Conceptual artist John Boskovich takes a turn at decorating, applying his twisted sensibility to the design of his own Los Angeles house.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, art and decoration have been intimately linked, even though some distinction has usually been maintained. In certain limited cases, that distinction breaks down: rather, it is destroyed. Such is the case in artist John Boskovich's Los Angeles house. Here, ordinary life is at every turn thwarted by a strange sensibility that is ruthless, uncompromising, illusory—even as the artist knows that, above all, he wants everything to be "comfy." Following in Freud's idea of the uncanny—the uncanny or, literally, unhomely—is a tided genre, and yet in this instance it seems inevitable. What's interesting about Boskovich's house is the casual intimacy presupposed there between comfy and bizarre, hospitality and entanglement. Furthermore, these interiors do their everyday, work as rooms while doubling as Expressionist stage sets for the artist's own alienation. Madea Sorensen meets Dr. Caligari. And it's no fair to complain that alienation is a heavy theme, that's like saying love is old hat.

One fin-de-siècle deserves another. Boskovich alludes his aesthetic with the Decadent movement of the 1890s. Joris-Karl Huysmans' novel A Rebours is perhaps his ground zero. This book, the locus classicus of literary Decadence, is pre-eminently a novel of interior decoration, in which pieces of furniture and other sundry objects take the place of human characters. Its hero, Des Esseintes, is concerned above all with controlling his environment down to the smallest detail—an environment absolutely enclosed and even claustrophobic, and throughout encrusted with the ornamental trimmings of a

The Mirror Has Two Faces

Opposite: The "Psycho-Sala" features numerous installation pieces by the artist, including a polyester rug, Krishna lamps with T.S. Eliot quotations on their bases, and a rectangular chamber of one-inch-thick acrylic inscribed with quotations from Jean Cocteau's Prisoner of Love.

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOSHI YOSIHIDE
willfully perverse sensibility. It's Victorian fearless, a lot of weird stuff rather than mini-
mates, " raves Bobrick. "I like things that scare me a little.

Indeed, fear—or perhaps more accurately, fear-as-fun—prevalent at Bobrick's House.
Two questions are insistently posed, even before properly entering: Am I safe? and, Is
someone watching me? A surveillance cam-
era boldly turns out the front door. Within,
video monitors display various views of the
exterior, patches of bare concrete or grass
become ominous. "The mentality is survival-
in," the artist remarks. "This is decor for the
approaching millennium. That's why I use so
much camouflage and security glass. And I
have a super high-tech alarm system. Sensors
detect heat and movement. "Instead of creat-
ing a secure environment—the home as
havens in a heartless world—Bobrick has
fashioned one that thearchicizes insecurity.
"It's very The X-Files," he says, "Isolation is
such a big theme in Modernism. Things have
only grown more extreme. Everyone knows
strange facts, and everyone is the only one
who knows. Everything is a conspiracy."

The decor of Bobrick House is super-
bad. It's as if Dennis and Frenchie had
done a moshome. The materials are extrema-
gly nonconventional. Bobrick, for exam-
ple, brushes vinyl. Most of the furniture,
including a tuxedo rocking chair, is uphol-
stered in vinyl, typically bright-colored, typi-
cally mimicking the hides of endangered
species. However, the material of calavera se-
ating becomes sickly twee butterfly hitch. "I
called the Environmental Protection Agency
and asked them about vinyl," the artist
reports. "What they said was, like, horrifying.
It's all awful petrochemical stuff that hangs
around corrupting the environment forever.
From an ecological point of view, it's probably
better to just kill a python or a croco-

Opposite: In the "Meditation Room," the main
sitting wall is a circle of jute covered in a polish-
varnished sheet vinyl. Osseous drawings adorning gold
walls. A series of black lamp bases in a recycled
version of an installation originally shown at the
Riverside Horn gallery in L.A.
Above: The "Venice Room" features a custom-de-
signed acrylic chair and a silver lamp base
chandelier with lampshade crystals.
Right: Bobrick's Polaroid photo series are show-
cased in the "Babe Awakening Coffee Nook."
sile." He also favors military-issue furniture and hospital/lab furniture. Of the latter he says: "It's not a Jacqueline Susann aesthetic. Not her style, but maybe McLean's Hospital. Somewhere that Nelly O'Lara could have spent some time. McLean's is the best. Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Robert Lowell all stayed there. James Taylor ruined it."

Perhaps the strangest element at Borkowski Home is the use of extensive text throughout. The artist uses quotations from his favorite writers everywhere: Flaubert, T.S. Eliot, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jean Genet, Paul Smith, and many others. The use of extensive text is familiar in Conceptual art, although to this day many viewers resist it, preferring a more straightforward "visual" experience. I don't go to the gallery to read, these people would say. So imagine going over to someone's house to read. At Borkowski Home, there is something normal at every turn even if you refuse to read the texts, the texts glower at you nonetheless.

"A room in the kitchen," writes Sylvia Plath, this line, from her poem "Lesbian," is written across the kitchen cupboards in a ragged hand. In the "psychosalon," as the artist calls his living room, the voice of T.S. Eliot drones.

One day, Anton LeVay's successor as top starlock of the Church of Satan dropped by. He was impressed. Evidently, Borkowski had intuitively gotten the design of his house just right for occult visuals. On a more mundane level, Borkowski looks forward to doing more deconstructing. His current projects—"Either a chapel in Houston or a South Beach hotel."

—David Rimanelli

Above: The "Prince's Chamber," a.k.a. the artist's bedroom, features an elaborate wrought iron bed with doggy finish and serpentine glass insets in the chapel grille. Moving inside to tables were ordered from a medical supply catalog.

Opposite: A fridge refrigerator echoes "Hell's Kitchen." Other pieces include a trash can emblazoned with the corporate logo of his family's business, Borkowski Farms.

David Rimanelli is a contributing editor at Arterial.