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The Flavor Of Florence

Architect Richard Manion And Designer Richard Winsberg
Create An Italian Villa In Beverly Hills

TEXT BY
STACIE STUKIN

PHOTOGRAPHY
BY ERHARD PFEIFFER



The vaulted ceilings in the hallway leading to the kitchen and family room, showcase hand painted decorative detailing and several of the nearly 150 sconces and lighting fixtures that can be seen throughout the house. "The lighting was a huge task in itself," explains designer Richard Winsberg. "The majority are antiques that we found in New York, Europe, Los Angeles and what we couldn't find, we had custom made."



One of the more intimate rooms in the house, the library references Renaissance decor with hand-twisted metal wire casings in the cabinetry and a zodiac-themed mural on the ceiling. The murals, were hand-painted by Garth Benton, who painted the original frescoes at the Getty Villa Malibu.



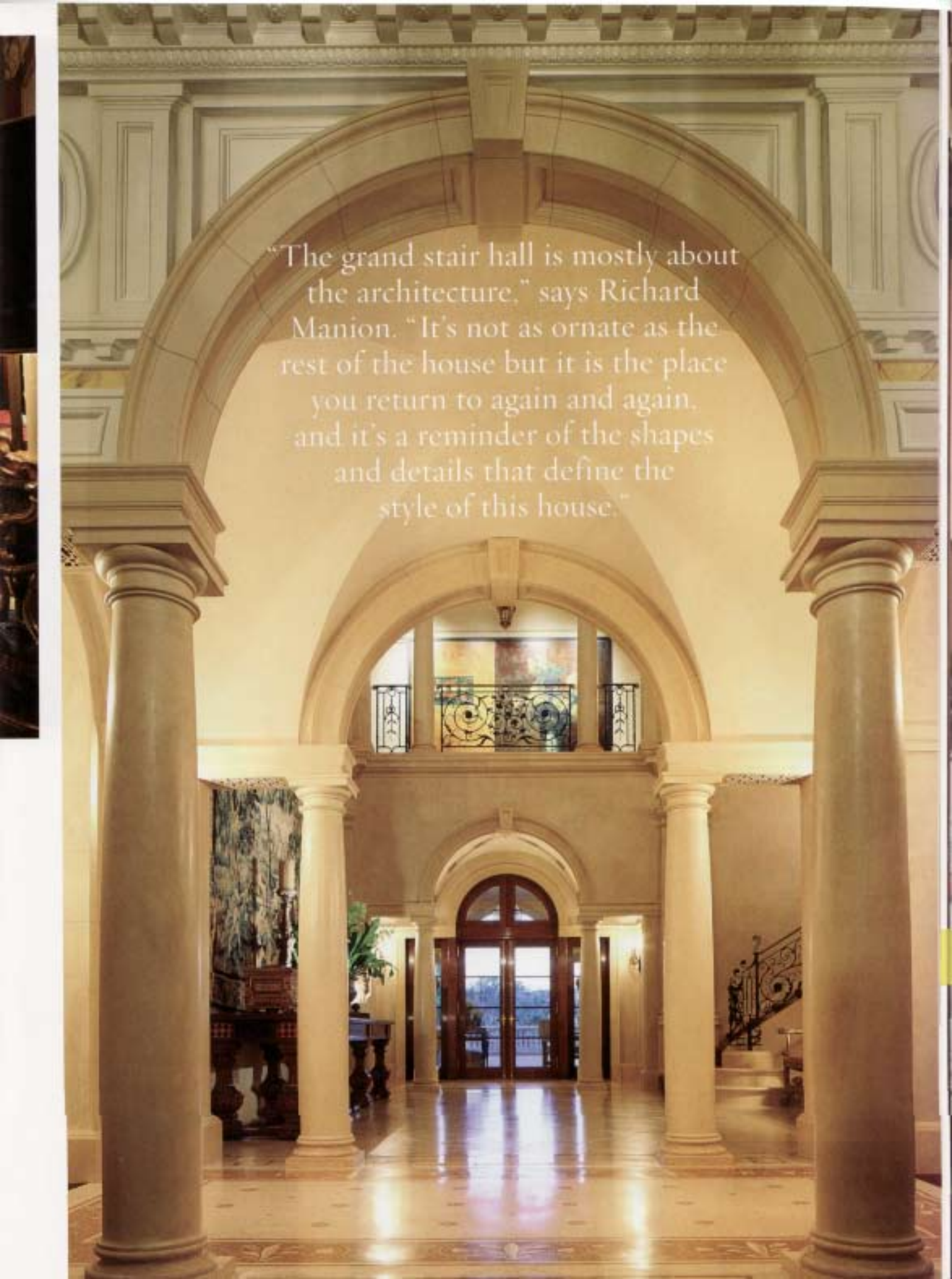
When a Los Angeles couple purchased a one-acre site in a prime Beverly Hills location, they commissioned architect Richard Mamon to build their dream home. Envisioning an Italian villa adapted to Southern California, Mamon's plan drew on the gracious older homes of Los Angeles, while offering an ornateness that evoked the owner's favorite Tuscan country houses.

"We were inspired by Italian villas like Villa Gamberaia outside Florence," says Mamon. "But the exterior was meant to be a bit more relaxed, more of a small villa with the scale of Italianate houses built in Los Angeles during the 1920s and 1930s." Taking cues from Mediterranean Revival architects of that era, such as Wallace Neff in Los Angeles and Maurice Fatio in Palm Beach, Mamon created a strong, distinguished exterior with Florentine rafter tails that accentuate the eaves and classical columns framing the entrance.

The first challenge was to reconfigure the site. Since the original house sat far back in a corner with a sweeping front lawn and small dark yard, Mamon flipped the layout and the front yard became the back. Then he terraced the southern-facing garden that was later landscaped by Robert Truskowski with classic Italian plantings like olive trees, bay laurel hedges and rose gardens.

ABOVE: The living room features some of the couple's modern art such as the Fernand Léger painting (untitled, 1927) above the mantel and a *Maïssé*. The red tasseled formal draperies add a flourish that complements European antiques from the 18th and 19th centuries. "We always like to mix our contemporary art with more traditional themes and pieces," explains the wife. "We believe these juxtapositions complement and enhance their beauty."

OPPOSITE: The grand stair hall is a reminder of architecture's strength and the faux painted limestone walls are a stabilizing visual force. "Here, we wanted to let the architecture speak for itself," says Winsberg.

A photograph of a grand, ornate interior hallway. The space is characterized by classical architectural elements, including large, fluted columns supporting a series of arches. The floor is highly reflective, showing the surrounding architecture. In the background, there is a balcony with an intricate wrought-iron railing and a set of stairs with a decorative handrail. The lighting is warm and focused, highlighting the architectural details.

“The grand stair hall is mostly about the architecture,” says Richard Manion. “It’s not as ornate as the rest of the house but it is the place you return to again and again, and it’s a reminder of the shapes and details that define the style of this house.”





OPPOSITE "I've always felt that the most provocative color to have in a dining room is red, and here it worked spectacularly," says Winsberg.

With hand-painted red lacquer chinoiserie, a Dutch metal ceiling and damask upholstered walls, the dining room also features a Marc Chagall painting that is flanked by a pair of 1730 Venetian silver-gilt and etched glass mirrors.

ABOVE The kitchen millwork was inspired by 18th century Umbrian cabinetry and the adjoining garden conservatory with latticework is styled after a room in one of the couple's favorite Parisian antique stores—Galerie Camon Demachy. The mosaic tile floor is a reproduction of a dining room floor at Le Meurice Hotel in Paris.

During the three and a half year design and construction process, the couple traveled to Europe several times with their friend and interior designer, Richard Winsberg. On those trips they purchased many of the seventeenth and eighteenth century antiques that would set the tone for the rest of the home. While stopping for lunch in Orvieto, they stumbled upon a mosaic marble table that now has a prime spot on the loggia, and one morning while having breakfast at the Le Meurice Hotel in Paris, Winsberg got the inspiration for a tiled floor pattern that later was reproduced in the family dining room. "We really approached the design process one room at time," says Winsberg.

The result is a well considered amalgam of precious antiques like the 1890 Florentine cabinet manufactured by G. Ugolini with inlaid floral mosaics of lapis, ivory and other precious stones that was purchased in Paris (the cabinet was also a star attraction at the Universal Exhibition of Paris in 1900) and fine modern art like the Fernand Leger hanging above the living room fireplace. "Whatever you bring into this house, it wraps its arms around it and says you belong here," says Winsberg, who says the real pleasure was indulging his and his client's fondness for Italy. "You see that in the textures, the decorative details and the architecture," says Winsberg. "The result is truly a labor of love."

That fondness for Italian architecture is revealed in the grand stair hall, where Manion took the concept of a Roman courtyard and created soaring coffered ceilings with Doric and Ionic columns and classical pilasters. The railings, scrolled with hand forged leaves, were inspired by an old Italian design, and the skylight ironwork forms a geometric pattern common in eighteenth



and nineteenth century Italian ironworks. "The grand stair hall is mostly about the architecture," says Mamon. "It's not as ornate as the rest of the house but it is the place you return to again and again, and it's a reminder of the shapes and details that define the style of this house."

Remarkable detailing in the decorative painting and intricate finishes reveal a level of craftsmanship rarely seen these days. Marshall Southern hand scraped every floor, giving the walnut an old world look and for over a year master artisans created such spaces as the theatrical red lacquer chinoiserie dining room. The faux bois painting in the powder room is a fanciful formality and dramatic canvas. Frescoes of Italian pastoral scenes depict musicians—a nod to the couple's love of music.

With a formality suited to parties and philanthropic events, this is also a home where the family can comfortably gather in the kitchen. Dinners with the couple's children are often followed by a movie in the state of the art theater, and four grandchildren love to help tend the organic kitchen garden.

At the end of the day, the couple retire to their bedroom—a subdued, serene suite in hushed blue tones that are both soothing and elegant. "We feel very lucky," says the wife. "We have so much pride in the people who created this home for us. They really gave us our dream house." [EJ](#)



OPPOSITE The hushed tones of warm blue, beige and gold create a respite at the end of the day. "We wanted something restful, classic and subdued," explains the wife. The master suite also became the perfect spot to hang and enjoy some of the couple's Renoir paintings.

ABOVE The centerpiece of this very feminine bathroom is a rock crystal 18th century French chandelier surrounded by a hand painted trumpet vine pattern. Mauve and Pink marble creates a relaxing retreat that also houses the misses Lalique glass collection.





“... You see that in the textures, the decorative details and the architecture... The result is truly a labor of love.”
Richard Winsberg

OPPOSITE This vignette is another example of the juxtaposition of the modern and the classical. A painting by Joan Mitchell (untitled, 1962) hangs above a 16th century baroque walnut commode decorated with two early 18th century Italian Baroque painted and gilded cherubs. ABOVE A sweeping double staircase leads down to the pool that sparkles with Bisazza mosaic tiles and features a swim-in grotto. With its classical columns, the pool cabana picks up on the Italianate character of the house and provides a comfortable outdoor bar and dining area. An intricate mosaic panel on the rear wall depicts a scene from Lake Como.