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HOME STYLE



The living room of Cassandre and Dennis Lynch's Eichler home in Orange is complete with vintage furniture.

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JOSEPH EICHLER'S NEIGHBORHOODS REMAIN AS POPULAR AS THEY WERE WHEN FIRST DEVELOPED IN THE 1950s AND 1960s.

Story by JENNIFER J. MEYER | FOR THE REGISTER
Photos by NICK KOON | ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Dennis and Cassandre DeleFortrie Lynch laugh about stalking the Eichler-built neighborhoods in Orange to find their modern dream home. They had to be vigilant because they knew the homes rarely came up for sale.

The sensibility of the modern architecture appealed to their creative natures. Dennis, a filmmaker, and Cassandre, a costume designer, had been living in Los Angeles in 2005 when their lives changed.

A trip to Orange County led to stopping at an open house in Orange's Fairmeadows neighborhood. Within an hour of the home tour, they had put in an offer.

"I thought, 'This is the craziest day,'" Cassandre said.

"Little did she know, it was about to get crazier," Dennis added. He had been planning to propose that day at Disneyland.

Today the couple is married with two young girls. They have worked hard to restore their midcentury modern marvel back to its glory days.

When the couple bought the home, many of the original Eichler features, including the kitchen cabinets, globe lights and mahogany paneling, were gone.

"All the bones were intact," Cassandre said. But the previous owners had tried to turn the house into a country home complete, with faux Tiffany lights and a large oak mantel. And the classic Eichler cinderblock walls were hidden in heavy stucco.

"It took two 10-hour days to chisel that off," Dennis said.

For several years, the couple scavenged for original Eichler parts, rescuing mahogany paneling from a neighbor, finding the midcentury kitchen cabinets on Craigslist and three globe light fixtures at a rummage sale.

"We wanted to be purists, or at least stay in the spirit of how it originally looked," Dennis said. And small details make a difference, down to the escutcheon around the handle on the front door. He ordered the circular, decorative metal piece from a machinist, who had designed it as a replacement for his own Eichler home.

"We bought this house because we'll probably never be grown up," Cassandre said. "We wanted a place for our toys."



[Top] Vintage furniture complements the dining area. [Left] Glass panels allow views into the house from the enclosed front yard. [Below] The home is a classic Eichler design that includes a two-car garage.





Cassandre and Dennis Lynch with their two children, Francesca, left, and Bianca.

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Dennis's favorite: the 1961 AMI Continental jukebox once owned by Dean Martin. It's "the jewel of the house," he said. Cassandre bought it as an engagement present. A framed record album, "Discotheque" by the Dovells, hangs on the wall behind. The 1964 album has a picture of the jukebox on its cover.

"The houses were meant to be minimalist, and we're not," Dennis said.

Designed by renowned architects A. Quincy Jones and Frederick Emmons, the Lynches' California Modern-style home is nestled among the 128 houses in the Fairmeadows tract built by Eichler Homes in the early 1960s. Developer Joseph Eichler built most of his 10,000-plus homes in Northern California. He expanded by adding 600 homes in Southern California in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with 350 of those in three tracts in Orange.

Eichler's open floor plans, floor-to-ceiling-glass, light-infused rooms and indoor-outdoor livability took advantage of Southern California's warm weather. The homes offered deep overhangs, generous use of glass and an open-air atrium.

"What makes them great is the light," said architect Todd Gannon, who teaches architectural history at the Southern California Institute of Architecture in Los Angeles. "The plans were very clever in how they work with the different orientations."

The Eichler models in Orange range from about 1,800 to 2,100 square feet, but the houses seem bigger because of the glass, he said. The main living spaces were quite generous compared with the bedrooms and bathrooms, which are small by today's standards.

"The houses are inwardly focused," Gannon said. "The front facades have no windows or very small windows, which isolates them from the street. And there are no front porches."

Cars were given a place of honor in carports in front of each home. During the '60s, the type of automobile one owned was a symbol of success, he said. "It makes less sense today."

The neighborhoods are autocratic, with limited destinations that are easily walkable.

"There's an Eichler attitude," said Gannon, who lives in the Eichler-built Fairhaven tract. Homeowners consider shortcomings just part of the modern sensibility.

"This is the first house I've ever lived in where the architecture didn't drive me crazy." He appreciates the intelligence of the plan and how he can watch his daughters from almost any place in the house.

The neighborhoods tend to draw people who work in creative fields, including many architects. With the large number of families with young children moving in, the demographics seem to be returning to how they were when the homes were built. Progressive dinners and fondue parties are still part of the community spirit.

"Eichler homes are sought after; they don't stay on the market for long," said Kelly Laude, a broker with Oaktree Realtors. "They have their own market and demand."

"There are always buyers waiting for the right one," said Laude, who specializes in Eichler sales. Some may want a certain floor plan. A purist may be looking for one that's original and untouched. Others may want an updated model.

"We have had people looking for years before they purchase and people that see one for the first time and fall in love."

The cost of owning an Eichler depends on the condition of the home and differs among the neighborhoods. Selling prices over the past six months ranged from the mid-\$600,000s to \$850,000, she said.

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Period pieces



[Top] A vintage Philco TV accents the dining area. [Left] Even the lamps are vintage. [Below] A jukebox once owned by Dean Martin is one of the home's focal points.



MODERNISM SHOW & SALE

Modernism Week takes place this year in Palm Springs from Feb. 13 to 23, with architectural tours and other events, including a sale featuring furniture, art, lighting, textiles and more. For information, visit modernismweek.com.