

Thanks to a tiny ADU, an L.A. home transforms into a stunning art gallery and studio



Antonio Adriano Puleo remodeled his L.A. home after architectural designer Ben Warwas suggested some “little tweaks” that would transform the property into a “forever home.”



By Lisa Boone
Staff Writer | [Follow](#)
Photography by **Juliana Yamada**

Oct. 8, 2025 3 AM PT

- L.A. artist [Antonio Adriano Puleo](#) wanted an ADU, or an accessory dwelling unit. He got a “forever home” in Glassell Park, thanks to thoughtful tweaks from architectural designer Ben Warwas.
- The art studio and ADU was once a garage and laundry room. Now it’s filled with art along with a kitchen and bathroom.
- “People often take notes when they come to visit,” Puleo said of his art collection.

[Antonio Adriano Puleo](#) didn't intend to renovate his traditional 1946 bungalow in the Glassell Park neighborhood just north of Mt. Washington, but after consulting with architectural designer [Ben Warwas](#), who told him he could transform the house into a “forever home,” the artist changed his plans.

“I originally wanted an ADU,” Puleo said of [adding an accessory dwelling unit](#) to expand the art studio in his garage. “For me, it was about having a bigger studio and being able to have collectors and curators come to the studio.”

However, as Warwas explored the two-bedroom home and corner property — the designer had previously designed and built a wood deck in Puleo's backyard — he began to envision a new narrative for the spaces.



The Glassell Park home before the renovations. (Ben Warwas)



The exterior of the house and ADU is now painted bright yellow. There's also easy access to the outdoors.

“The living room wasn’t big enough, and it featured a huge red brick fireplace that had doors on either side of it, leading to the backyard,” said Warwas, who first met Puleo when they were undergraduate students at Massachusetts College of Art (now called Massachusetts College of Art and Design). “To access the outdoors, you had to walk down concrete steps to a covered patio.”

Paired with a third door off the kitchen, the home’s entrance to the backyard was awkward at best.

After touring the property, Warwas proposed some subtle changes: adding a 250-square-foot ADU to the garage, removing the fireplace and raising the ceiling height in the living room; adding a loft bedroom in the attic; and redesigning the exterior of the house.

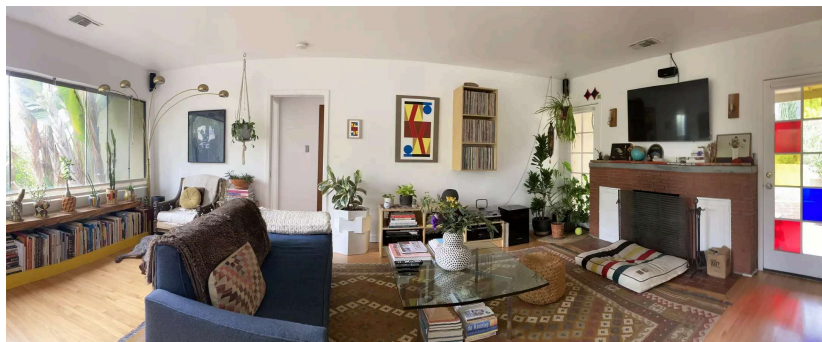


The front of the 1946 house remains the same.

“It was a small project, but there were a lot of issues with the house,” Warwas said. “I thought, ‘Why don’t I propose four different things and he can choose two or three of them?’ He chose all four.”

Puleo, 49, purchased the bungalow in 2010 for \$387,500 after seeing an ad for a two-bedroom home “priced well for a quick sale” in Glassell Park. Although only 1,000 square feet in size, the house offered a backyard for his dog and a detached garage.

“The garage was really the draw,” Puleo said. “The thing about the house that attracted me is that it had a space that could be a studio.”



The living room of Puleo’s Glassell Park home before it was redone. (Ben Warwas)



Puleo, standing, and Warwas in the living room today. “We both have a love of design,” Puleo said of his longtime friend.

Shortly after purchasing the house, Puleo renovated the kitchen and bathroom, opened up the wall between the two spaces and widened the kitchen door. “There were so many doors,” he said of the compartmentalized floor plan. “Doors in the kitchen; doors in the dining room.”

Still, it wasn’t easy to reach the garage, which housed his art studio, and the adjacent laundry room. “I was always frustrated with the house because it was not maximizing space efficiently,” Puleo said. “The studio was detached, and we had to enter through a gate.”



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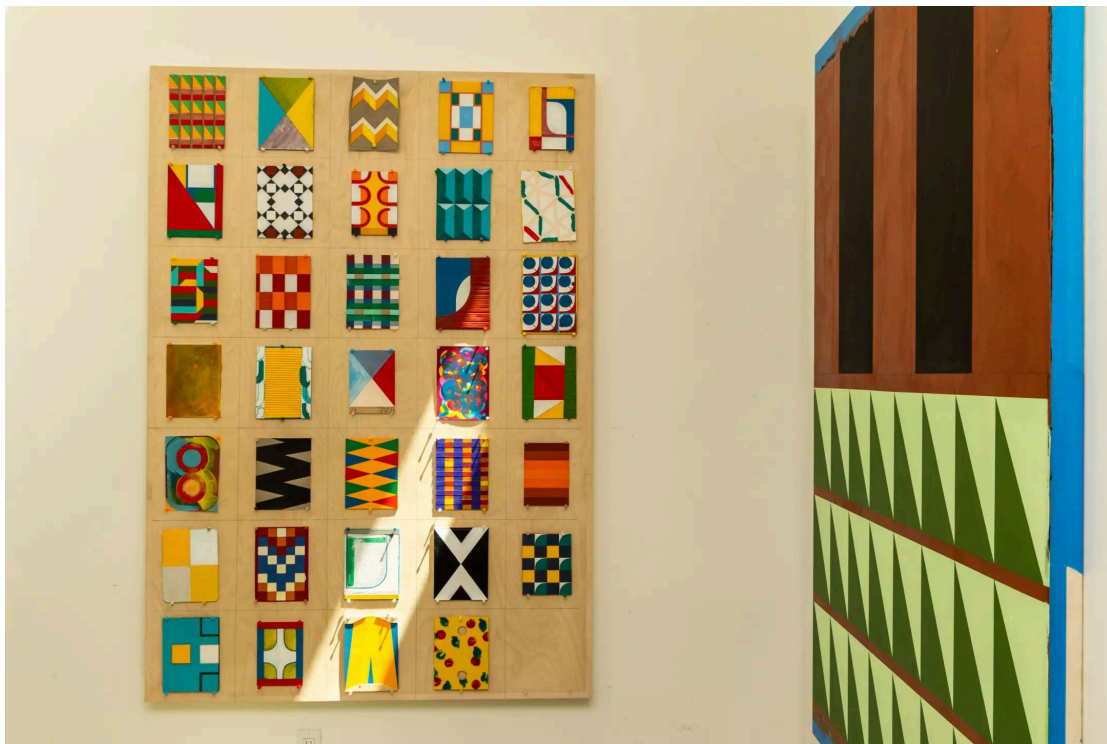
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And so the makeover began.

Warwas tore out the fireplace and extended the living room by six feet, adding a sleek Fleetwood sliding door that provided instant access to the backyard. Then, he raised the ceiling of the living room and added a sculptural curve that completely transformed the living space.

Because the home had a complex roof and an accessible attic, Warwas then transformed the attic into a loft that Puleo uses as his main bedroom. (The two bedrooms on the first floor are used as a den and a gallery space/guest room.) Thanks to the high ceilings and a new skylight, the attic now floods the center of the living room below with natural light.



Puleo's patterned canvases hang in the ADU.



The ADU, which is attached to the garage, and just six inches from the main house, features a kitchen, bathroom and living area. Puleo is using it as part of his art studio.

“Little tweaks totally transformed the house,” Warwas said.

In the garage, Warwas designed an ADU that can function as an art studio or rental, featuring a small kitchen, bathroom and enough room for a bed. The design of the ADU was carefully considered to maximize space and light, with a skylight and high window flooding the space with light.

A level shift offers a dramatic experience when you step into the ADU, as the floor drops below to the art studio and the ceiling goes up, creating a sense of spaciousness.

The living room of the main house is now open and airy, with custom cabinets and millwork by [James Melinat](#) that showcase the artwork Puleo made himself and the pieces he has collected for more than 30 years, including ceramic pendants by [Torbjörn Vejvi](#) and [Courtney Duncan](#), vessels by [Bari Ziperstein](#) and [Pilar Wiley](#), and paintings by [Patricia Fernández](#) and [Steven Criquei](#).

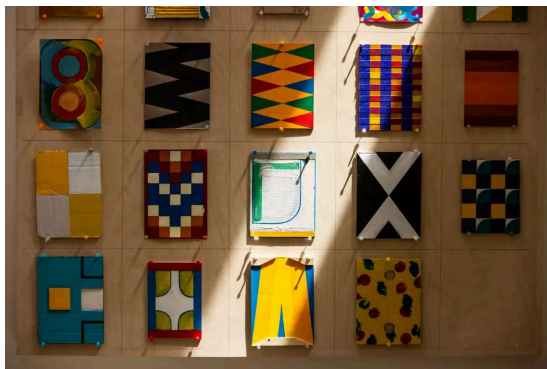
The living room’s fireplace is gone, but the wooden mantle remains atop a console behind the sofa, graced with a series of colorful ceramic planters by Ashley Campbell

and Brian Porray of [Happy Hour Ceramics](#).

“Ben and I have known each other since we were in college,” Puleo said, emphasizing their long-standing relationship and the collaborative nature of their process. “The fun thing about the project is that we did a lot of back and forth in terms of communicating shapes and forms. We both have a love of design, and Ben does a great job of using traditional materials in a way that ignites them and increases the dynamics of a space.”



Puleo chose bright blue tiles from Daltile for the shower of the ADU.



Puleo's art studio, a former garage, rests a few steps below the new ADU.

On a recent visit, Warwas was still fine-tuning home improvement possibilities. “You could put a stackable washer and dryer here,” he suggested to Puleo as they stood in the hallway. (Puleo had moved the appliances from the laundry room in the garage to the basement of the main house.)

Similarly, Warwas appreciates Puelo's curatorial skills. "He's made his home so personal," Warwas said of his friend, who, for the last year, has featured the works of local artists in one of the downstairs bedrooms, which served as an art gallery.

"It's an amazing house," Warwas said of the interiors, which are enhanced by the artworks and make visitors feel connected to the space.

"People often take notes when they come to visit," Puelo said of his art collection.



1. Designer Ben Warwas stands inside the 250-square foot ADU, which features a tall window and a skylight. 2. In the former garage, stairs from the art studio lead up to the ADU and bathroom. (Lisa Boone / Los Angeles Times)

From the sidewalk, the traditional stucco bungalow looks like so many others in the neighborhood. But step into the backyard, past the colorful paintings, textiles, tiles, stained glass and ceramics and the new rear exterior — painted a bright yellow — and it's like a completely different property.



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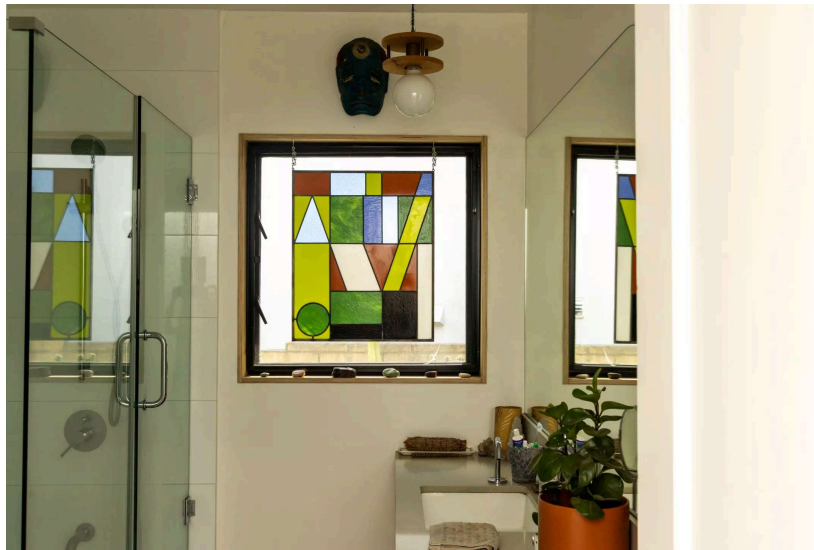
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"The front of the house didn't change, and the back of the house is totally different," Warwas said of the exterior, which reminds him of a piece of paper that has been cut up and folded together. "It's a fun moment."

That he was able to totally transform the house without adding much square footage does not escape him. "It creates a landscape where you can travel back and forth, and the garden is now much more a part of the house," Warwas said. "The yard got smaller, but it feels bigger."



A stained-glass panel by Puleo hangs in the bathroom.

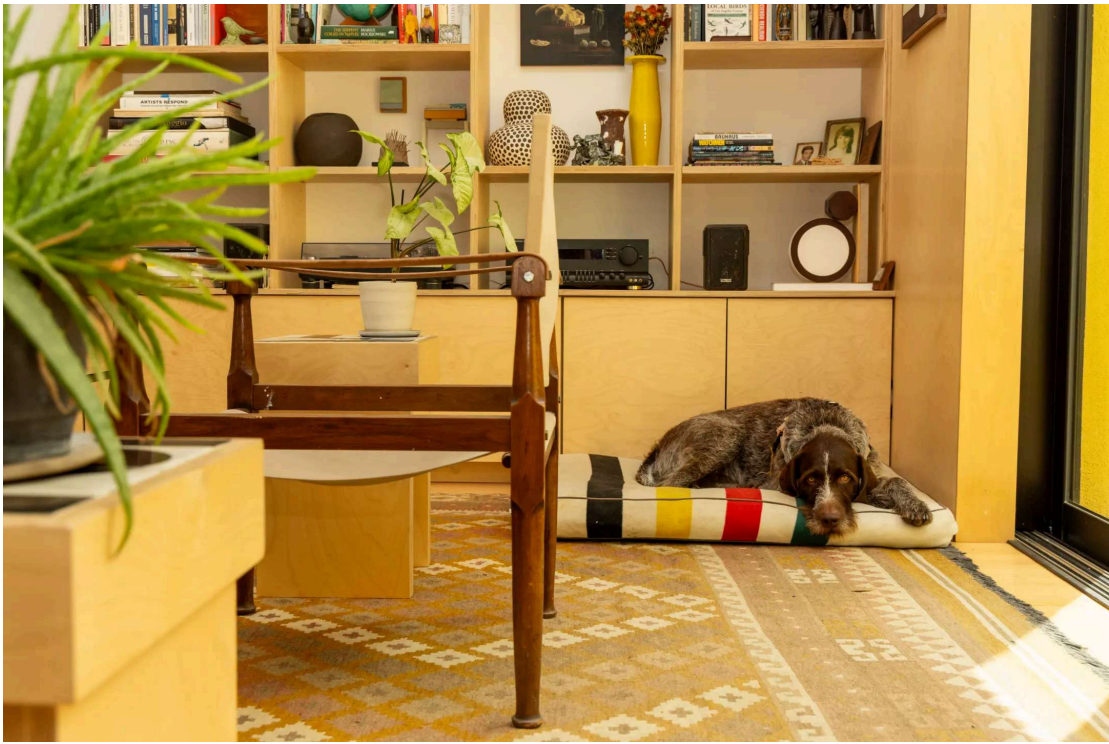


Mixed-media pieces by [Megan Reed](#) are on display in Puleo's bedroom art gallery.

Despite a \$95,000 ADU addition eventually growing into a \$320,000 overhaul for the property, Puleo is happy to have the flexibility that comes with living in a home with two separate spaces.

"I could add a lofted bed and live in the ADU and make art and rent out the house if I wanted," Puleo said. "It would allow me to go back and forth between the East and West coasts and teach and be with my family in Boston."

As he sat taking it all in from his dining room table overlooking the San Gabriel Mountains, the artist said, "The house is super efficient now. This is a magical space."



Puleo also chose colorful textiles for his dog Ono's bed.

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