



# Den Mother

Designer Bridgid Coulter finds creative sustenance—and a family haven—in her indoor-outdoor home in Los Angeles

Written by [Melissa Goldstein](#) Photographed by [Trevor Tondro](#) Produced by [Sarah Storms](#)



Poolside living, Bridgid Coulter—style. Dress by Diane von Furstenberg. Necklace and earrings, Lia Sophia. Fashion styling by Christie Wittenborn. Hair, Jasmine Todd. Makeup, Angie Wells. Prop styling by Laurie Raab.



The outdoor grill and bar area on the pool deck.

**B**ridgid Coulter thinks vertically. “I wanted our house to have high ceilings because I thought the kids should grow up with lofty spaces,” she says. “I feel ideas can float when you have room and clarity.” Statements like this may sound, in Coulter’s own words, “a bit woo-woo,” but when you visit her multilevel residence (which she designed with architect Bruce Bolander) in Santa Monica Canyon, Los Angeles, it’s hard not to be a believer.

The experience is a bit like stepping into a Folgers commercial, if the commercial costarred Oscar-nominated actor Don Cheadle (Coulter’s beau of 22 years) and was art-directed by, say, Lisa Bonet. The smoky-sweet smells of freshly brewed coffee and chai waft through the kitchen. The couple’s teenage daughters, 17-year-old Imani and 19-year-old Tai—the latter a college student visiting home from Boston—seem to actually look forward to hanging out with their parents. And streaming sunlight suffuses the neutral-tone spaces, whose walls are dotted with pewter Ethiopian Coptic crosses and tribal masks picked up in markets in Johannesburg.

FRANK & OAK

LOOK EXPENSIVE  
WITHOUT  
PAYING EXPENSIVE.

SHOP NOW

Despite the artful global touches, it's the seamless interior flow—a network of interconnected lounges, secluded nooks, and tree-framed outdoor terraces—that is the home's most striking feature. "I was a space planner first," explains Coulter, a Northern California native and self-described nerd who passed up a college engineering scholarship to study theater at UCLA. "I start with how you walk through the place and the overall picture. What are the textures? What are the colors? What do you want to feel when you come home?"



At one end of the pool, a raised banquette provides a spot for relaxing in the shade.



Coulter and daughters (from left) Tai, 19, and Imani, 17, enjoy a casual picnic in the bamboo-shrouded backyard.



A sitting area by the pool is dressed in contrasting woods and complementary patterns.



In the process of asking herself such questions while in the midst of her own remodel, Coulter—who took a hiatus from her acting career to raise her daughters—began to embrace decorating as a second calling. “I got deep into Candice Olson’s HGTV show *Divine Design*,” she admits. She went on to pursue her masters in interior design at UCLA, which laid the groundwork for a thriving business built on word-of-mouth referrals. Today her clients include Matt Damon, Oliva Munn, and Alfre Woodard, and she launched a textile line last winter with a collection whose angular motifs channel such wide-ranging influences as Jeep safari tracks and ’70s-style florals.



Seated on vintage Kantha throws, Coulter works on the next collection of her eponymous textile line.

Of course, Coulter’s own residence was her breakthrough project. “I wanted it to be a sanctuary. I’m in love with the dark wood of Craftsman houses and I like to play with modernism, but mainly I hoped it would feel like the kids could run around and nothing’s too precious,” she says. “The hanging-out factor is important, because everyone in my family is a homebody, and we’ve made a place where we can do that.”



Coulter and Don Cheadle gather with their daughters on an upstairs deck, whose oversize table has been commandeered for games of Ping-Pong.



Tai joins her father in a round of dominoes on the upstairs terrace.



The home's indoor-outdoor flow affords the tight-knit clan countless spaces to enjoy each other's company.

It's not unusual, for example, to find the Coulter-Cheadle clan picnicking in their yard amid blue crown passion flowers and towering decade-old bamboo, or engaging in any number of after-dinner diversions—Monopoly, Scrabble, Ping-Pong, even an Xbox Dance Central battle. “Everybody works hard, so you’ve got to play,” Coulter explains, before adding with the arch of an eyebrow: “But maybe it’s not playfulness so much as competitiveness.” And lest you think her earth-mother leanings translate to a household in which everyone is a winner: “Someone’s got to go down.” (To wit: Coulter and Cheadle have long since agreed to a chess détente due to the heated nature of their game.)

“My favorite thing is to hang with my little crew. I just like them as people and enjoyed every moment of raising them.”

—BRIDGID COULTER

The atmosphere has a feeling of a low-key yet exclusive club whose members are only too happy to keep it that way. “My favorite thing is to hang with my little crew. I just like them as people and enjoyed every moment of raising them,” says Coulter. “They’re braver than me. They curse way too much, but they’re so grounded.” Granted, even the tightest of families require a certain amount of alone time: “We have a lot of intimate spaces so you can retreat when everyone is getting on your nerves.” Coulter clocks hours poolside practicing her own particular form of meditation: sketching. She’s currently putting the finishing touches on the color studies and designs for her latest batch of textiles, which evoke tribal wood carvings in geometric patterns and are set to debut this summer.

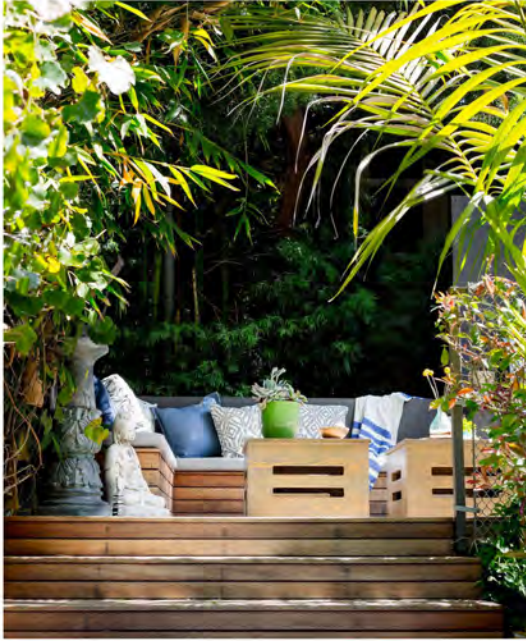


Alongside her decorating career, Coulter has also made a return to acting. Last year she appeared in the Walter Mosley play *White Lilies*, staged at the prestigious Crossroads Theatre, in New Brunswick, New Jersey; she just filmed a guest spot on Cheadle's Showtime series, *House of Lies*, and she's toying with the idea of mounting a production of Bill Manhoff's Broadway comedy *The Owl and the Pussycat*. It's not overstating the case to call this latest phase of her career a renaissance. As she puts it, "I'm excited about this time in my life, and I want to let my voice be heard. I like to be in the background, and I've done that a lot for the last 12 years, but right now I have something to share."

In a bid to unearth her full potential in both the decorative and performance realms, Coulter is taking classes with acting coach Kim Gillingham, whose Carl Jung-influenced methodology hinges on a process called "creative dream work" in which students are guided to tap into the unconscious to help reap their artistic promise. "It's a type of meditation where you invite creativity," Coulter explains. "But I already feel like I'm living in a dream."



Coulter's elegant yet carefree design sensibility also extends to her personal style.



## WORLDLY GOODS

The method behind designer Bridgid Coulter's well-traveled look? "I start with the color palette, selecting one or two accent colors to feature, then layer in depth and visual interest through furniture, lighting, accessories, and surface materials," she says. The following are her five no-fail, high-low destinations, both online and brick-and-mortar.

**ANTHROPOLOGIE** Coulter shops the retail bazaars of the boho-chic mother ship for "colorful knobs, hooks, bins, throws, frames, and more."

**BERBERE WORLD IMPORTS** If you can't stop by in person to see the 50,000-square-foot Culver City design mecca—filled with mother-of-pearl dressers, chinoiserie lamps, and Turkish rugs—you can shop a sampling of its far-flung handcrafted items online. "I'm a fan of their carved-wood mirrors and vintage artifacts—I once sourced a perfect set of giant old sake jugs here," Coulter says.

**MECOX GARDENS** Specializing in indoor-outdoor living, this home and garden emporium has eight locations across the country and stocks everything from vintage coral sculptures to antique wicker armchairs. "Their art and accessories are fun and moderately priced, and they're always receiving new inventory," says Coulter.

**PAT MCGANN GALLERY** Take-out-a-second-mortgage-worthy textiles are the order of the day here, ranging from hand-embroidered Hindi door hangings to jewel-tone Banjara Indian pillows. Says Coulter: "It's all about the exquisite fabrics."

**WEST ELM** The go-to source for stylish modern decor on a budget—or, in Coulter's words, "an affordable global-accessory fun house." Her favorites? "Beaded and jeweled boxes, trays, baskets, and glass vessels. The store also carries great Moroccan rugs and the occasional accent table."