



Stepping Up

A Manhattan Beach couple takes on a new house, twins and community involvement during a whirlwind year.

When Jonathan Levey and Melanie Barr-Levey decided to put down roots and build a home, they picked Manhattan Beach for its small-town vibe. “It has a real family feeling to it, and we love that we can walk to the beach and restaurants,” says Melanie.

At the time, they had no idea how many life changes would occur in the following 12 months and how important it would be to them to have found such a family-friendly place.

Jonathan has a lot of experience in the real estate market, so he recognized that the original house on the deep lot in Manhattan Beach was a good buy. Working with Bobby Rees as the architect and John Stone as the builder, Jonathan and Melanie worked through the design process together.

“We made a list of things we really wanted in a house, while we took the deep lot into consideration for building purposes,” says Melanie.

Taking the time to explore various architectural styles of the area, Jonathan and Melanie spent days looking at houses in the South Bay. “We were really torn between the Mediterranean and Cape Cod styles,” says Jonathan.



However, when they happened upon a soft, light blue-grey, shingled house in the tree section of Manhattan Beach, they both knew that was the style of house they wanted. “We didn’t want a really dark grey shingle that’s more historically referenced like the homes on Nantucket. This shingle felt light and contemporary,” says Melanie.

That leisurely process was soon expedited when Melanie found out she was pregnant with twins. All of a sudden, they were thrown into the midst of building a home and having two children in the same year. With that realization, they started making firm decisions about what was really important in their new home. “We had certain architectural elements that we wanted to incorporate, such as the soft arches and tray ceilings,” says Melanie.

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The couple also had to make an important decision about whether to build a two-story home with high ceilings or a three-story home with more traditional-height ceilings. “I’m tall, and it just felt better to have higher ceilings. So we went with two stories and put a lot of effort into finding great lighting for the spaces,” says Jonathan.

Melanie brought in interior designer Caroline Burke to help with furnishing the house. “I wanted a soft palette throughout the house, so we used various shades of grey both inside and out,” says Melanie.



While the house feels like a contemporary Cape Cod-influenced home, there are playful elements throughout. The downstairs powder room has bold wallpaper and an ornate mirror for a more feminine, fun feeling. An oversized capiz shell chandelier anchors the dining room, while a traditional-shaped urn chandelier is made from blue-green shells in the foyer. The bedrooms and bathrooms continue the palette with Carrara marble and fabrics and paint tones in white, silver and grey.

Both Jonathan and Melanie work from home, so creating two home offices was critical to the design of the house. Melanie, an insurance consultant and president of Barr Insurance Services, is also the co-chair for Step Up Women’s Network of Los Angeles. Step Up has made an impactful change across the country for girls and young women in under-resourced areas to achieve their potential.



“We help high school girls become confident, college-bound, career-focused young women through both after-school programs and mentoring,” says Melanie. After three years as chair for the Los Angeles Step Up board, Melanie is proud of the progress they’ve made. “For the past five years, 100% of our seniors have graduated from high school and been accepted to college,” she says.



Not many people can build a house, have twins, run a consulting company and co-chair a valuable community resource program, but Melanie has made the past two years look easy. The house is evolving as the twins grow and Melanie and Jonathan are finally settling into their new home. “I think we’re going to take some time as a family to enjoy the house and our new community, and enjoy the pace of life in the South Bay,” says Jonathan.

Manhattan Beach is as fortunate to have the Levey family involved in the community as the Levey family is to have found such a family-friendly place to call home.