

# Mission Implausible

Interior Designer Lisa Slayman Makes A Software Magnate's Orange County Dream Home A Reality

TEXT BY [KATE DARLING](#)

A sculptural, descending roofline and a curved, freeform travertine slab patio frame a stunning view of the Corona del Mar coastline. Designer Lisa Slayman selected the home's sand-toned exterior color to blend with the rocks that define the shoreline. Photograph by Toby Ponnay







When Newport Beach based interior designer Lisa Slayman ASID, IIDA was hired to finish software mogul Frank Pritt's ambitiously whimsical beachfront estate in Orange County, it seemed like business as usual. In two decades, the principal of Slayman Design Associates Inc. had designed the interiors of dozens of opulent West Coast homes. But when Slayman first visited the site of Pritt's Portabello estate in Corona del Mar, her jaw dropped.

"It blew my mind," she recalls of the strikingly contemporary 30,000 square foot home, which was just a skeleton at the time. The voluptuous, organically shaped roof was intact but the curvaceous walls were still being framed. "I could see it wasn't an ordinary home or a typical job site."

Plans for the eight bedroom home, which were conceived by Pritt, founder of Seattle software maker Attachmate Corp., looked like something from the desk of John Lautner or, even a creation of the eccentric Spanish architect Gaudí. The mansion was to resemble a massive, futuristic mushroom, perched on three seaside lots above the exclusive Cameo Shores beach.

"It was a massive space that was all open with curves everywhere," Slayman says. "There was no definition between ceilings and walls. No complete curve had a singular center point; everything was a combination of arcs. This house had no architectural reference points, because there's nothing like it in the world."

There were plans drawn on paper but, without a straight line in the house, Slayman knew that translating Pritt's vision from his brain to this most unusual canvas and, eventually, to a finished product was going to be a challenge.

A contemporary living room nestles between two continuous walls of glass that face the ocean on one side and the poolside grotto on the other. Slayman custom designed almost every piece in the room, from the anigre cocktail table to the hand painted pillows. "It was important for me to develop a color scheme that was representational of the outside environment," Slayman says. "The handmade wool and silk area rug I designed used different yarn techniques to create a three-dimensional effect reminiscent of an ocean floor." A whimsical fireplace, hand-carved from slabs of granite by artist Jesus Morales, anchors the room. "We needed an organically shaped fireplace that didn't interrupt the ceiling line," Slayman says. "We had one side of it chiseled in a honed finish and the other was polished." Photograph by Toby Ponnay.

To wrap her mind around what she was designing, she had to develop a relationship with the space. She spent three months looking at the drawings, walking the house and talking with Pritt to gather information. Then she used Graphite 3-D drafting software to test ideas and design the interiors.

The curved walls made basic processes, like designing kitchen cabinets, a challenge. The open, ambient house plan demanded custom cabinetry, furnishings, carpets, fabrics and wall coverings, which Slayman designed to complement each space. With no doors between rooms except for bathrooms, materials needed to transition well between spaces while still creating areas with their own character. An open plan

that invited the outdoors in—with several patios, an open-air grotto and hundreds of square feet of glass walls—presented additional design challenges.

Slayman designed thick, textural area rugs and upholstery to ward off echoes and excessive reflections. “In the living room, the design I came up with was topographical—loose and unstructured, with high and low areas and organic colors that really created the texture and warmth that the house needed, and lent another dimension to the house,” she says.

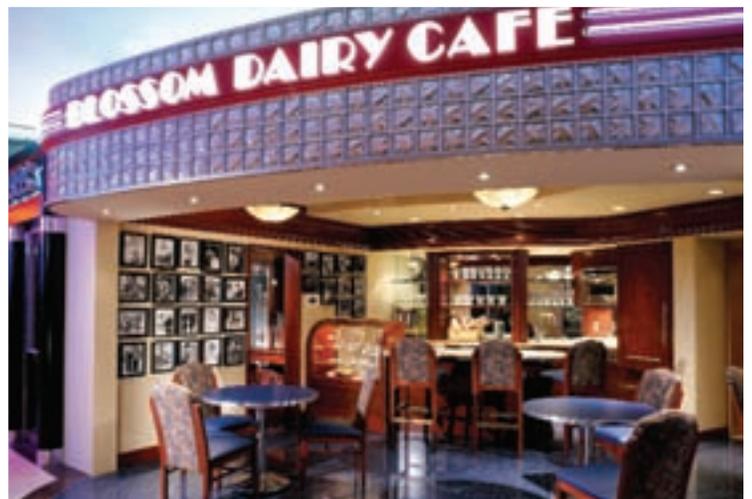
She put a sand texture on the walls, lending them a dimensional quality when light interacts with them. An organic granite fireplace and massive nautilus shell sculpture,

carved by Texas artist Jesus Morales, anchor the voluminous living room and entry area.

“To bring the outside in, I used oceanic, beachy colors like corals, oranges, blues and sand tones,” she says. “The colors are reminiscent even of the red and yellow sunsets that we get on the Orange County coast, so it’s all organic and related to nature.”

To warm the tone of the expansive spaces, she chose several exotic woods. Tamo ash, burl walnut, makore, anigre, koa and zebra wood are featured throughout the house. In Pritt’s office, curvaceous, golden hued burl cabinetry and a burl desk, custom carved by furniture artist Wendell Castle, complement woven leather walls and leather-hand tiled floors.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In the family room, a black and gold veined marble and anigre fireplace was designed to display an eagle sculpture from the owner’s art collection. The scene is completed by a custom designed zebra wood and stainless steel pool table and a stainless topped cocktail table with leather wrapped legs and a black marble inset. Photograph by Eric Figgie; Also downstairs, in an entertainment zone designed to recreate a street scene from the owner’s childhood hometown, a showroom houses up to 15 of the owner’s vintage cars, and an Art Deco styled jewelry store space displays the owner’s family heirlooms; A Deco soda fountain eatery resembles one in the owner’s hometown, with a stained, stepped and curved frieze that flows throughout the room at the ceiling line. To make the space feel inviting and authentic, Slayman outfitted the built-in cabinetry and bar with African pomele veneer, for its fluid, dimensional grain, and chose white marble floors with gold veining to recall the Deco period; Terrazzo floors with Hollywood stars create a mini Walk of Fame outside the recreated Rialto theater’s elaborate Deco marquee and ticket counter. Photographs by Phillip Ennis. OPPOSITE A shallow swimming pool’s glass bubble bottom offers a peek-a-boo view from the ground level of a three story, open-air grotto below. The water feature streams around the house to a smaller pool with a swim-up bar. A floating travertine walkway leads past the pool to the front door, where expansive, floor to ceiling glass allows a view through the house to the Pacific Ocean. Photograph by Toby Ponnay.





Pritt being a techie, the house is as wired as they came at the time. In the kitchen, a curved privacy wall of etched glass rises from inside a counter at the press of a button, to conceal the room from dining room guests.

The living space itself was like none other, but what made the home doubly unique was Pritt's plan for the basement: He wanted to recreate a street scene from his hometown of Charleston, West Virginia—complete with a movie theater, café, jewelry store and bowling alley. Manhattan based architect Theo Kalomirakis planned the layout and designed realistic storefronts in the 3,000 square foot entertainment zone. Slayman designed the interiors and chose fabrics, neon lighting and other materials to bring the street scene to life. In the theater, she created an Art Deco look with tamo ash detailing, period stained glass and blue and gold carpets, which she designed and had made in Scotland.

For three and a half years, the Portabello estate was almost a full time project for Slayman. She was on site nearly every day, working side by side with Pritt. "He had a great vision and it was exciting to help him make it happen," she says.

Now, three years later, the public is seeing photos of the estate for the first time. "I designed one of the most exotic homes in the world," Slayman says. "Working on Portabello took a lot of skill and it was an honor in itself, and I am proud that I was able to use all my skills and vision." 

The kitchen is the hub of the main part of the house. The few walls that define the space were originally planned as low walls with the ceiling passing over them. "It became apparent that we needed to bring the walls up to the ceiling to ground the space," Slayman says. For the curvaceous, flowing cabinetry, she selected an African makore wood veneer for its movement and naturally warm tone. A curved privacy wall of etched glass rises from inside a counter at the press of a button, to conceal the room from dining room guests. "We did several versions of oven hoods and ended up with a very simple stainless-steel form with a glass ring around it," Slayman recalls. "It was important that it didn't dominate the space." Photograph by Toby Ponnay.



