

## HOMES

# Designer to the Stars

For his next act, veteran Hollywood manager Sandy Gallin transforms homes of showbiz bigwigs, adding his signature style to luxury spaces

By **LAUREN SCHUKER BLUM**

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It's a Monday afternoon and Sandy Gallin—best known as a Hollywood talent manager—is hiding in music mogul Jimmy Iovine's bathroom. "I just need a quiet place where I can take this telephone call," he says.

Outside, 120 people lay cobblestones, drill into walls and move furniture in order to get the 16,000-square-foot Wallace Neff-designed house in Holmby Hills ready in time for Mr. Iovine to move in. And Mr. Gallin is overseeing the entire project—from landscaping to interior design—for Mr. Iovine, the co-founder of Interscope Records and Beats by Dr. Dre electronics who often appears as a mentor on "American Idol."



Mr. Gallin, 72 years old, first made a name for himself decades ago managing musicians such as Michael Jackson and Dolly Parton. He was an executive producer in both TV and film, including the 1991 remake of movie "Father of the Bride." At the same time, he developed a second vocation in buying, renovating and "flipping" homes. Over the past 40 years, he has sold nearly 50 homes—mostly in Malibu, Beverly Hills and New York's Hamptons—earning as much as \$15 million a pop on those

transactions.

But around the time the housing market began to dip in the wake of the financial crisis, Mr. Gallin embarked on what is now turning into a third career: doing luxury renovations and home design for clients. "I really fell into this whole thing by accident—I mean, who starts a new business in their 70s?" Mr. Gallin asks, standing in Mr. Iovine's bathroom. Then, he answers another telephone call.



MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

It's Bono. He wants a suggestion of whether to buy Mr. Iovine a 60-year-old olive tree as a 60th-birthday gift to decorate Mr. Iovine's newly renovated home. Mr. Gallin recommends an indoor plant instead, probably a succulent. Then he walks into the foyer to see whether a 17th-century Flemish Renaissance cabinet that has just arrived looks



Mr. Gallin is pictured sitting in Jimmy Iovine's home in Holmby Hills, Calif. MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

good in the elliptical space, which he transformed by adding a skylight to the ceiling and lacquering the walls white.

Mr. Gallin says it was Jeffrey Katzenberg, the veteran film executive, who first persuaded him to give home design for others a try. "People asked me for years about redoing their homes, but I always said no," says Mr. Gallin. "Then the market became more tenuous, and Jeffrey asked me to do his house, and I thought it might be fun. In some ways, doing a house for another person is very similar to managing a star—they tell me what they want, and I try to figure out how to make their dream a reality."



The pool area of Mr. Gallin's home in Los Angeles, Calif. MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Mr.  
Gallin  
acts in  
a role  
he  
calls

"executive producer" on these projects, a term Mr. Katzenberg first coined for him. Mr. Gallin works with architects on plans for the home, then he often hires and works with subcontractors on specific jobs like landscaping. He picks the finishes for the home, and then designs each room, from the placement of furniture down to choosing the actual furnishings, art and decorative objects. He finished work on Mr. Katzenberg's house last year.

"Sandy really grilled us on our day-to-day habits to get a sense of how we live," says Mr. Katzenberg. "He never does a room to make a statement, it's always about livability. That's his first priority."

Currently, Mr. Gallin is finishing up work on both Mr. Iovine's home and a three-bedroom, three-bathroom Beverly Hills home for entertainment lawyer Allen Grubman and his wife, Deborah. The Grubmans bought the home last year for \$6.3 million from the estate of Sue Mengers, the talent agent, who died in 2011. One of Mr. Gallin's first moves was to move the pool from the home's circular courtyard farther back on the property. He is now using the courtyard space to build a garden with a dining area for entertaining.

Although Mr. Gallin tailors each home to his clients' desires, his style has trademark elements. He prefers floors in homes to be uniform, usually with one material throughout. He also tends to like dark wood floors, and usually uses reclaimed wood



A dining area in Mr. Gallin's home. MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

with a distressed look from very old homes on the East Coast. He almost always pairs very white walls with dark floors, something Scott Mitchell, a Los Angeles-based architect who has worked with Mr. Gallin on all his recent projects, calls "a



The backyard area of Mr. Gallin's home. MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL GALLIN

psychological device to create high contrast, which sets up a dramatic stage for the furnishings."

"There's definitely a Sandy Gallin look," says Barbra Streisand, one of Mr. Gallin's longtime friends. "Usually white walls, dark floors, white marble, white sheets, even white books."

To decorate surfaces, Mr. Gallin often turns to orchids, stacks of coffee-table books, jars of brightly colored candy (he's partial to jelly beans), firewood and candles. He likes some clutter: "I love collections of things, but always in moderation," he says. On the bookshelves in his Los Angeles home, he displays a collection of crystals that Elizabeth Taylor bequeathed to him in her will.



Iovine's Home: Like many of the renovation and design projects Mr. Gallin has overseen, Jimmy Iovine's home in Holmby Hills, Calif., has dark wood floors and crisp white walls. MICHAL CZERWONKA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Wire-brushed vertical-grain oak is another Sandy Gallin signature. The walls and ceiling beams in Mr. Katzenberg's 10,000-square-foot California ranch-style house in Beverly Hills are all covered with it. Mr. Gallin's Los Angeles residence, a roughly 4,000-square-foot home that he rents from actress Cameron Diaz, has floor-to-ceiling oak bookshelves he installed in the living room.

Hiring Mr. Gallin isn't cheap. According to people familiar with his business, he typically charges between \$2 million to \$3 million a project, on par with Los Angeles's most

expensive designers. Mr. Gallin declined to comment on his pricing but says his services can save a client millions of dollars because he knows how to cut deals with contractors, landscape designers and antiques stores after decades of doing it for his own homes.

Real-estate agents say that the high fees can be worth it because a home built and designed by Mr. Gallin often carries a premium, and living in one is something of a status symbol. Billy Rose, president and co-founder of the Agency, a real-estate firm in Beverly Hills, says that a house designed by Mr. Gallin will often sell for 10% to 30% more than would a comparable home. "In the same way that buyers will pay a premium for a house by Neutra, or a Frank Gehry, or a Paul Williams," says Mr. Rose, "people are willing to pay more for a Gallin...it's gotten to the point where he's a brand."

Mr. Gallin grew up in Lawrence, N.Y., on Long Island, where his father was a builder of high-end custom homes. Mr. Gallin says that in his youth, he had no interest in going into real estate. He was singularly focused on show business. He began renovating and designing homes in the 1970s after he had moved to Los Angeles to become a talent agent and needed "a hobby to help me deal with stress," as he puts it. "I always found buying and redoing houses relaxing."

Mr. Gallin quit the entertainment business 13 years ago, and buying and selling houses became more of a focus. But it's Mr. Gallin's latest foray into designing houses for clients that has made him happiest, his friends say. "He gets to have all the fun without the responsibility of buying and selling houses. And he happily doesn't have to deal with real-estate agents either," says Barry Diller, one of Mr. Gallin's longtime friends. "I think he enjoys this work far more than being in the entertainment business with all its stress and craziness—and he's great at it."

David Geffen, another longtime friend, adds that Mr. Gallin's new business has some key advantages over house flipping. "When Sandy was selling houses, he never ended up with a home. He was constantly moving. The great thing about this new business is that now he can stay in a house he loves and still work on other people's houses. And he can have one client at a time, as opposed to the 30 clients [he would manage] in his Hollywood days."

**Write to** Lauren Schuker Blum at [Lauren.Schuker@wsj.com](mailto:Lauren.Schuker@wsj.com)