

CASA DEL SOL



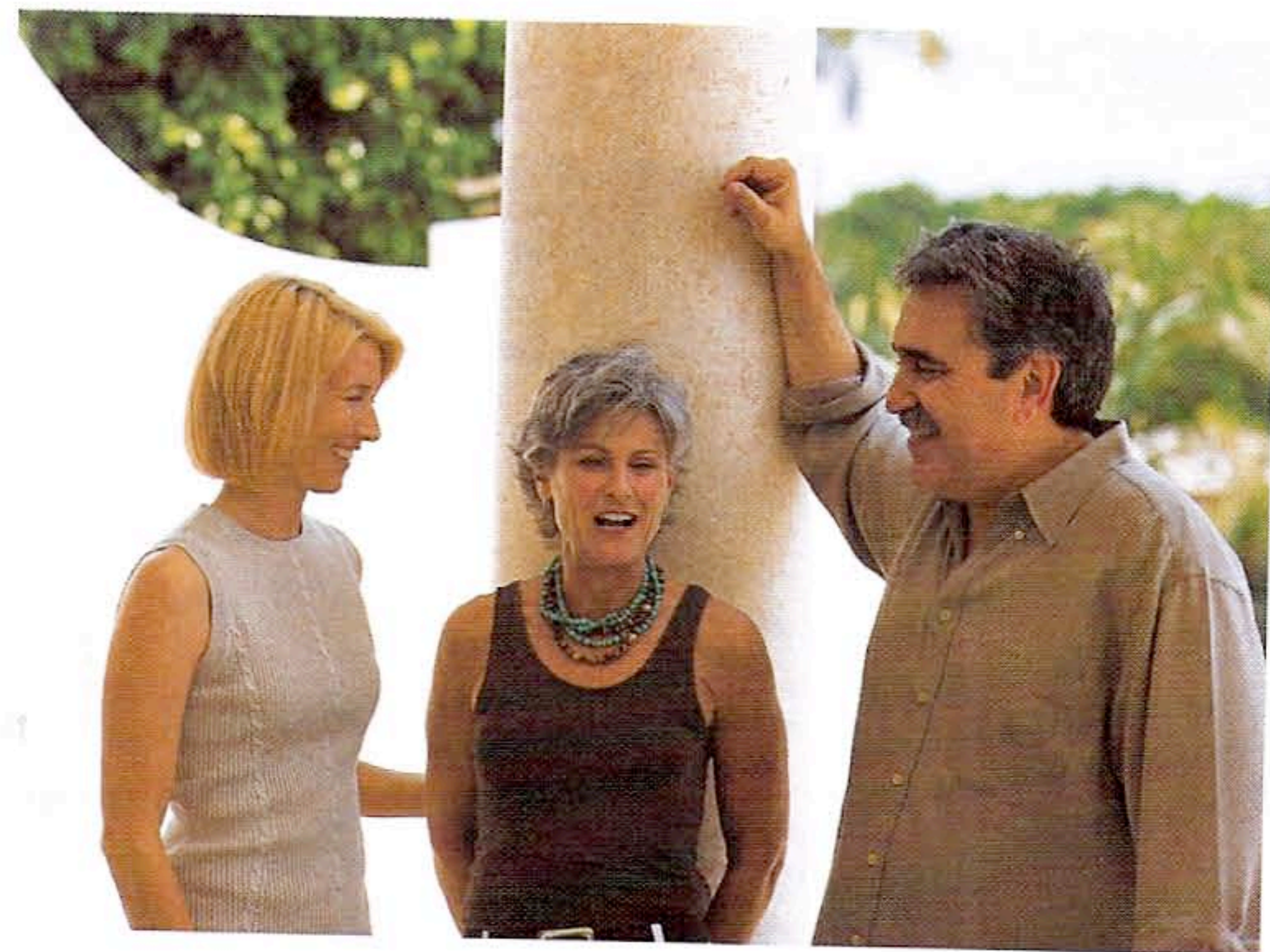
The open-air front courtyard of Rosalie and Richard Alter's vacation home sets the mood for a house that spreads its wings, so to speak, to welcome guests. The scene is set with a Middle Eastern chair (below) from the owners' collection of international flea market finds and antique Indian marble seating (opposite) to suit a maharaja's garden.

MEET HOME OF THE MONTH A NEW HOUSE IN MIAMI BEACH
EMBRACES VISITORS AND ENCOURAGES DAYDREAMS OF EXOTIC
LANDS IN TROPICAL CLIMES.



Living room doors open onto a covered terrace that features an old Javanese teak daybed flanked by two woven armchairs designed by Oscar de la Renta for Century. Installed for shade, the long draperies made of outdoor fabric from Perennials give the loggia a roomlike quality. Right (from left): Designers Wendy St. Laurent and Nikki Baron and architect Jorge L. Hernandez.





The

vacation home that Richard and Rosalie Alter built is the final, satisfying product of the couple's longstanding relationship with Miami. For years, the Alters, whose main residence is in Maryland, rented every winter and went apartment hunting on the side. For the most part, they avoided Miami Beach. "My husband, the real estate maven," laughs Rosalie, "kept saying, 'The Beach is never coming back.'" That was years ago, of course, before the resuscitation of South Beach turned the whole area into a magnet for trendsetters from around the world.

Serendipitously, the Alters came across this site, a former tennis court with panoramic views of Biscayne Bay. A chance meeting years ago with interior designer Nikki Baron, followed by a series of coincidences, led to architect Jorge L. Hernandez. Almost inevitably, the Alters hired Baron and her partner, Wendy St. Laurent, to complete the design team.

The house itself is an idyll in white stucco, swept by bay breezes and washed by the near-tropical sun. "The architecture is really about atmosphere and light," Hernandez says. "I wanted it to seem like time had been turned off. Is it old? Is it new?"

The house conjures images of the Aegean or Mediterranean or even the Caribbean, but it is also firmly planted in Miami Beach, a place where storybook styles of architecture have long thrived. Though there are no specific architectural references, the house summons an array of images. "I wanted to feel like I lived somewhere exotic," says Rosalie.

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house not only speaks to the past and the present, it also offers a balance of privacy and intimacy on the one hand, and spaciousness on the other. Where there might be windows, there are doors. Where there might be walls, there are terraces. With all the living room doors open, the Alters can entertain, as they did not long ago, the entire Jerusalem symphony orchestra.

"This is the way people should live in Florida and generally do not," says Baron.

The house is none too specific about its architectural ancestry, content to look somehow exotic. Though it does have arches and loggias, it is not precisely Mediterranean. Hernandez, long a classicist, has recently been exploring a more stripped-down idiom, which he terms "a purposeful sense of abstraction." He eliminated crown moldings, for example, to keep the look clean

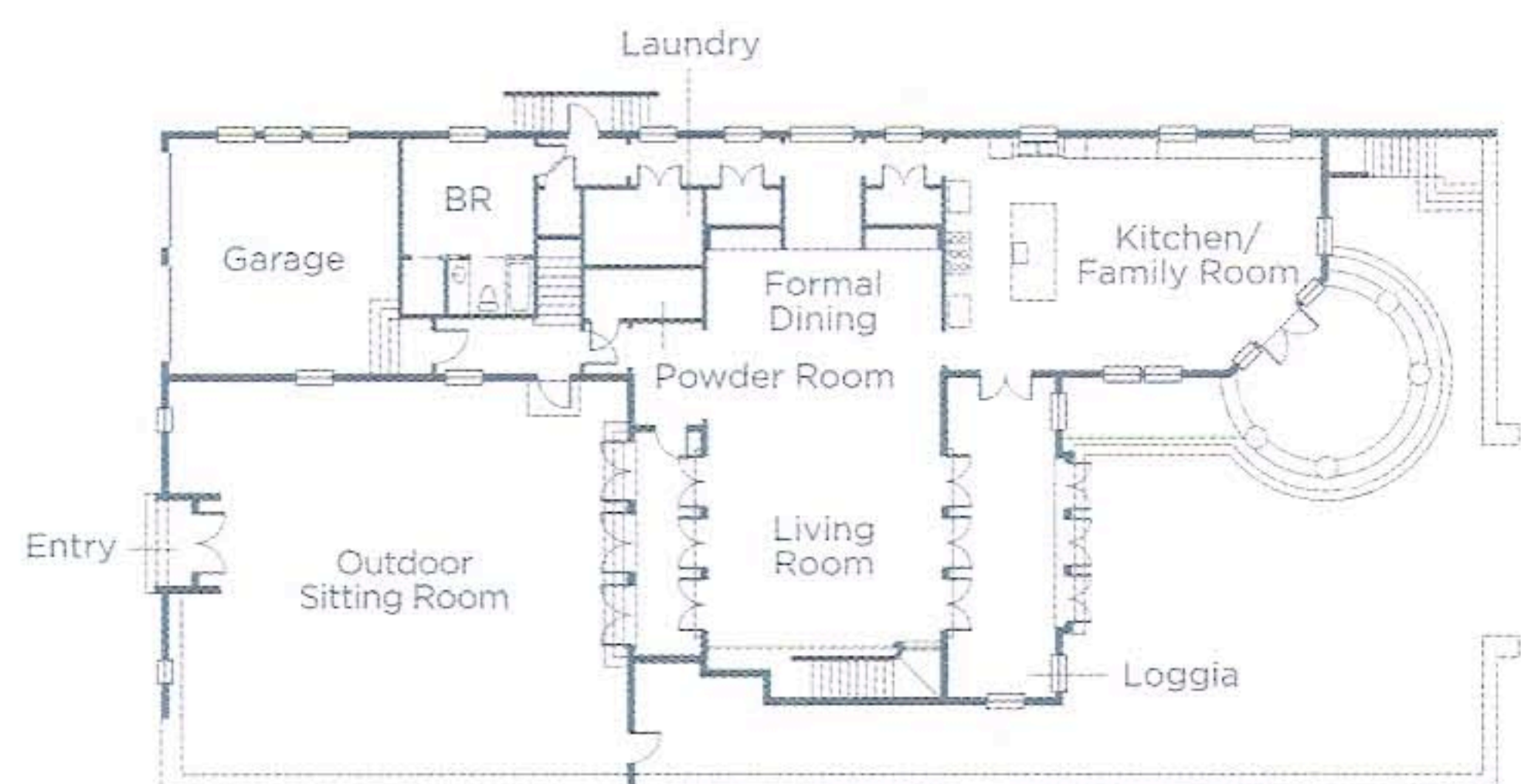
and modern, but there are neoclassical touches, too, as in the framing of the living room window (above).

The house also strikes an equilibrium between the formal and the more casual, giving the impression, perhaps, of a European embassy in some place decidedly more tropical. It has its grand moments (like the formal dining area's table for 16), but, says St. Laurent, "it's still a beach house and cozy." That was important to the Alters, who sometimes play host to their entire blended family—two married daughters, one teenage son and five grandchildren. When Rosalie's father or Richard's mother visits, there are four generations in the house at once, congregating in the living room or gathered in the kitchen or outdoors around the pool. "In this house," Rosalie says, "there is not one place where you can't put your feet up."

The dramatic dining area features a 12-foot-long *Bungalow* table from Robert Lighton's British Khaki collection, a pair of sea grass wing chairs from Bauer International at the head and foot and mahogany chairs from Holly Hunt along the sides. The chandelier was designed by Israeli artist Ilana Gorr. Opposite: In the living room, a pair of British Khaki *Lord Clive* chairs and matching sofa (behind which is an African circumcision bench).

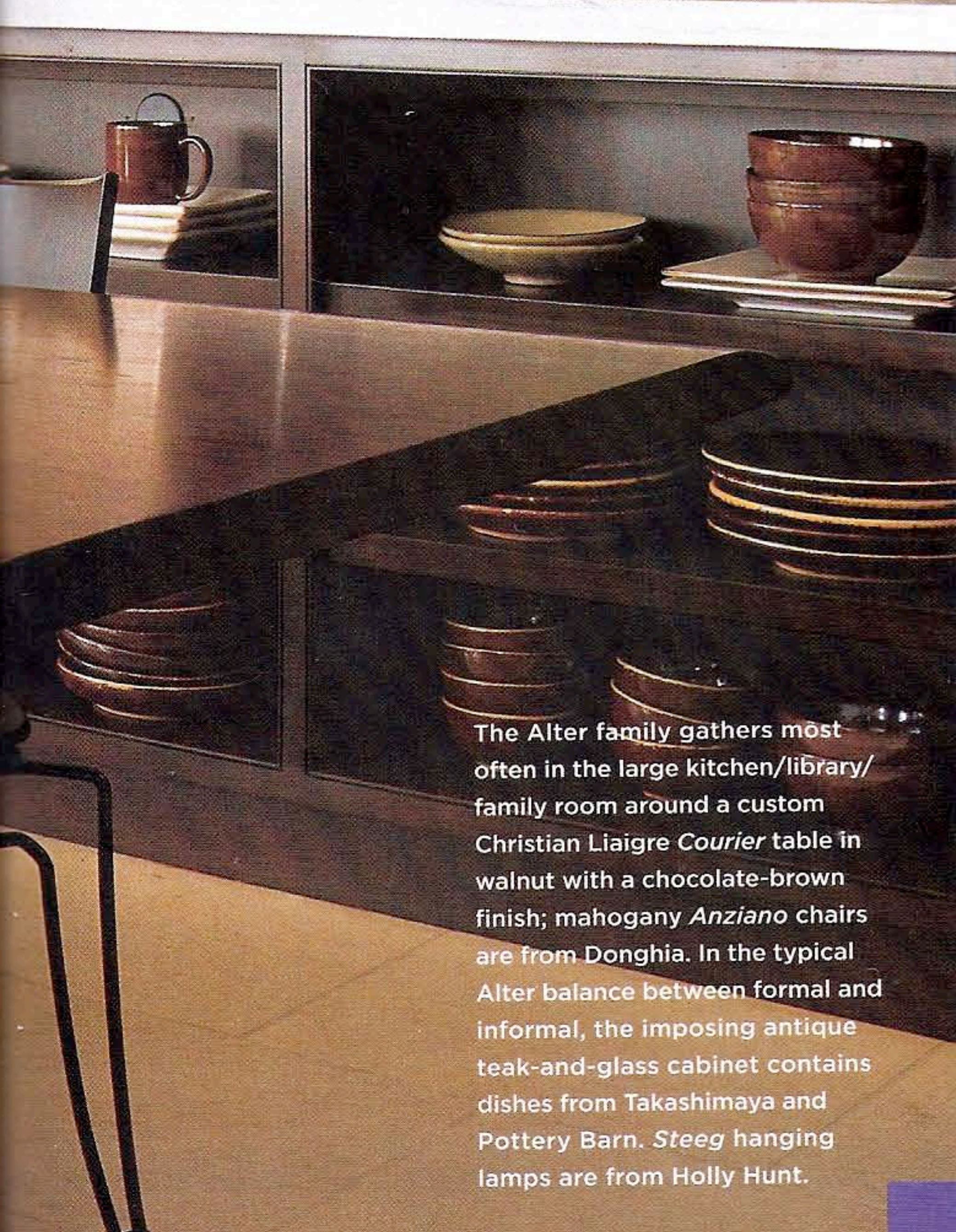
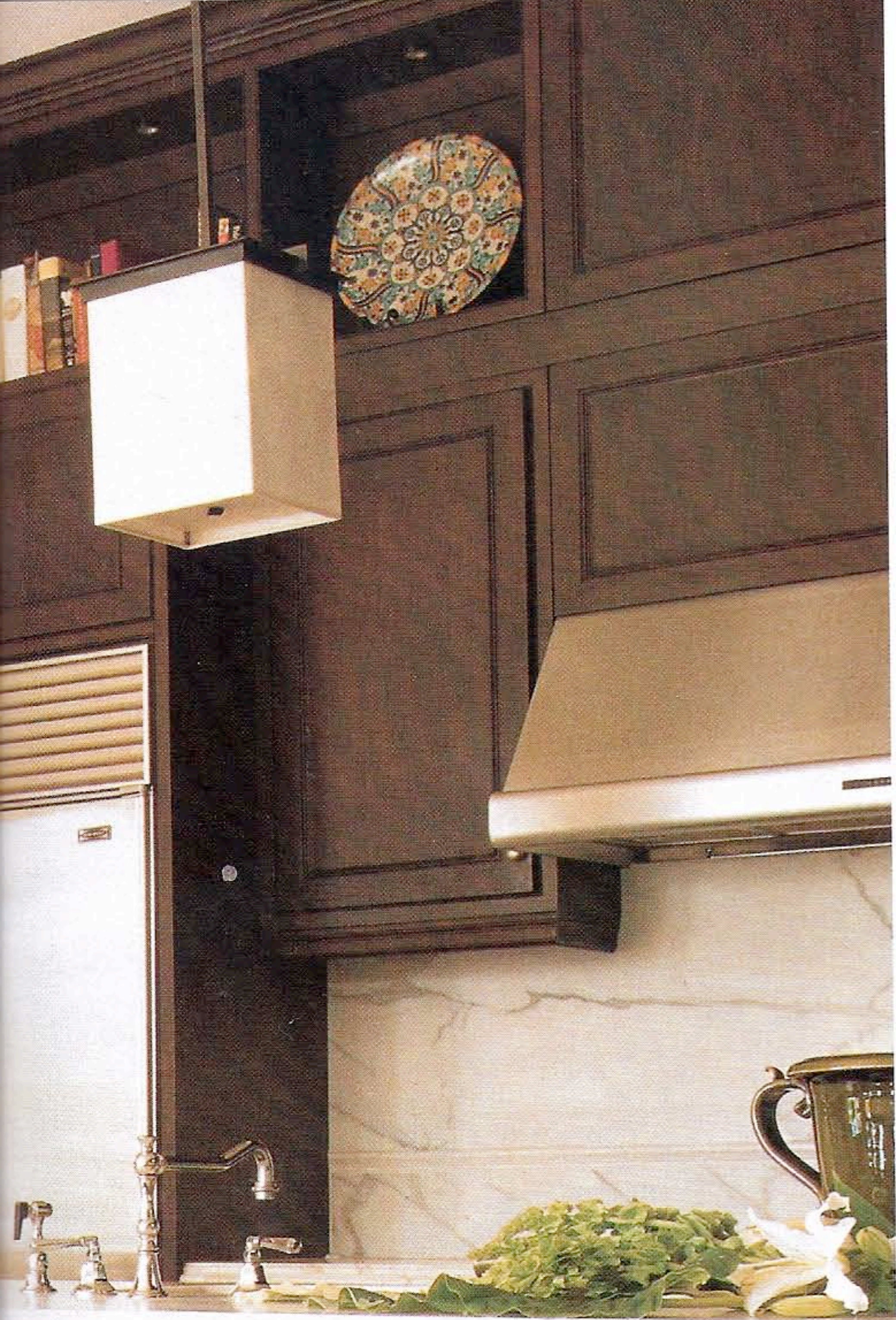


What the Pros Know Much of this house is white (Benjamin Moore's Dove White), but the entry portico is the same company's Summer Blue—an invocation of the sky. The loggia was treated to Benjamin Moore's serene Kittery Point Green. The interior designers used the same color in the master bathroom, helping to create an overall cohesiveness, but they softened the tone with white in a one-to-one ratio. They employed the same 50-50 mix in the dining room (above) to give the already tall space an even greater sense of drama, using two shades of Benjamin Moore's Butter Pecan. Painting the ceiling in the lighter tone "lifts the volume of the space and gives you a sense of verticality," says Wendy St. Laurent. "It's a great trick."



Ground Floor





The Alter family gathers most often in the large kitchen/library/family room around a custom Christian Liaigre *Courier* table in walnut with a chocolate-brown finish; mahogany *Anziano* chairs are from Donghia. In the typical Alter balance between formal and informal, the imposing antique teak-and-glass cabinet contains dishes from Takashimaya and Pottery Barn. Steeg hanging lamps are from Holly Hunt.

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form of the house is what Hernandez calls a classic side yard: On the main, public floor two large open-plan rooms meet to form an "L." One space is for living and dining (including the pale-green loggia); the other is a kitchen, library, media room and family room all wrapped up in one. Here, the elegant custom-made cabinetry is paired with antiques and modern furniture, and the shelves hold both dishes and books. Upstairs are the master suite, two family bedrooms, a small "retreat" for Richard and additional guest quarters.

"The kitchen is basically where we live," Rosalie says, which is why the table can be made to fit a dozen when the family is in residence en masse. When they are on their own, however, Rosalie and Richard Alter often take their meals outdoors, on the covered terrace adjacent to the kitchen, gazing out across the bay at the Miami skyline as they eat.

The designers, who knew their job would include adding new furniture to the Alters' collection of treasures from around the world, had to create a marriage of ethnic, vintage and new pieces that would somehow cohere. So they did most of their shopping in Miami showrooms noted for imported furnishings from global sources. Their color palette was inspired by an Afghan robe the Alters bought in Israel: dark brown wood on the furniture and trim and Chinese red in accent pieces. "It would have been very easy to get way too serious," says Baron. "Instead," says St. Laurent, "we took the expected and made it unexpected."

"It's a very eclectic house," says Baron. Her partner adds, "Wonderfully so."



DETAILS

1 In the master bedroom, the wall above the mahogany sleigh bed and side tables (by Barbara Barry for Baker) is occupied by a complex work by Gabriel Delponte—168 small resin cubes that hold images provided by the Alter family. Oversize bed pillows were made from a celery-colored silk taffeta and a tropical print. Bedside lamps are from Baker.

2 Modernized Ionic columns define the terrace just outside the kitchen/family room. The columns are made of intricately textured Mexican shell stone. Floor-to-ceiling draperies that ripple in the breeze are practical (they're made from all-weather Perennials outdoor fabric) and romantic.

3 The circular deck, outside the master bedroom, sits atop the columned terrace, affording expansive views of Biscayne Bay. Since teak is naturally resistant to water, the designers chose

furniture of that wood from Brown Jordan's Mesa line; the cushions are covered in weatherproof Sunbrella fabric.

4 Rosalie Alter's dressing area includes customized built-ins and accessories that neatly summarize the design aesthetic of the house: a refined bell-shaped mirror (custom, from Baker) and an African tribal stool from the Jalan-Jalan showroom in Miami's Design District. *Greco* sconces in a matte nickel finish are from Holly Hunt.

5 In a departure from the more restrained style of most of the house, the master bathroom features a custom-made Murano-glass chandelier for a pure shot of glamour. "In those old Caribbean great houses," says Rosalie, "you see these crazy moments, like the chandelier, that are there just for the romance of it." 🍷
See Resources, last pages.

