

Robb Report

LUXURY HOME

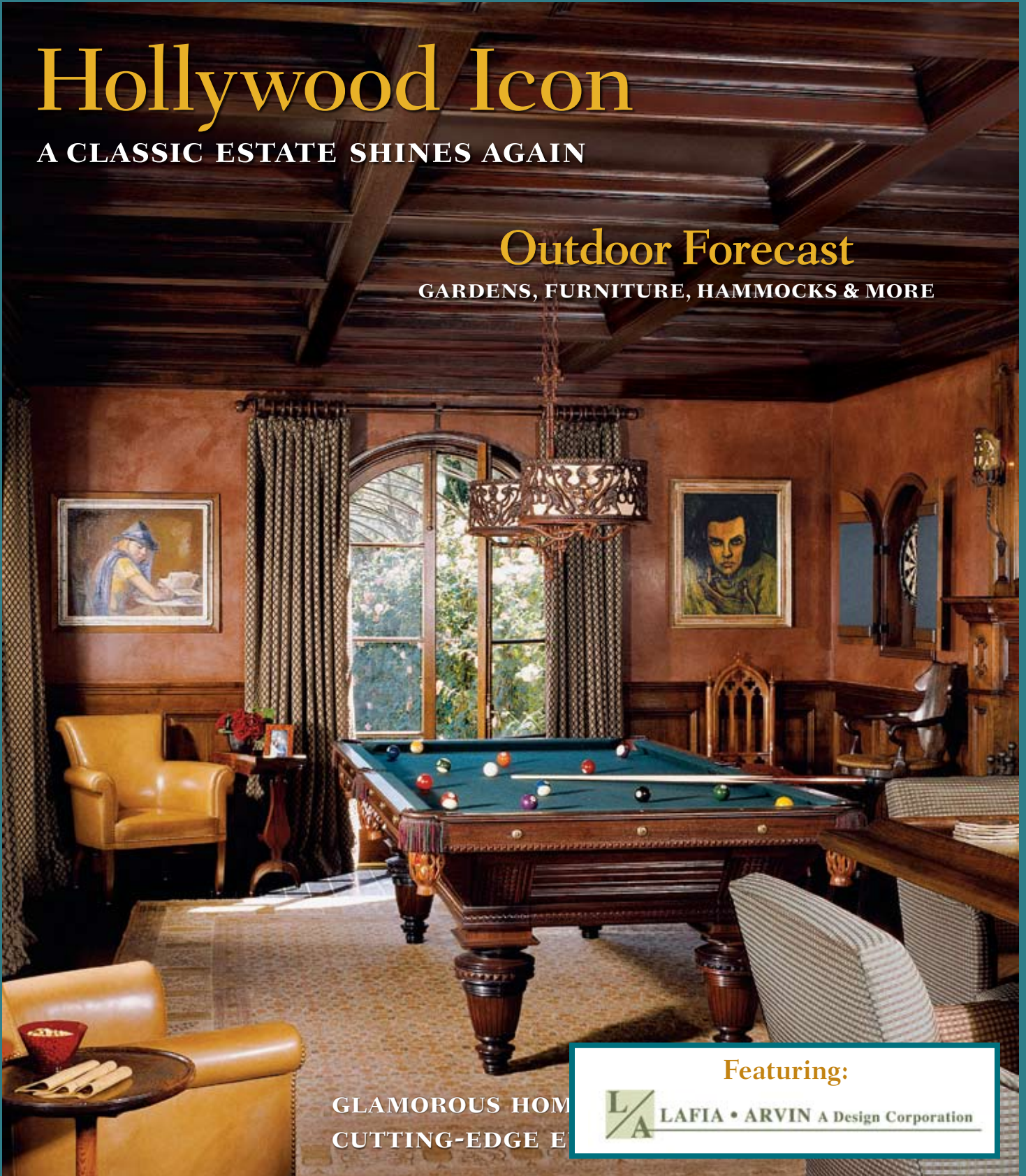
CUSTOM DESIGN + ARCHITECTURE + TECHNOLOGY

Hollywood Icon

A CLASSIC ESTATE SHINES AGAIN

Outdoor Forecast

GARDENS, FURNITURE, HAMMOCKS & MORE

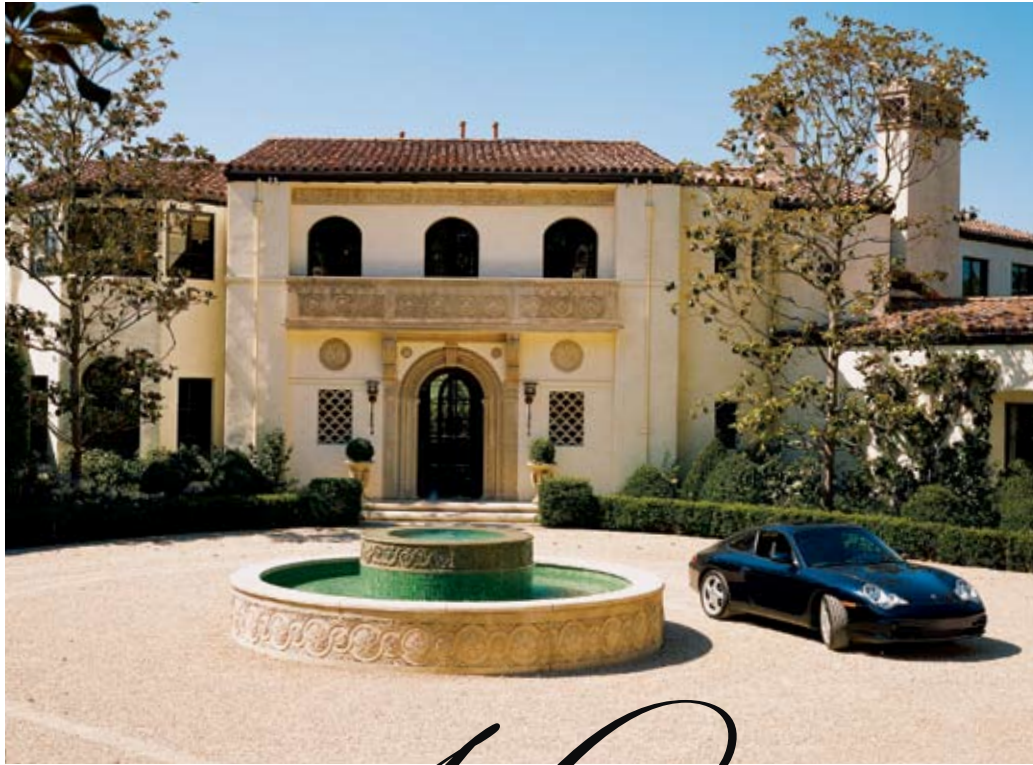


GLAMOROUS HOME
CUTTING-EDGE E

Featuring:



LAFIA • ARVIN A Design Corporation



Hollywood REVIVAL

“THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING ICONIC BEVERLY HILLS ESTATES,”

says Chris Arvin of Santa Monica design firm Lafia/Arvin, describing this north-of-Sunset-Boulevard Spanish-style palazzo built in 1926 by a silent film legend, and subsequently home to the likes of Woolworth heiress Barbara Hutton and Cary Grant, James and Pamela Mason, and, sharing the guest quarters for a time, Richard Burton

A BEVERLY HILLS ICON IS READY FOR ITS CLOSEUP

By Andrew Myers + Photography by Mary E. Nichols



Opposite: The pedigree of this 1926 Beverly Hills estate includes past owners Cary Grant and James Mason. The home now houses a family of five and their art collection. Above: The 19th-century iron chandelier is new to the two-story entry. Douglas Fairbanks once made a grand entrance by swinging from the second story from a rope.



The living room is a jewel box of rarities. Two 18th-century chandeliers hover above an antique Agra carpet. A pair of rococo carved and gilt stools upholstered with antique Aubusson tapestry rest next to a George III chinoiserie coffee table. The Old World cement fireplace was refinished with an amber glaze. In the adjoining piano room is a Steinway, one of only 150 that were created to honor the company's 150th anniversary.



Once hidden by a dropped ceiling, the stenciled beams along the dining room ceiling were disliked by Barbara Hutton and Cary Grant. They were recently restored by Sally Ost. Paintings by Kees van Dongen (left) and Victor Manuel Garcia (right). Chairs from Melrose House.



This page: A Picasso hangs above a Melrose House walnut game table and chairs in the media room. Antique lamp found in New York. Leather "Justice Lounger" from Baker, Knapp & Tubbs.

Opposite: The vestibule's mosaic chandelier, previously owned by Ozzy Osborne, sits above a William IV pedestal table. In the background hangs a Magritte painting of a man in a bowler hat.



and Peter O'Toole. To borrow MGM's motto from Hollywood's corresponding heyday, "More stars than there are in heaven" crossed this casa's threshold to dine, dance and, in the case of Douglas Fairbanks, literally swing from the rafters.

Trouble was, this grande dame had fallen—hard—and needed a lot of help getting back up. Even after a two-year renovation by Christopher Bedrosian and John Bercsi of Beverly Hills Properties, during which the exterior was sandblasted and re-stuccoed, the interior's dry rot routed, hardware restored and leaded-glass windows rebuilt—not to mention the plumbing, electrical, heating and cooling systems that were completely overhauled—Lafia and Arvin's clients were still unconvinced. "They found the house cold and uncomfortable, and wanted to make sure we could fix that," says Monique Lafia, who spearheads the firm's design work.

The clients—he an owner of an international media-based business, she an owner of a cosmetics company—had space-planning concerns as well. Bedrosian and Bercsi had added two outbuildings, a four-car garage with maids quarters above and a tennis pavilion with two guest suites. Even so, there were still

doubts that the 1.5-acre-property could accommodate three children, an in-residence mother, home offices for both clients and their assistants, and security. Then there were the more mundane questions: Why was the pool directly adjacent to the front motor court? Why did the nonfunctional kitchen have hardly any seating? And how had the original owner managed to squeeze a billiard table into the media room, obscuring the screen, no less?

Lafia/Arvin addressed all qualms. "Both the owners and we realized the house itself was a work of art," says Lafia. As such, the subsequent three-year renovation was meticulous, and the design team was mindful not to disturb the property's unique spirit. Nevertheless, not one wall was left untouched. The exterior stucco received a warmer hue, and the interior walls Venetian-plastered. The pool was moved to the side of the house, the two-story poolhouse redone, and the kitchen rethought (although not with the sacrifice of the original Quick Meal gas stove). But the biggest alteration was the addition of a billiard room off the media room, which allowed the creation of an entirely new outdoor courtyard.

Then came the interiors.

The billiard room was the only addition to the house. A painting by Francis Picabia (right) and six plasma screens hang on the wall so that multiple games can be watched at once. Antique pool table from Bankshot. Antique Tabriz carpet from J. Iloulian.







The master bedroom's palette was determined by the rare Tabriz rug from Mansour, which complements the chinoiserie lacquered canopy bed brought in from the owners' previous home and modified. To the left of the bed, a painting by Santiago Carbonell hangs above the nightstand. A Tiffany vase is casually placed on a walnut cloverfield table.



“BOTH THE OWNERS AND WE REALIZED THE HOUSE ITSELF WAS A WORK OF ART.” —MONIQUE LAFIA



A cocoon of mahogany, leather, rich colors and plush textiles, the media room is outfitted with the latest, state-of-the-art equipment as well as antiques. Sofa and chair from A. Rudin upholstered in chenille fabric from Micana. Leather chairs from Baker, Knapp & Tubbs.



Left: The courtyard off the kitchen includes a new fireplace and hardscape. The carved dining table weighs thousands of pounds and required a crane for installation. Twig collection chairs from Melrose House. Sofas from Giasi.


Lower Left: The pool was moved to the side of the house facing the dining room. Landscaping by Jonathan Sidy acts as a verdant screen, providing natural shade for the home.

Below: The lady of the house hired a specialist to create a rose garden with antique roses; she uses the colors as inspiration in her cosmetics business. The octagonal fountain with Spanish tiles was found near Santa Barbara.



“One of the reasons we usually do multiple homes for our clientele is that we take ultimate responsibility for the project,” says Lafia. “Basically we feel that, in terms of execution, the buck stops with us.” In this house, that buck extended far beyond the custom furniture, antiques and decorative arts to include fine art. Joining a creative assortment that includes a signed, limited edition Steinway, a mosaic chandelier previously owned by Ozzy Osbourne, 18th-century Neoclassical chandeliers and Louis XV chairs and ottomans is a jaw-dropping collection of work by Picasso, Picabia, Dufy, Magritte, van Dongen and Dali. Intimately involved with the composition of all the collections, Lafia went so far as to have actual-size prints of the paintings blown up from auction catalogues to try them on walls throughout the house. Not to be outdone, the floors received a collection of important antique carpets,

Agras and Tabriz in particular. Lafia was careful to study pedigree and provenance as well as color and composition, and how each prospective piece looked in particular rooms.

Given the scope of work, nearly three years suddenly doesn't seem so long. Certainly not to an 81-year-old grande dame who is standing taller than ever, and has a long full life yet to live. 

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