yoga deck that lives below, bringing out the rich texture of the wood. You can’t see the light source, so it looks as if the deck itself is glowing. “The downlights created a dapple effect on the ground,” Erdman says. “It looks as if there’s moonlight coming through the trees.”

The downlights, as well as the other luminaires throughout the exterior landscape, are MR16 fixtures retrofitted with LED lamps, which helped the team with costs. The team also saved money by lighting only greenery that was part of a larger scene.

The sense of moonlit magic and drama, both in the exterior and interior, are what Erdman likens to a theatrical play. “When you talk about theater, you’re talking about all the different designers coming together to create one show that feels very integrated,” Erdman says. “You leave and think, ‘That was really amazing,’ but you don’t think, ‘Oh the lighting was good or the set designer was good.’ You just come away with this sense of, ‘Wow, that was fantastic.’ ” □

THE DESIGNER



Erin Erdman, IALD, Member IES (2005), is principal of eSquared Lighting, Redondo Beach, CA.

FAST FACTS

- Track lighting solves the problem of steeply pitched ceilings and illuminates an extensive art collection.
- The interior is a hybrid of MR16s and LEDs.
- The exterior enhances the moody ambience with a reflecting pool and illuminated greenery.