

HOME

REFRESH. REMODEL. RE-IMAGINE.

El Segundo design firm About:Space realigns modern work and living spaces

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(previous page) Luxurious simplicity in Brentwood, photo by Erhard Pfeiffer. (this page, clockwise from left) Sunny Mediterranean in Manhattan Beach, photo by Nicole Leone; Asian-inspired along a Naples, California canal, photo by Charles Chesnut; Romantic villa touches in Manhattan Beach, photo by Nicole Leone; Thoughtfully sleek in Brentwood, photo by Erhard Pfeiffer; Cozy Coastal in El Segundo, photo by photo by Nicole Leone.

In 2001, Josette Murphy was gearing up to take a short sabbatical from her gig at global design firm Gensler. It had been a busy seven years since she joined the powerhouse firm fresh out of college, and the designer was ready to recharge her creative senses.

“It was exhilarating and exhausting,” Murphy says of that time. As she got ready to kick off her sabbatical, a few personal acquaintances approached her to work on their residential projects. Since the projects wouldn’t conflict with Gensler (which only does workplace—not residential—design), Murphy accepted.

“I found myself on day one of my sabbatical with three projects,” the designer recounts. “As busy as I was at the firm, I was just as busy with my own projects. And I was loving it.”

The business About:Space was then born. These days, Murphy and her team—which includes longtime senior designer Christina Meneses, along with designers Cheri Carbajal and Tecola Robinson—work from a charming brick-front studio in downtown

El Segundo. It’s a tight-knit collaborative crew. Stopping by the studio on a blustery, downpour day, Robinson is coming in from inspecting progress on a job site, while Carbajal is poring over CAD floorplans. There are fabric swatches and rolls of architectural plans neatly laid out around the place.

The firm does both residential and workplace design, but with a greater number of projects in the former versus the latter. “It’s nice to have that balance of the two kinds of work,” notes Murphy. On workplace design: “It’s fun to vision in sync, so the space reflects the personality of the company, what is being projected in the public, and to visually and practically support that.”

The longevity and success of Murphy’s firm can be chalked up in part to an easy fluency across styles. Projects range from elegant coastal remodels to decorating a classical Italian villa to re-visioning an airy, ceiling-beamed beach cottage to producing sleek, contemporary properties along the Strand. But it’s a deep technical understanding of architecture and building that allows them to optimize any design opportunity in a given space. “I love to buy area rugs, and pick fabric and mess around with tile,” says Murphy. “But there’s a lot more to it.”

That’s because About:Space is a design firm, versus a decorating firm. “People understand what a decorator does. Everyone understands what an architect does. We’re something in between.” The difference? “When it comes to remodeling we do everything you’d expect an architect to do, but where we draw the line is we don’t design buildings from the ground up.” This means knock down walls. Re-configure an existing floorplan or even make a dated but structurally sound home look refreshingly *au courant*, as was the case with a 90s-esque, Manhattan Beach Mediterranean. Rather than tear it down, About:Space re-cast it as a fresh Coastal Plantation. “Often it doesn’t make sense to tear it down,” says Murphy. “But you can remodel [the interior] and re-style the façade.”

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