



Exterior at dusk



Exterior daytime



Entry

**Client:** Rand and Jeanette Elliott  
**Scope:** Renovation of a private residence  
 3,700 s.f.

**Description:**

On April 22, 1889, more than 50,000 land-hungry settlers gathered in the heart of Indian Territory. They were there for the world’s greatest “horse race,” the run into Oklahoma country. At high noon the cannons sounded and the dash for free farms and town lots began. When the dust had settled that evening, Oklahoma City was born.

Eleven years later, Anton Classen and several civic leaders plotted Classen’s Highland Park addition, a distant mile north of downtown. Over the next two decades, it would become the opulent, most elegant and prestigious neighborhood in the state. The Texas attorney who wrote Oklahoma City’s managerial form of government purchased the lot next door to the Overholser Mansion in February 1910, Richard Robert Bell. After a trip to Italy where the Bells saw a villa they loved, they returned to Oklahoma City and began work on a new home using elements of that design.

The two-story house that rose from the red clay soil had a mixture of Italianate and Italian villa architectural elements. The Italianate style was evident in the wide eaves, flat roof, long veranda porch, rectangular floor plan, formal balance of component parts and pronounced detailing and moldings. The Italian villa influences were seen in the arched openings and the elaborate medallion brackets.

Bell would live in this beautiful home until his death in the early 1940s and Mrs. Bell would remain there until 1950. They then sold it to Crawford D. Bennett, Jr., who lived there until January 1988. An architect, Rand Elliott, and his wife Jeanette, who is creative director of a leading Southwest advertising agency, purchased the house in August of 1988.

The concept developed for the house is “ghosts,” the ghosts of the previous owners, the lives lived there, the memory of an earlier time. The “ghost” concept is seen in the use of natural light, the color white, luminous, translucent materials and fragments of the original structure. It is a space painted with light where new and old live together in harmonious contrast and appreciation. The old is embellished, while the new takes on a fresh new energy.

The entry sets the tone for the “ghost” concept to unfold. A second entry door, once covered over, has been recovered. The opening becomes an infill panel floating in an ice-like outline. This “icing” process, patented by the architect, is used extensively throughout the house; its shadowy, translucent quality is central to the ghostly illusion. A 1953 drawing by French architect, Le Corbusier, hangs on the panel. The tired asphalt floor tile was removed to uncover original oak floors. Existing iron levers remain on the doors and the imported Italian plaster angels are spotlighted from adjacent fixtures. The entire entry floor is splashed with light patterns from framing projector lights above. The stair is

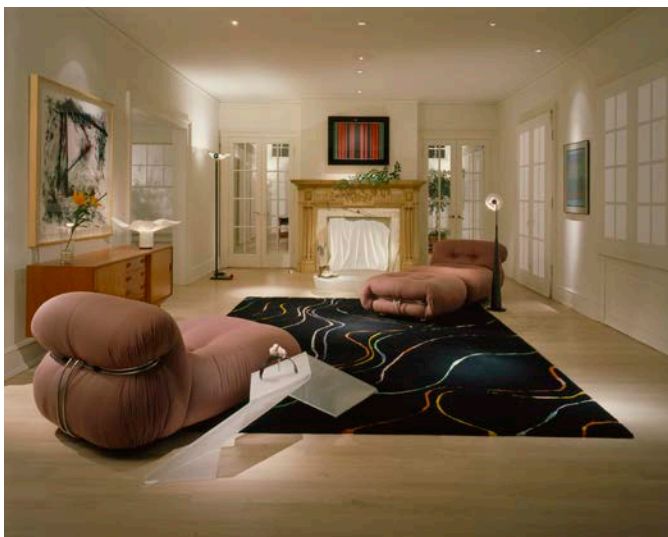
# V I L L A B E L L A



Entry with guest bath and stair on right.

original and seems inspired by Charles Rennie Macintosh. Best of all, a small plaster bell adorns every door in the house, the romantic signature of the original owner. A guest bath off the entry, once a part of the entry porch, includes a contemporary, custom-made toilet to contrast with the original pedestal sink, now cracked from age. Behind the sink, Elliott's ice-like material appears in a curved and perforated, freestanding screen. A large mirror features a 3" diameter truck mirror as a centerpiece. The screen covers a window, so it glows by day, and with the evening sun becomes alive with dotted light and shadows of the trees outside. A bare bulb on a coiling cord supplements lighting.

Little has changed in the living area, beyond new low voltage lighting, white paint, and whitened oak floors. The crown and door moldings are original, as are the fireplace carvings, which have been left in their original condition and color. A sculptural glass has replaced the gas logs designed to reflect, in the artist's words, "the Zen-like energy of the space."



Living area

"Broken" openings were created to 'open' the house allowing access between the living area, kitchen and staircase. Their irregular shape suggests that these new openings are not original, and wood wall studs on the floor indicate where original walls were located . . . another ghost of the past.

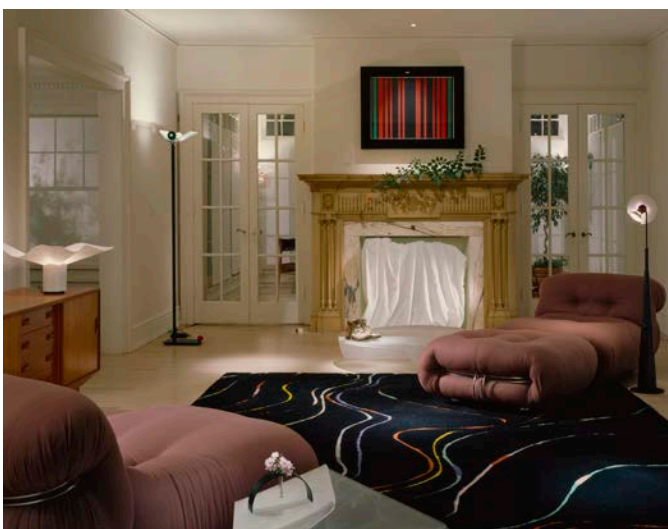
The original sun porch has been converted into a music room with eight pairs of operable French windows. In contrast, wall lights are fashioned from a wall-mounted electrical box, a slab of the ice material, a coil cord and a bare lamp.

The dining room has wonderful carved wood molding and a plaster wedding cake ceiling. The concept for this room is to let it be art in and of itself. The ceiling glows as floor lights softly enhance the moldings.

The "ice sculpture" dining table glows. Its only tabletop detail is a series of five recessed glass test tubes in the top to provide water vials for fresh flowers. The glow and shadows from the translucent window shades enhance the soft "ghost-like" ambiance.

The new kitchen was conceived as sculpture, not as a kitchen with cabinets. The center island is a 12' long granite counter top ending with a 3' diameter black disc; the center of energy for the house.

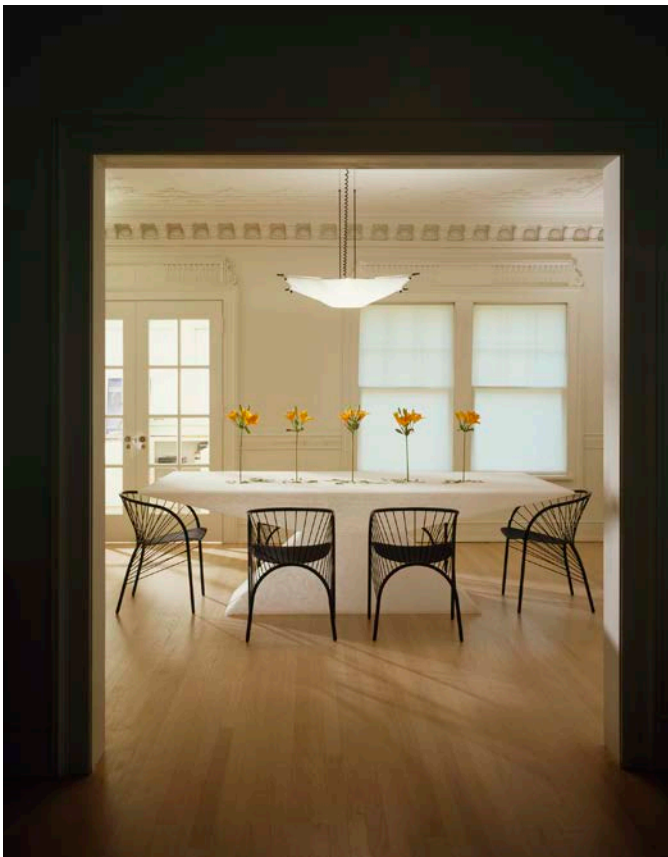
Lighting is provided by a 12-volt wire light system stretched its full length. Cabinets were conceived as translucent towers for storage where the contents are slightly visible through the scratched plexiglass material. Even the hinges become soft, white, ghost-like dots. The base cabinets float above the Japanese tile floor with a curving bottom edge. Additionally, the refrigerator is covered with the ice-like material and a clock hangs on the wall above the flowing plastic splash plates that overlap the windows beyond. The utility room beyond is separated from the kitchen by ice-like bi-fold doors, equipped with finger holes for easy opening.



Living area



Detail of fireplace with sculptural glass



Dining room

Upstairs, the southwest bedroom has original wood moldings, French windows and a pair of French doors to the balcony. The bed is a childhood heirloom, stripped to raw wood. The ice-like freestanding slab is a picture frame for a black and white photograph.

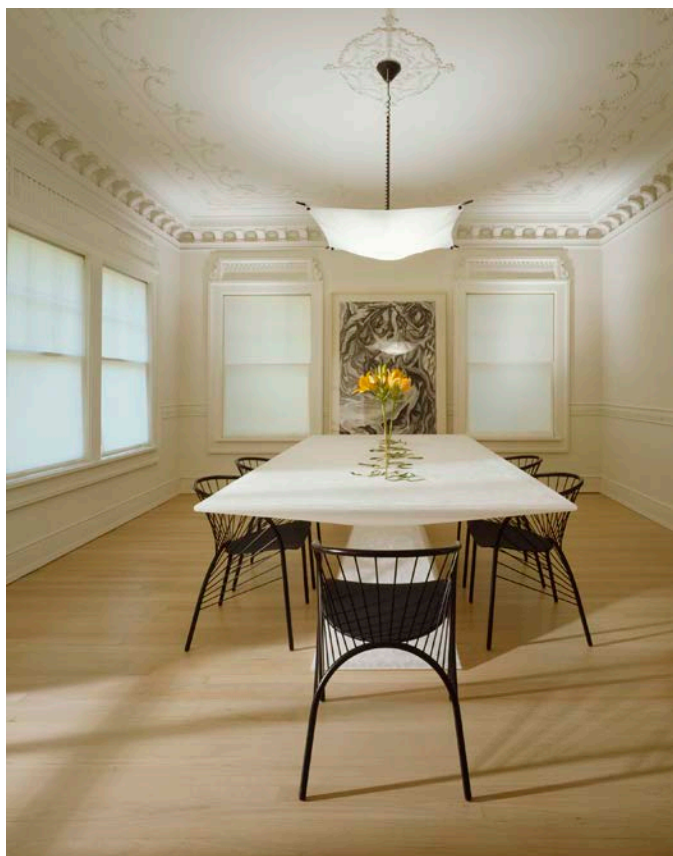
The concept for the upstairs hallway is an art gallery. It now includes pieces of broken mirror on the floor illuminated from lighting above to create a wall of patters from the reflections. On the opposite wall hang three Le Corbusier drawings. The hall gallery flows into the master bedroom, through double doors adorned with the signature plaster bells.

The master bedroom is a result of combining two bedrooms from the original plan. Where walls were removed, the original studs appear in the floor. The fireplace is original except the new white iridescent glass surround. Iridescent glass has replaced the original glass stove inserts, again to reinforce the ongoing dialogue between old and new. A new floating wall forms closet space, with light from within to outline the shape. The adjacent sun room has become a study with marvelous arched windows; all operable from the outdoor floor boxes.

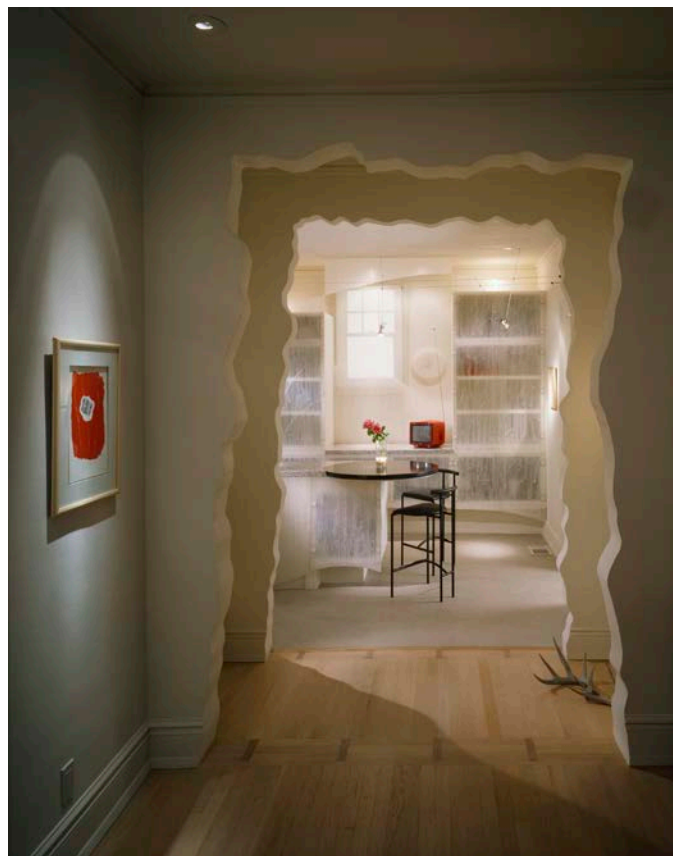
What appears to be a pair of doors into the master bath comes alive as it mysteriously revolves to reveal the space beyond. What was once an old-fashioned tile bathroom is now an island of ice-like forms in a sweeping curvilinear counter top, walls, a carved tub, translucent shower and free standing cabinet, all of which glow from the natural light. Recessed low voltage fixtures and a framing projector have provided lighting to spill light patterns onto the floor.

One afternoon, the Contractor contacted Mr. Elliott to come by the house after work; he had a surprise. The workers had discovered a pair of workmen's boots placed inside a wall cavity during the original construction in 1920. They appeared to be the boots of a plasterer whose laces had been broken so many times they had laced that twine into the eyelets and the soles and heel were completely worn through. Little did the Elliotts know that a few months after the inception of the concept about "ghosts" that they would actually uncover the remnants of a real "ghost." Surely, the plasterer is smiling today, wherever he may be.

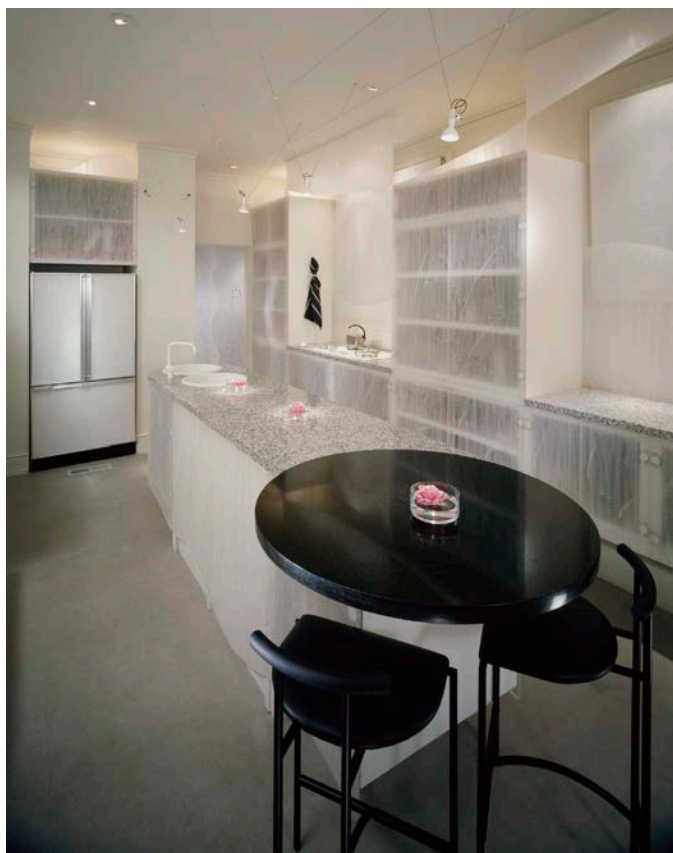
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Dining room



View through "broken" opening to kitchen



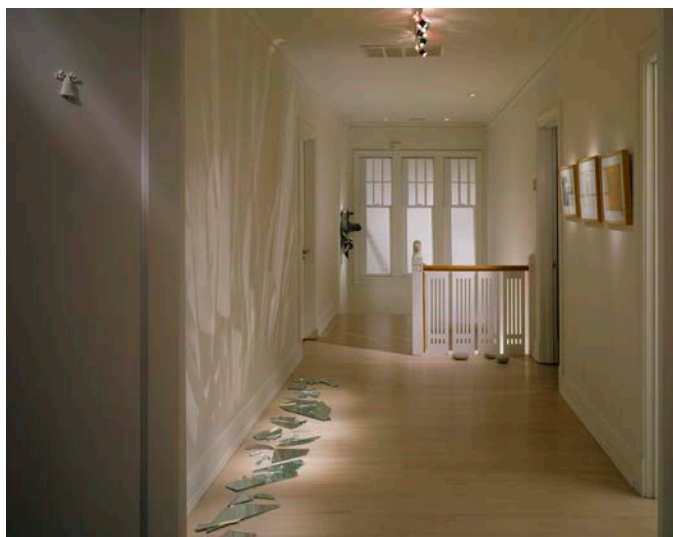
Kitchen



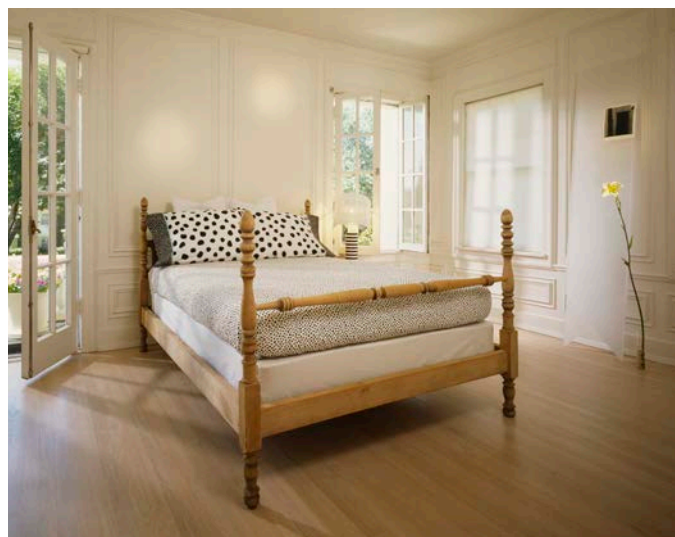
View through "broken" opening to stair

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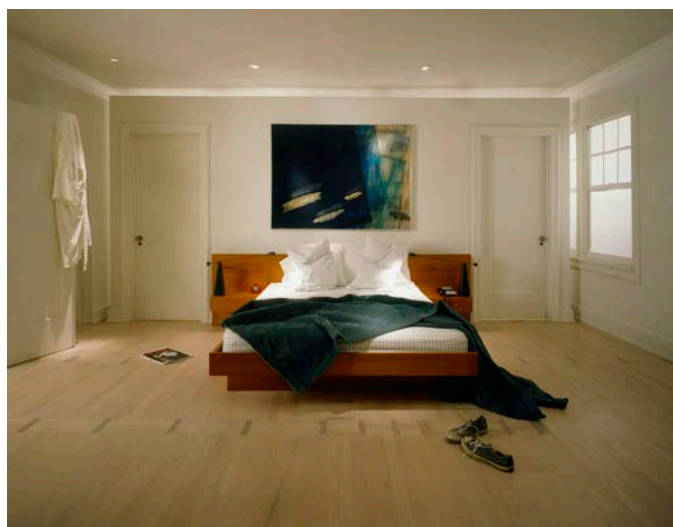
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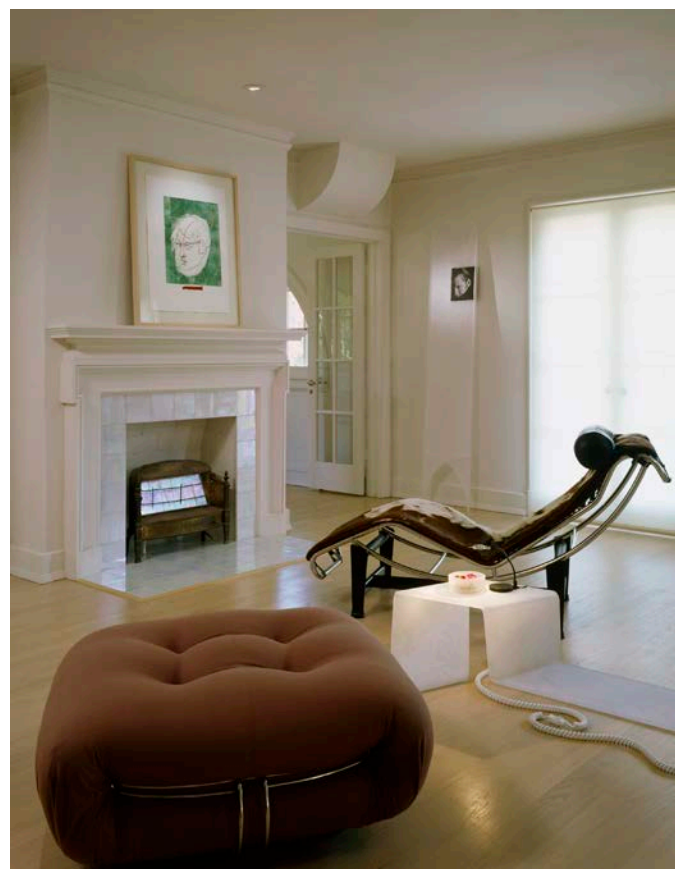
Upstairs hall/art gallery



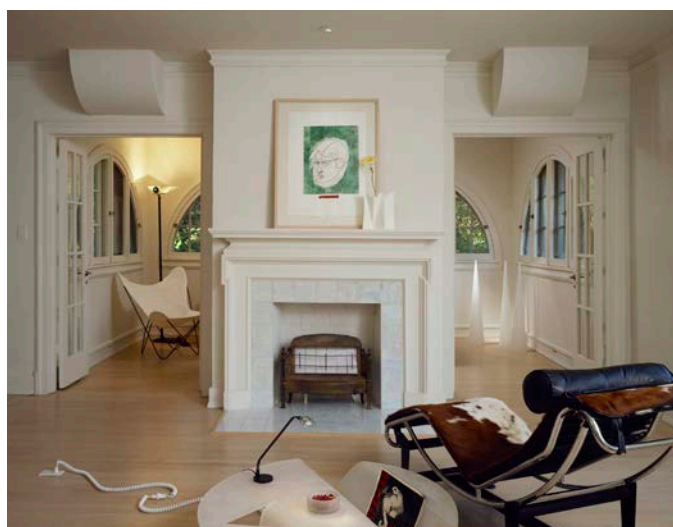
Southwest bedroom



Master bedroom



Master bedroom with original fireplace



Master bedroom with adjacent sun room/study

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Master bath with revolving door



Master bath