

Modern Gothic

WITH ITS FUTURISTIC PROFILE AND MOODY COLOUR SCHEME THIS HOME MAY APPEAR TO BE FROM OUTER SPACE, BUT THE REALITY IS FAR MORE DOWN TO EARTH – YOU COULD EVEN BOOK IT FOR YOUR NEXT HOLIDAY

Words BRITT COLLINS Pictures RICARDO DEARATANHA AND ROBERT STONE

Exterior The minimalist pavilion-style property is located in the desert on the edge of California's Joshua Tree nature reserve ▶



The stark beauty of the desert is what inspired Los Angeles architect Robert Stone to build the Rosa Muerta, a unique all-black retreat on the edge of California's Joshua Tree nature reserve. A shaven-headed, tattooed former punk rocker, he lives here part of the year with his artist wife, Amy Wheeler, and their three-year-old son, Ford; the rest of the time the house is rented out for fashion shoots or to adventurous travellers. Here, Robert explains the idea behind his extraordinary home...

What's the significance of the name?

Rosa Muerta means 'dead rose'. A lot of things in southern California are named in Spanish to make them sound more romantic, but they're meaningless in translation. The desert itself is a dead, dry landscape that is filled with life, so the name works.

How long did the house take to complete?

Three years. I created everything from scratch; there were no other builders involved.

Was there anything on the plot before you built the Rosa Muerta?

The site was undeveloped. There's no new landscaping outside of the house. It sits in the middle of the open desert and is surrounded by weeds and grass.

The house has a modern Gothic feel – are you a fan?

There's a sense of darkness and despair in the desert. I grew up with that, and I like to make things that are meaningful to me, so Gothic fits.

Why did you choose an all-black scheme?

It isn't black itself that interests me, but monochrome in general, as it focuses the attention on subtle variations in texture. Black also makes the house about the colours that surround it; at night it disappears and all you see are the stars. I'm currently finishing

a house that's entirely metallic gold and my last design was electric blue.

Why have you chosen such minimal furniture and accessories?

All the furniture is built-in – the steps, benches and countertops create a kind of landscape made of concrete. I even carefully removed all of the joints so that it feels continuous. Now people sit on the counters and steps and stand on the benches. It's sexier than detached furniture as it engages your body in a very self-conscious way. **The property merges the indoors and out – how was this achieved?**

I didn't invent the blurring of interior/exterior, I've just found a few new ways to do it. I thought I'd build the Rosa Muerta like an abandoned house, open to and overgrown by the desert.

Why did you put mirrors on the ceiling?

I was excited by the slickness of mirrored glass combined with dirty desert sand. I placed them on the ceiling so that they would reflect the light and colours of the desert. I was also inspired by the reference to 'mirrors on the ceiling' in The Eagles' song, *Hotel California*, as something that suggest debased sexuality.

How does the space change according to the seasons?

The weather here is really mild. It rains about once a year and it's amazing to see the effect on the surrounding plants. The sun angles were carefully considered so that the living room is in the sunlight in the winter and shaded in the summer. The house is designed to catch the breeze so that it continuously replaces the warmer air that sits below the ceiling.

How do people react to the property?

You have to understand or appreciate my aesthetic to be moved by the house. People always say that there's no place like it. When you come here, you're in another world. prettyvacantproperties.com



Entrance The property's name, which means 'dead rose' in Spanish, is stencilled at the entrance. 'It's a nod to Mexican culture, which I always borrow from. Things always sound dreamier and more romantic in Spanish,' says homeowner and architect Robert Stone (above left) ▶



'I like the slickness of mirrored glass combined with dirty desert sand'

Living room *This space has built-in concrete seating that wraps around an open fire pit and Jacuzzi. The mirrored ceiling reflects the surrounding desert and helps merge inside and out. The walls are made of hollow black-painted cinder blocks that are interwoven with metal roses* ➤



‘The house functions as a social sculpture that comes to life in response to whoever occupies it’

Bedroom *The bed is sheltered by block walls and a black-stained wood ceiling. The open roof above the yucca plants allows the cooling desert breeze to flow through at night* **DECO**