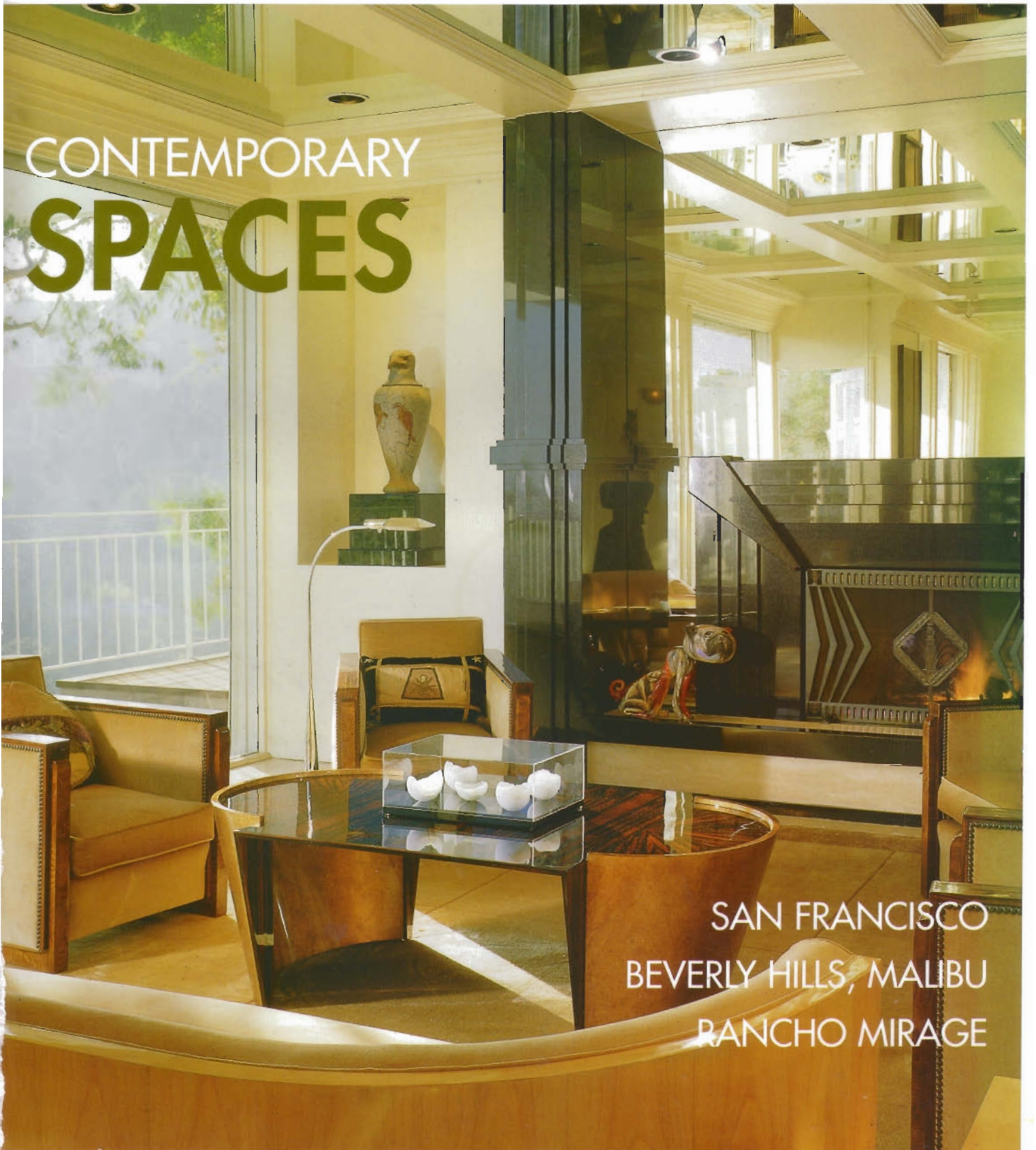


CALIFORNIA HOMES

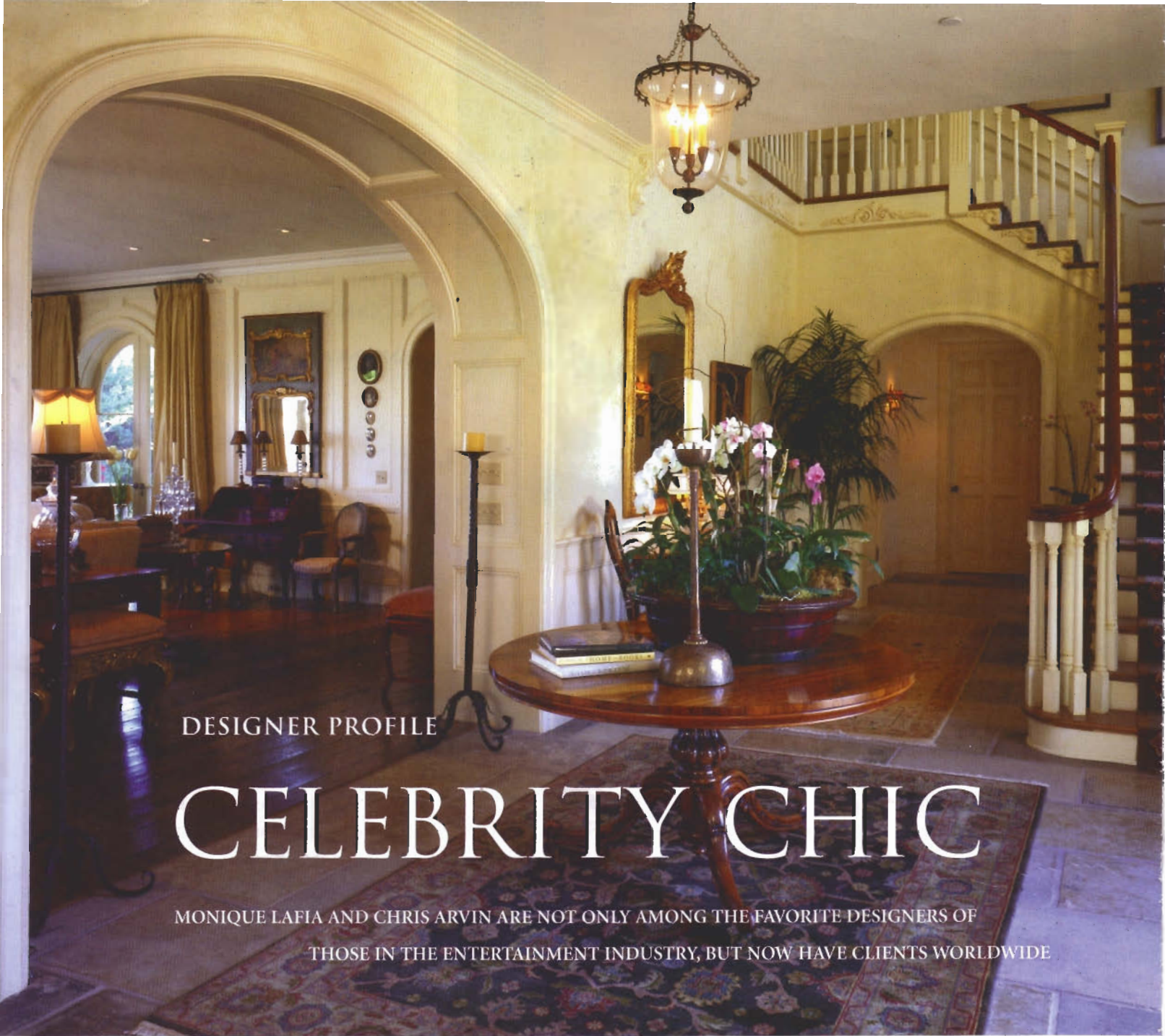
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CONTEMPORARY SPACES



SAN FRANCISCO
BEVERLY HILLS, MALIBU
RANCHO MIRAGE



DESIGNER PROFILE

CELEBRITY CHIC

MONIQUE LAFIA AND CHRIS ARVIN ARE NOT ONLY AMONG THE FAVORITE DESIGNERS OF THOSE IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, BUT NOW HAVE CLIENTS WORLDWIDE

SANTA MONICA-BASED DESIGNERS MONIQUE LAFIA AND CHRIS ARVIN are the design world's answer to Merchant-Ivory. Like the British filmmakers, they are masters of elegant classicism.

Whether designing a causally chic, modern beach house in Malibu for a young celebrity couple, or a formal house showcasing important antiques, or restoring an old Hollywood mansion to its former glory, Lafia/Arvin creates interiors of beauty and distinction without compromising their client's taste or character.

"You want to be known for your style, but you don't want to repeat yourself," says Monique Lafia. "It's important for clients to be honest and specific about what they want, so they can keep some control of the project. "I don't want people to walk into a house we've worked on and think, 'This is a Lafia/Arvin design,'" she says. "I want it to express the client's tastes and personality."

BY LYNN MORGAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES S. WHITE

Certain themes are recurrent, though, in rooms they design: fruitwoods and chinoiserie, and dark woods accented with light colored fabrics; meticulously selected antiques and accessories. Scrupulous attention is paid to details like floor surface materials, wall treatments, textures, tones and colors. “You want the house to look finished, complete and pulled together,” says Monique.

Since they established their firm in 1997, Lafia/Arvin has designed homes all around California, as well as in Hawaii, Colorado and Hong Kong. “That one required about two thousand e-mails to China,” laughs partner Chris Arvin. “Technology allows us to work closely with clients who are far away. We are open to more projects outside of California.”

Their projects in California have included homes for former “Melrose Place” stars Rob Estes and Josie Bisset, Harry Hamlin and Lisa Rinna, musician Kenny G, Sugar Ray Leonard, “According to Jim” star Courtney Thorne-Smith, and a Montecito home for Rob Lowe and his wife Sheryl. Currently, the firm is at work on another daunting undertaking: the restoration of the historic Buster Keaton house in Beverly Hills.

Built in 1926 by architect Gene Verger, in close collaboration with the silent film star, the 15,000 square foot, twenty room Mediterranean house has an impressive Hollywood lineage—it was owned by Cary Grant and Barbara Hutton, and eventually actor James Mason—but in recent years it had been empty, crumbling and neglected. Collaborating with architect Mark Appleton, Lafia/Arvin is restoring the historic villa’s ebony floors, adding a new billiard room in the mansion’s Spanish Revival style, and relocating a swimming pool to make room for a two bedroom guest house with its own garage and private office.

“The house is going to be filled with antiques,” says Chris Arvin. “The walls are Venetian plaster, and we’re upholstering them in silk. We’re returning the house to its original beauty.”

“We’re starting to do historic restoration work now,” says Monique Lafia. “We like restoring old, historic houses, as well as working on new houses that have a high level of workmanship.”



LEFT PAGE: The entry hall of Rob and Sheryl Lowe’s Montecito house introduces visitors to its reserved elegance. Monique Lafia custom designed the rugs and Paris ceramics executed the remarkable floor, also a Lafia design. The antique table and gold leaf mirror were already in the Lowe’s collection, and the designer showcases them in the “overture” which introduces the house. UPPER RIGHT: A wicker sofa and lounge with a cognac-colored finish, upholstered in fabric from Lane Ventura, a coffeetable from Ironies and end-tables from Murray’s Iron works create an elegant, outdoor living area in Rancho Palos Verdes. LOWER RIGHT: Bed linens and pashmina from Linens et Al; wall tapestry from Aga John in West Hollywood, create a distinctive style for this room with an ocean view.



Monique Lafia likes to begin her design concept with the very first impression of the home. "The entryway or the foyer is the most important room in the house," she says. "It's the overture: it really introduces you to the home, and sets the tone for the residence." She likes to include custom-designed rugs in her entry halls, wall scones and consoles. "It's an opportunity to use furniture in ways that the client may not have thought about before."

She and Chris Arvin always take into careful account what kind of art and furniture their clients already own before beginning a design project. "It always helps to see what a client already has and ask, 'Why do you like this? What is it about this piece that makes it important to you?' That begins the dialogue and allows us to begin."

Favorite resources for antiques include Therien, Habitate and Ed Hardy in San Francisco, Hideaway House in Los Angeles and Charles Jacobson in New York. Kim 3 in West Hollywood is a favorite source for fine Asian antiques.

There are certain luxurious elements that Lafia/Arvin clients demand in their new homes. "Media rooms are important to people now," Monique says. "TVs are everywhere! In the gyms, in the guestrooms, in the home office. Flat screen TVs are like paintings: they are affixed to the wall, so I don't have to use armoires or cabinetry to conceal them. They can be hidden behind a painting or descend from the ceiling."

Home offices are also important to many of their clients: massive antique desks, Herman Miller chairs and upholstered walls are some of the extravagant details Lafia/Arvin provides for those who want a workplace at home.

Separate his and hers home gyms have become a major trend recently in upscale home design. "Women like yoga

studios and Pilates equipment," Monique says. "Men want Precor and weights and a plasma TV to watch ESPN."

For Californians, the outdoor environment can be just as important as the interior design of their homes. Patios, loggias and outdoor living rooms are often a part of a Lafia/Arvin design. "Our clients are using real furniture outside," says Monique. "Scalamandre is making outdoor fabrics now. It's an extension of the design of the house, and people want real thought and care put into it; they don't want plastic furniture."

Decorating or restoring a home can be enormously time consuming and a surprisingly intimate process. Lafia/Arvin has been working on the Buster Keaton house since December 2002, with a projected completion date of February 2004. They have been working with architect Richard Landry on a massive Georgian style manor house in Lake Sherwood for National Hockey League legend Wayne and Janet Gretzky for three years. "It's an enormous house," Chris says.

Many clients return to the firm when they move or acquire vacation homes. "We value long term relationships," says Monique Lafia. "We cultivate a relationship with our clients. We want them to be excited and energized whenever they walk into their houses. That's the ultimate reflection of our success as designers." ❁

UPPER LEFT: A media room in Palos Verdes combines contemporary technology with Asian antiques: a plasma television from Theatre Designs, leather chairs from Hancock & Moore, a paisley ottoman covered in burgundy, cream and burnt sienna chenille are for comfort and entertaining; the celadon vase and candy dish from Kin 3 antiques add grace notes. UPPER RIGHT: The kitchen of Rob and Sheryl Lowe's home is a warm and private place for friends and family to gather. It features a fireplace, a center isle of heavily distressed fruitwood with a tea-stained butcher-block top. The appliances include a Viking range and Trulsen refrigerator.