Features

106 ROB LOWE
The Actor and His Wife, Sheryl, Build Their Dream House on the California Coast
Architecture by Don Nulty, AIA
Interior Design by David Phoenix
Landscape Architecture by Mark Rios, FALSA
Text by Nancy Collins
Photography by Mary E. Nichols

114 OLIVER STONE
The Director Looks to the Water in His New York Apartment
Interior Design by Geoffrey Bradfield
Text by Gerald Clarke
Photography by Durston Saylor

122 ANNA FENDI VENTURINI
At Home with the Daughter of the Great Fashion House's Founder in Her 17th-Century Roman Villa
Text by Joseph Giovannini
Photography by Adriano Bacchella

128 STEVE WYNN
The Las Vegas Mogul Masterminds a New Residence for Himself and His World-Class Art Collection
Architecture by Butler Ashworth Architects
Interior Design by Roger Thomas
Landscape Design by Lifescapes International
Text by Judith Thurman
Photography by Mary E. Nichols

136 C. C. SABATHIA
The Yankee Southpaw Is Pitch-Perfect at His New Jersey House
Architecture by James Paragano, AIA
Interior Design by Martin P. Mitchell, ASID
Text by Michael Frank
Photography by Durston Saylor

continued on page 20

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Rob Lowe
THE ACTOR AND HIS WIFE, SHERYL, BUILD
THEIR DREAM HOUSE ON THE CALIFORNIA COAST
like a great relationship, a great house is more than the sum of its parts. And so it is with Sheryl and Rob Lowe’s sweeping 20-room Georgian-style home, nestled on four exquisitely landscaped acres near Santa Barbara. “I’ve always been drawn to a historic, East Coast American aesthetic,” says the actor, a Virginia native. “But a house also has to be comfortable, able to withstand the simultaneous traffic of teenagers playing football on the lawn, barbecuing on the patio, me slipping off to write. Our challenge was extrapolating our views on how to live our lives and raise our children into what we need in a home. Working in TV and film, my strengths are composition and sight line, while Sheryl works great spatially. When it comes to design, she’s as good as it gets.”

Rob Lowe (above) and his wife, Sheryl, looked to East Coast precedents in designing their California home. “It was inspired by the Virginia-area style,” says architect Don Nulty. Mark Rios of Rios Clementi Hale did the landscaping.
“Like Rob, I loved the idea of a big lawn rolling up to an understated manor house perfect for mud boots or high heels,” says Sheryl Lowe. “Building from scratch, I could finally have everything we’ve experienced, loved, wanted to have or do under one roof—a meld of our personalities. Besides sleeping,” she laughs, “my husband’s favorite things are reading, writing and music. Who else would have a piano bar? My mantra was that it reflect my non-conformity: a black, white and gray palette, lots of different rooms for the gypsy in me who has traveled the world. And loving entertainment, I wanted a place not so much to entertain friends as ourselves.”

And what a snazzy playground it is, put together with the creative posse of architect Don Nulty, interior designer David Phoenix, landscape architect Mark Rios and feng shui master David Cho. Part chi wrangler, part Freud, Cho looked at everything from furniture arrangements to accessories to determine what he describes as the most propitious “energy patterns to optimize wealth, wellness and charisma” in the couple’s lives.

“The minute I drove onto this land, I said, ‘This is it!’” Sheryl recalls. “To understand the integrity of the property, we walked it for three weeks before pouring the foundation”—guaranteeing, adds Rob, “that our house sits in the ground as if it’s always been there.” Mount Vernon, for instance, with its white walls and scarlet roof, is a Lowe favorite. “Part of me wanted to go for a red roof,” he notes, “but that was a no-fly zone—our only argument, since our taste is so in sync,” as it was with their architect. Says Nulty, who traveled to Mount Vernon for research, “We all liked the clean, efficient lines and proportions of traditional Virginia detailing.”

The couple’s shared appreciation of history, modernity, sophistica-

“Sheryl loves beautiful things and is definitely a collector,” says designer David Phoenix. “She has a very clean vision.”

Right: An English dog painting is set over the living room fireplace, while a photograph by Lyndic Benson is above the Dutch secretary. Stark sisal rug.
“I always wanted that house where everybody wants to go—full of energy, dogs, music, fun,” says Rob Lowe.

...tion and graciousness starts with the treelined motor court. “Don did an amazing job sited the house among the existing mature oaks,” says Phoenix. “Looking through the living room windows from the front door, you see the ocean; from the pool, you see the mountains. Though large, the house has a human scale. It welcomes you.”

The seduction continues on the expansive veranda that stretches from the master suite to the white-wood Ping-Pong table, a battle site for sons Matthew, 17, and John, 14. Besides two guesthouses, there are four kitchens. The largest (and family hub) was designed by Phoenix with floors of reclaimed French oak, a Calacatta marble-topped island and a breakfast room with a motorized pocket door. “The wonderful thing about Sheryl,” he says, “is, presented with something she likes, she makes a decision. When I showed her my sketch, she said, ‘That’s it!’—ending up with a kitchen. Sheryl adds, “to take your breath away.”

Which is exactly what happened when Rob Lowe (currently writing his memoirs) walked through the realization of their long-held dream—“different,” Sheryl muses, “from our other houses because of the phase Rob and I are in now that the kids are getting grown.”

“I always wanted that house where everybody wants to go,” says the actor, “full of energy, dogs, music, fun. I wanted ours to be that house, and it is. ‘Family home’ is a trite phrase, but that’s exactly what we have. Nothing makes me happier,” he adds, a seeming catch in his voice, “than the life that goes on within these walls, the history that’s been created here every minute, every day.” □

**LEFT:** The master bedroom opens to views of the Pacific. Notes Sheryl Lowe, “I wanted a light, airy feeling with dark woods.” Cowtan & Tout Roman shade fabric. Sisal rug by Stark. **ABOVE:** One of two old oaks on the property shades the veranda. Rob Lowe, who recently wrapped up a starring role in the television series *Brothers & Sisters,* often reads scripts near the reflecting pool in the distance.

www.ArchitecturalDigest.com | 111
Nulty emphasized clean lines and what he calls “almost contemporary styling” in designing the house, which evokes George Washington’s Mount Vernon in Rob Lowe’s native Virginia. “It’s a large house,” adds Phoenix, “but the scale fits the property. It’s very peaceful, very relaxing.” Perennials fabric covers the seating around the pool and spa.