



# Cottages in the Sun

## *Bungalows of Venice, California*

*Margaret Back*

Photography by

*Melba Levick*

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RIZZOLI  
NEW YORK

**M**ore than a century after tobacco millionaire Abbot Kinney envisioned and realized in California his Venice-of-America—a place of romantic canals, quaint cottages, and fanciful Venetian-styled streetscapes—its descendant, the present-day Venice, shimmers with energy. Images of vibrant boardwalk, beach, and street life come to mind. However, it is the century-old bungalows and cottages on its remaining canals, quiet lanes, and walkstreets, that are its beating heart.

*Cottages in the Sun* bungalows of Venice, California features 28 houses that are an iconic collection of small-scale studies in creativity. Having emerged from the neglect and disrepair of the 1950s and '60s, the homes featured have been lovingly restored or wonderfully reinvented by owners attuned to and engaged by the challenges of small space and intimate community.

At times eclectic, charming, whimsical, or bold, these extraordinary houses are a testament to passionate love for domestic space and a convincing argument for the virtues of an intuitive, highly personal approach to home design. The imaginative interiors and abundant gardens of the cottages and bungalows of Venice sparkle like gems in this multifaceted treasury infused with the light of the California sun.

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*Back | Levick*

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## *Bungalow at the Edge*



**T** heir small California bungalow, when built in 1924, fronted on one of the original (and now filled-in) Venice canals. Today, while referencing a time past, the home of Douglas Speidel and Robert Greene exudes a hip, contemporary vibe, with a stylish dose of retro that leaves no question as to the century you are in and the culture you are celebrating: sophisticated, urban, and global.

When they bought the house in 1999, Greene and Speidel found a recently renovated bungalow—modernized inside by the previous owners (architects Susan Addison and Jeffrey Sherbeck), with an intact, vintage exterior and a

**LEFT**  
Mid-Century Modern meets California Bungalow with an updated roof profile, a slatted fence, and structured plantings. Front windows remain unobstructed, maintaining a visual connection between the house and the surrounding neighborhood.

**ABOVE**  
A vignette from the garden patio portrays a decidedly modern vibe.



**RIGHT**

An open floor plan with strategically placed partition walls creates a lively series of connected spaces at the front of the house. One of Robert Greene's paintings serves as a focal point for the room, with its carefully edited collection of classic modernist pieces, most purchased at local shops.

**FOLLOWING PAGES**

The guest room, built in a converted garage, displays an abstract by Greene, and above the daybed, a printed textile panel.

small bedroom/bath addition at the rear.

"We kept the essence of what we were given," says Speidel, a creative director of an advertising agency, "and then made it work."

What they were given was a tightly orchestrated series of spaces, featuring a play of cubic volumes that both define rooms and ingeniously accommodate storage. Adding to the spatial interest are ceiling heights that vary by room. All of this is contained within a bungalow with an exceedingly small footprint—only 700 square feet.

Inside, they started by painting all of the walls white, and then began to populate the rooms with a rich and provocative mix of signature contemporary and vintage pieces, many purchased locally at nearby shops and galleries. "My decorative inspiration is Italian Modernism from the '60s and '70s," says Greene, an artist whose paintings grace the walls alongside thrift-shop finds and works by friends and colleagues. The result is a disciplined tapestry of fanciful, individual sensibilities.

Outside, they started from scratch. After working with landscape architects Jay Griffiths and Russ Cletta to structure the spaces, Speidel









**RIGHT**

A partition doubling as a storage unit defines one edge of the main living area. Beyond, a wall of drawers in the master bedroom is visible. To the right, doors to the outdoors extend the living space to the decks, constructed at the same level as the wide-plank maple floors to create a continuous surface.

**FOLLOWING PAGES**

Every square inch of the small urban lot has been used to maximize outdoor living space. Douglas Speidel designed and built all of the outdoor decks and installed the landscaping according to a layout designed by Jay Griffiths and Russ Cletta.

planted and detailed every square inch on the tight urban lot to create "wall-to-wall plants"—a thoroughgoing labor of love. He also designed and built the decks that surround the house, as well as the front fence that serves as the new entry. And while privacy is always at a premium in Venice, Speidel is quick to point out that this fence stops at the bungalow's front windows, thus maintaining the house's visual connection with the neighborhood.

"Ours is a synergistic do-it-yourself collaboration," says Speidel of the house, "combining Robert's artistic vision with my pragmatic, hands-on, getting-it-done approach." While acknowledging the bungalow's quintessential California features, Greene—who hails from New York City—describes their dwelling as "a kind of New York apartment, what we call a 'floor-through,' because when you step outside, you're in the city." This time, the city is Venice, a place that embodies everything they value about urban living.

*"It was important to us that our bungalow retain the integrity of its 'cottage scale' and vintage architectural character at the street front. The modern volumes and sensibility emerge as one moves through the house."* — Robert Greene





