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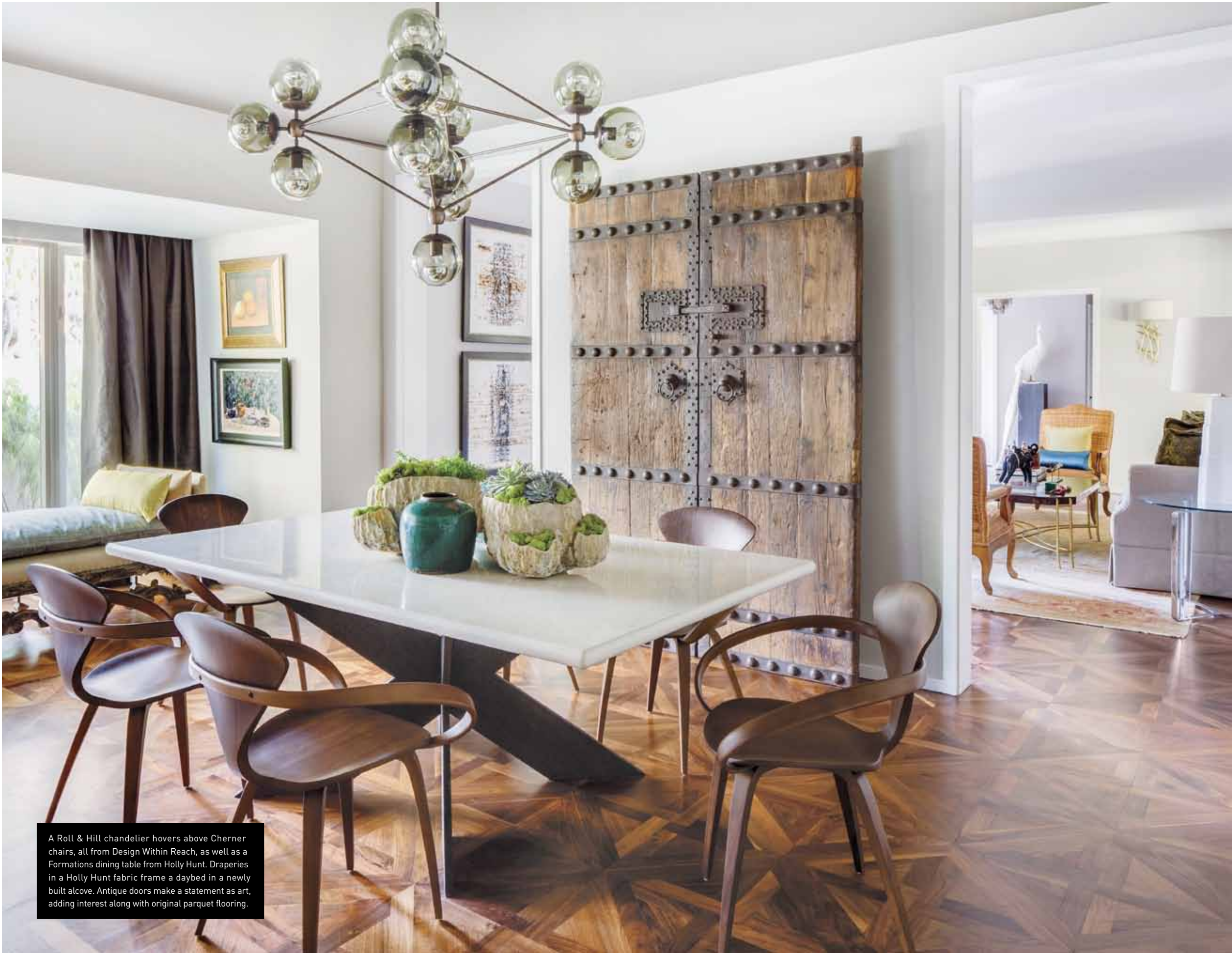


personal space

TWO DESIGNERS GIVE A MIAMI VACATION HOME A GLAMOROUS MAKEOVER FOR ITS GLOBE-TROTTING OWNER, WITH OBJETS D'ART THAT MATCH HER SPIRITED CHARACTER.

WRITTEN BY **LISA BINGHAM DEWART** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MARCO RICCA**

INTERIOR DESIGN Alberto Villalobos and Mercedes Desio, Villalobos Desio
HOME BUILDER Emilio Cubero, Artigues & Cubero Builders
BEDROOMS 4 | **BATHROOMS** 6 | **SQUARE FEET** 5,000



A Roll & Hill chandelier hovers above Cherner chairs, all from Design Within Reach, as well as a Formations dining table from Holly Hunt. Draperies in a Holly Hunt fabric frame a daybed in a newly built alcove. Antique doors make a statement as art, adding interest along with original parquet flooring.

We were with her from day one shopping for a vacation house,” New York-based designer Alberto Villalobos says of his client, for whom he designed a Coral Gables retreat along with partner Mercedes Desio. Introduced through mutual friends, the trio scoured Miami, searching for the perfect “house with a Rat Pack feel,” recalls Desio. What proved to be the ideal pad required intensive care, but the wide front lawn and unusually deep pool, not to mention the home’s stellar 1950s bones, won their client’s heart.

Teaming up with builder Emilio Cubero, Villalobos and Desio began the renovation by tackling the old bones while remaining respectful of the house and its era. “We worked to merge its style with our client’s needs,” says Villalobos. “The architecture speaks to you, and you have to listen.” Topping their priority list were larger windows that would bring the outside in. “We wanted to shower the interior with as much natural light as possible,” says Villalobos. “It was also important to make a greater connection between the indoors and out so the owner could enjoy the scenery.”

The interior space received a major overhaul, too. “We kept the existing footprint and roofline, but everything else was in play,” Cubero explains. The original large living room was split into a smaller formal living area and family room, and the kitchen was enclosed, though it remains visible through glass doors. Guest bedrooms gained en suite bathrooms, and the master bedroom’s entrance migrated from the



Left: An African juju hat joins a tribal headdress from Holly Hunt and a jade sculpture from Baker above shelving by Ligne Roset in the family room. Opposite: Butterfly art from Natural Curiosities brings a sunny focal point to the master bedroom.



To reflect the home's 1950s roots, the office features an Eames chair by Herman Miller that sits behind a desk from Williams-Sonoma Home. The bookshelf—with volumes covered in green and cream vellum—is from Restoration Hardware. Oly stools sit on a starburst rug.

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living room to the main hallway. The project was ambitious even under the best circumstances, and the construction made revamping the space somewhat of a puzzle. “The interior walls were load-bearing,” explains Cubero. “In newer construction they’re not, so you can move them wherever you want. Here, we couldn’t move all of them.”

Color further defines and animates the newly minted spaces. Walls in both the living and dining rooms are bathed in a pale gray, but in the dining room the ceiling is darker to give it a more intimate feel. Plus, says Desio, “it creates a cocoon-like effect.” For the study, “we used a dark brown to pull the eye outside,” says Villalobos. “Now it becomes all about the beautiful garden.” Shades of citron and blue travel through the home, seen in an ikat covering a comfy swivel lounge chair, on vivid throw pillows and on accent walls such as the dreamy blue enveloping one of the guest rooms.

When it came to furnishings, the two leaned toward pieces that read “sophisticated and clean-lined,” Villalobos says. “Though it’s a tropical vacation house, it feels like a fashionable home in a cosmopolitan city.” A simple geometric rosewood chest resides in the master bedroom: “You wouldn’t expect that in a beach house,” notes Desio. “But the butterflies above make it more friendly and fun.” A limestone-topped table sits on a monumental X-base in the dining room. And bits of

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period design come into focus throughout the home as well, including an Eames desk chair in the study, Cherner chairs in the dining room and the Saarinen table in the family room. “They can be formal yet playful,” Villalobos says of the classic finds. The casual textures of the textiles, such as linen and burlap, also temper some of the more formal details found in the residence.

The designers’ reach also extended to the landscape. “For the front, we kept it simple with some Florida natives to create texture around the house,” says Desio. “We also planted a garden with a wonderful bamboo wall that shields it from the traffic and noise.” The pool area received a clean, minimal facelift as well, with an additional jolt of greenery—bougainvillea and ivy—around the perimeter wall to make the exterior “feel fresher and cooler,” says Villalobos.

“THE POOL AREA RECEIVED AN ADDITIONAL JOLT OF GREENERY TO MAKE IT FEEL FRESHER AND COOLER.”



Designers Alberto Villalobos and Mercedes Desio put their own spin on the landscape, making it a lush tropical oasis that invites the owner to relax on her vacations. Chaises from Restoration Hardware await beside the newly renovated pool.

An eclectic flair travels into the guest bedroom, where pillows in D. Bryant Archie's silk ikat pop against Area bedding on an Oly bed. Bedside lamps from R+Y Augousti in Paris perch on walnut tables from Williams-Sonoma Home.



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Although the generous spaces inside and out are very well-suited for entertaining, the house is an intimate reflection of its owner. Throughout, the design duo layered elements “that connected to her travels, telling her story,” says Villalobos. The monumental antique doors in the dining room, for instance, reference time spent in the Far East, along with the ceramics on the dining table, and the vintage terra-cotta figure on her office desk is further evidence of an aesthetic filled with whimsy and wanderlust. “This is a house that is all about her,” says Desio. “She was our inspiration.” **L**

Awash in a serene shade of blue, the guest bedroom gives visitors a peaceful place to work on an Andrew Martin desk and Herman Miller chair, as well as a spot for repose on the wing chair from the owner’s collection. The hand-blown glass lamp is by Porta Romana, and the mirror is from Nest Interiors in New York.