

## RHONA MITRA

Mitra's sense of humor, as well as her willingness and ability to slip into character (even that of her pet), is part of what makes her such a natural performer. Right now the British actress, 29, is plying her trade on ABC's edgy courtroom drama *Boston Legal*, playing sharp-witted attorney Tara Wilson. After the crazily long hours she puts in on the show, Mitra is grateful that her home—which she bought in the winter of 2003, renovated and recently moved back into—provides a unique refuge.

Because Mitra spent much of her early adult life dashing off to faraway places (Tunisia, Morocco and Mexico among them), she felt somewhat unmoored. "The home thing was never there for me," she says. "I didn't have the place where I had my own room, and that can unhinge you. So creating this home now is incredibly poignant."

Located near Venice Beach, her place looks at first glance

like an ordinary two-story stucco house. "When I originally saw the outside I thought, 'This is awful!'" she recalls. "But when I walked in, even though it had bamboo floors and a mishmash of oriental stuff, it was like these lightbulbs went off inside me, and I said, 'This is it.'"

With the help of a friend, interior designer Vanessa Alexander, Mitra gutted the house and raised the ceiling in the master bedroom, adding a cozy loft that can be reached only by ladder. ("I've always wanted to have a tree-house situation," she says.) To give the house a weathered feeling, she put down wide-plank, dark-oak floors and terracotta tiles and replaced aluminum-frame sliding doors leading out to the patios with heavy wooden ones. The walls were made two inches thicker, plastered in a rough texture to give a rustic feel, and deliberately left unpainted.

Perhaps the biggest change Mitra made was converting the downstairs master suite—whose doors lead out to a big patio—into a media room and separate dressing room. (On warm summer nights she wanted to give dinner parties on the patio, and the idea of people traipsing through what would have been her bedroom seemed odd.) "This way," she says in a whisper, "the boys can stay outside and smoke cigarettes, and the girls can go upstairs and have the kitchen all to themselves."

