

Kayne Griffin Corcoran



Inside the Whimsical World of Peter Shire's L.A. Home and Studio

A founding member of the Memphis Group opens his doors



Every morning, L.A.-based artist Peter Shire starts his day with a cup of coffee he makes here in his studio, a ritual he regularly extends to his studio staff—and anyone who visits. Any guests lucky enough to partake will find themselves surrounded by canoes strung from the ceiling, stacks of ceramic sculptures, and white open shelves filled with colorful mugs.

A founding member of the Memphis Group (a postmodern design collaborative founded by Ettore Sottsass in the early 1980s that's having something of a revival today), Peter Shire is probably best known for his color-blocked chairs and spatter-paint mugs. All of his fearless designs starts here, in a 6,000-square-foot studio nestled on a shaded street in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles.

Before Peter made this space his studio, it was home to a private courier service (and before that, an automotive shop). And though he kept most of the layout the same, there were still renovations to be done, like scraping and repainting the peeling and chipped ceiling. He used nearly 80 gallons of white paint, only to find that over time the cracks in the surface would return. To this he responds in the words of James Brown:



Shire sips from one of the roughly 50,000 mugs (and counting) he guesses he's made, all by hand, in his 46 years of art practice—with the help of his studio staff, of course.

So baby, don't worry, don't worry Don't worry about the peeling falling from the ceiling But just be there when I get the feeling Uh, uh, uh, uh

Peter grew up in this neighborhood; in fact he's lived in Echo Park his whole life. In 2011 he and his wife Donna moved back into his childhood home, just a few minutes away from his studio. His parents designed the house with architect Josef van der Kar and his father Hank did the construction, completing the three-bedroom, 1,400-square-foot residence in 1950. The legacy of his parents' modern style is apparent throughout the home. Upon finishing construction their budget was nearly spent, but the couple managed to afford a set of eight Eames molded plywood lounge chairs. Over the years, the chairs began to show their age with scratches at the belt lines and patchy hardware, so Peter reimagined some of them. "It seems requisite to modify an Eames chair," he says, "and these were definitely part of my history and fair game." Referring to the one he keeps by the front door, he quips, "The interpretation that you see here might just be the epitome of postmodernism."

Pless, Corynne. "inside the Whimsical World of Peter Shire's L.A. Home and Studio." Architectural Digest. 30 August 2018. Web.



The ceramic A Peter made in school to convince his teacher not to give him a bad grade.

As a Los Angeles City Cultural Historic Landmark, the house cannot be renovated—and that's fine with the Shires. ("It validates and enforces my abhorrence to ugly and greedy development," says the artist.) The couple has worked to preserve its history, even going to visit with Van Der Kar, who was 95 at the time. But perhaps even more than the architecture, it's the childhood stories hiding in every corner that make the house so memorable. Like the time Peter worried he would get bad grade in school, and in hopes of improving it he made his teacher a large blue ceramic A. It now sits surrounded by succulents next to the kitchen door in their yard. "Even more happily, who would have known later that I would name my daughter Ava?" he says. But what is it the thing he loves most about the house? "My parents; I sense their hopes."



Giza, a 2018 work, will go to MOCA Tucson for a group show opening early next year.

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The phthalo green painting of Paul McCartney, by Peter's wife Donna, sits propped behind a ceramic cacti candelabra of his design.



The couple repainted the kitchen cabinets only slightly brighter than the original colors Peter's parents chose.

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Custom wooden shelves store a collection of his ceramics, sculptures, drawings and keepsakes in his office.



Seen here in his classic striped attire, Peter works on the ground floor of the studio he's had open for 21 years.

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"[The] turquoise against redwood was very 50s," Peter says. "In restoration, I found the original colors had been two slightly different shades of turquoise, at different times. Using One Shot Sign painters enamel, Shire recoated the trim (and doors) around the home."

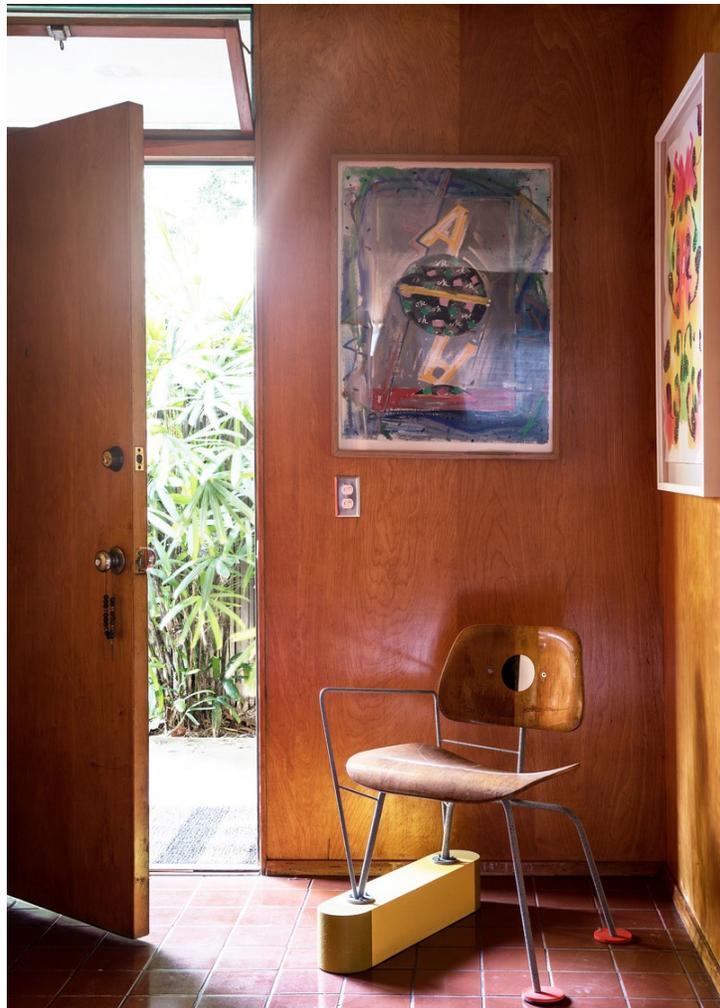


Donna and Peter's patio wraps around the home with gorgeous views of the Los Angeles skyline.

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The colorfully painted bookshelves in the couple's home were once plaster, painted white, and "100 percent full of books." After visiting Van Der Kar's home and seeing his bright, colorful walls, Peter was inspired to return home and paint them these major hues.



Peter's modified Eames chair sits at the front door under a framed painting he gave Donna for Christmas one year.

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Just past the pleasant, handwritten sign that says "Peter Shire Studio by Appointment Only. Thank You!" (he commissioned it from a friend) is the studio's kitchen, where Shire starts his day and welcomes guests.



Peter making coffee, a morning and welcoming ritual.