



Tatler Homes

HOME GROWN

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ORCHESTRATED OASIS

Daniel Joseph Chenin's monumental residence in Nevada's high desert strikes a harmonious chord between architectural poetry and personal narrative

By Celeste Goh. Photography by Douglas Friedman



In a landscape known for its extremes, Tombolo offers balance. In a world that moves ever faster, it invites pause—a place where emotion is built into the walls, and movement through space becomes a form of storytelling, where contrast and cohesion merge.

Designed by architect Daniel Joseph Chenin—renowned for creating immersive, thoughtfully integrated spaces—this grand residence perches like a crown upon a natural rise in the Nevada desert, sprawling approximately 12,000 sq ft across three storeys, with gardens and outdoor terraces that extend toward the dune horizons.

Like the namesake landform, it serves as a bridge between opposites: geometric and organic, grounded and ethereal, shelter and sensation. Through a poetic interplay of land, light, and form, every detail is crafted to evoke emotion, turning daily rituals into moments of discovery and lived experience.

NATURE'S SYMPHONY

The homeowner, a woman with a global perspective and collector's sensibility, intended to divest from several homes across different cities and focus on one deeply personal place. She approached Chenin with a vision for this full-time residence to serve as both “sanctuary and statement, designed not for display but for meaning—something that would reflect all the different dimensions of her life.”

“She was not looking to replicate a dream home from a magazine or follow a trend, but sought something that would endure beyond fashion or time—a place that felt rooted, expressive, and emotionally intelligent,” the architect recalls. “That kind of clarity and ambition is rare, and it invited us to push the boundaries of what residential architecture can be.”

Hence, Chenin proposed the tombolo as a metaphorical framework for the home—a natural landform that connects an island to the mainland, linking what was once disconnected.

“Just as a tombolo links land and sea, the house would connect fragments of memory, identity, and intention into a singular work,” he

This spread, clockwise from top left: The white-washed living room across from the main gallery; each space maintains distinct character yet connects through visual cues and aligned geometries; layered with custom pieces and vintage finds, the home reflects all the different dimensions of the homeowner's life; in a landscape known for its extremes, Tombolo invites pause

Previous spread: Tombolo perches like a crown upon a natural rise in the Nevada desert with gardens and outdoor terraces that extend toward the dune horizons







From left: The expansive bar area exudes modern elegance with a wink of playful indulgence; the blush-hued kitchen with a 13-foot La Cornue range



explains. “A bridge between opposites—art and architecture, silence and spectacle, personal memory and physical form.”

SPATIAL COMPOSITION

This metaphor not only provides the residence with its name but is embedded in every gesture of its design, bridging disparate elements through a cinematic sequence of spaces.

While the design drew inspiration from diverse sources—ancient acropolises, monastic architecture, French detailing, Japanese spatial philosophy, Art Deco, and moments of early Hollywood elegance—the most enduring inspiration was the desert itself.

“The way it holds silence, the way light behaves across its surface, and the way it forces you to slow down—all of this shaped the home’s material palette, massing, and atmosphere,” Chenin elaborates.

The winding private road shifts from asphalt to cobblestone as the grand architecture reveals itself amid the rugged terrain of the

Nevada desert in a slow, cinematic unfurling. Here, the entrance greets with a circular auto court centred on an oculus that frames the infinite desert sky above.

The property’s bold, geometric exterior is reminiscent of the rigour and symmetry of Art Deco, softened by a green rooftop space and the organic influences of the surrounding desert. A series of buttresses establishes a sculptural rhythm along the façade; deep colonnades and vertical fins that optimise passive cooling, as steel and stone cast dramatic shadows that shift with the sun’s passage, grounding the residence in both movement and monumentality with its environment.

“There’s an emotional rhythm to this home,” says Chenin. “A sense of breath—tight and expansive, intimate and monumental.”

ROOM FOR SQUARES

With a home of this scale, the risk of spaces becoming impersonal meant that imbuing emotional intimacy at an architectural scale



presented a significant challenge. Therefore, Chenin's design team spent nearly four years developing the interior narrative, refining every volume, surface, and threshold to ensure that the experience of moving through the house felt intentional; nothing was left to default.

Rather than adopting a traditional open-plan layout, Chenin drew inspiration from Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square* series to create curated vignettes throughout the home. While not literal in geometry, each space maintains distinct character yet connects through visual cues and aligned geometries—proportion, depth, and adjacency forming a sensorial narrative that unfolds room by room.

"The interiors are where the story becomes tactile, more nuanced and personal," he describes. "The cool strength of the exterior yields to warmth and sensuality indoors: rich stones, dark oak tones, reflective patinated metals—all locally and regionally sourced—and bespoke finishes unfold in layers, inviting discovery."

Rooms of varying tone and scale are positioned in deliberate contrast; some are hushed and cocoon-like, while others prove





theatrical and expressive. Instead of following one decorative approach, they assemble as a collection, layered with custom pieces, vintage finds, and objects that feel discovered rather than prescribed.

“We wanted to create a cinematic atmosphere that shifted with time and movement; not defined by a singular mood, but by a sequence of experiences,” Chenin explains. “Using contrast—light and shadow, raw and refined, open and enclosed—to shape those transitions, each room offers its own identity yet remains in conversation with the whole.”

CHOREOGRAPHED RHYTHM

To test how light would move, how materials would meet, and how the body would feel within the main hall, Chenin collaborated with Forté Specialty Contractors and the millworker to construct the entire volume at full scale.

“We walked it, fine-tuned it, and recalibrated every joint and reveal,” he says. “It was one of the most revealing moments; the proportions and millwork were so precise that we decided to build a full-scale mock-up off-site.”



This spread, clockwise from top left: One of the bedrooms extends the interior's warmth into the vast desert expanse; the master ensuite with shimmering metal beads that glint like desert rain; the grand staircase with hand-painted silk wall coverings, and railings conceived as an abstracted musical score spiralling upwards; transitional corridors lead to furnished hallways composed of art, light, and materiality



Circulation is choreographed around this central gallery space and a secondary hall, where, anchoring the home at its heart, the grand staircase spirals upward like a lyrical refrain—connecting public zones to more private areas through transitional corridors and furnished hallways composed of art, light, and materiality.

Like architecture choreographed to light, the railing was conceived as an abstracted musical score—a sequence of lines and voids that recall sheet music but reinterpreted in forged metal. While it doesn't literally represent musical notes, it carries rhythm and cadence; as one moves through the stair hall, the play of light and shadow animates the space like a silent composition.

"It is one of my favourite spaces," Chenin notes. "The curvature of the railing, hand-painted silk wall coverings, and mirrored reflections of the way light filters from above—it is quiet and grand simultaneously, all coming together in a kind of vertical performance."

Across the main gallery, a white-washed living room opens to a blush-hued kitchen with a 13-foot La Cornue range. Here, onyx-backed portals, custom brass hardware, and sculptural light fixtures elevate the culinary core into an artful atelier of everyday ritual.

Meanwhile, the office and study are cloaked



in traditional refinement with stepped ceilings and gold-leaf-lined bookcases, whereas the lounge and bar—equipped with a Moët champagne dispenser—exudes modern elegance with a wink of playful indulgence.

These lower-level rooms open onto outdoor terraces with double-sided fireplaces and commanding views, extending the interior's warmth into the vast desert expanse.

On the main floor, the primary suite

features rose petal-carved wool carpets underfoot, silk wall coverings, and a cocoon-like bed structure, while the adjoining ensuite showcases material richness—burl wood, onyx, polished brass, and a freestanding tub framed by shimmering metal beads that glint like desert rain.

Finally, on the top floor, a six-bed bunk room channels nautical whimsy and precision for visits from the homeowner's grandchildren. —

This page, from top: A series of deep colonnades and vertical fins optimise passive cooling; the geometric façade recalls the rigour and symmetry of Art Deco architecture

Opposite page, from top: The circular auto court is centred on an oculus that frames the infinite desert sky; the stone façade casts dramatic shadows that shift with the passage of time

