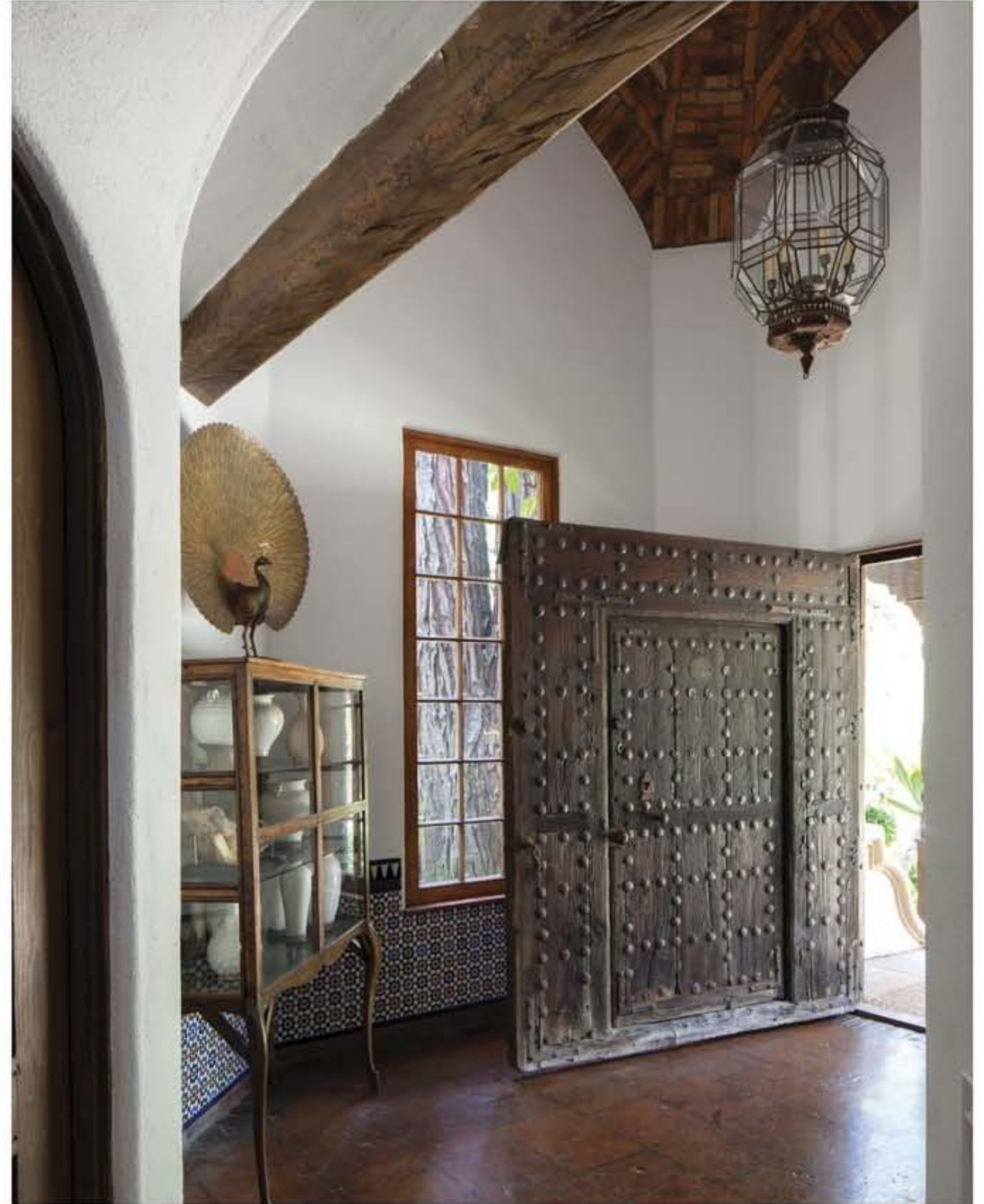




lavender hill

INTERIOR DESIGN: ALISON PALEVSKY AND SARAH SHETTER
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Malibu is shorthand for glamorous oceanfront living, but the traffic-clogged Pacific Coast Highway is walled off from the ocean by houses that seem to be leaning on each other for support, and a jumble of unsightly development scars the arid hills. Turn off the highway, however, and surprises abound, none greater than Lavender Hill Farm, an idyllic enclave at the heart of a private community. Here, Mel Gibson raised his large family in a sprawling hacienda that includes three guest houses: an open-sided music pavilion and the obligatory pool, all concealed by mature trees. Following the actor's public difficulties, the house stood empty until it was bought by Mike Fleiss, a pioneer of reality television.

To transform the echoing interiors and banish any lingering ghosts, Fleiss summoned Alison Palevsky and Sarah Shetter, who had previously designed his beachfront bachelor pad. The two women became friends as students at USC and practiced together as SPI Design for a decade. And while they recently opened their own separate offices (AP Design and Sarah Shetter Design), they still welcome the chance to collaborate. "We work with a lot of people in the entertainment industry who trust us because they're too busy to get involved in details and have learned to rely on professionals," says Shetter.





The designers had plenty to work with. The house was built in 1973, but it has the generous proportions and rich detail that architects Wallace Neff and George Washington Smith brought to movie-star mansions in the 1920s. There's a pleasing sense of intimacy. Vaulted brick and wood-beamed ceilings are crowned with lanterns to pull in natural light, and arched openings link the principal rooms. Expansive windows look out to leafy terraces and a small courtyard, and there is an abundance of patterned tiles that evoke the Moorish architecture of Andalusia.

Though the bones of the house were good, a facelift was long overdue. "The interior felt drab and beige, and there was too much painted ornament," says Palevsky. "We wanted to lighten the spaces and furnish them with an eclectic mix so that our client could entertain friends and move things around without spoiling the composition."





The job might have stretched out over three years, but in a plot-turn worthy of the best reality show, the producer of *The Bachelor* married Laura Koeppler, a former Miss America. She is a singer and active in charity work, and he is immersed in the bustle of development and production, so they were in a hurry to get the house finished. The designers focused on essentials, painting the walls adobe white to throw the dark wood into relief, eliminating excessive ornament and sourcing furniture from their favorite Los Angeles showrooms. "We showed Mike about fifteen of the pieces we were considering to indicate the direction we were moving in, and after that he gave us carte blanche," recalls Shetter. They started in July and were finished by Thanksgiving.

Restraint was the key to success. "In the entry hall, we left the tiles, brick bodega ceiling and studded Moroccan door to speak for themselves, adding a note of elegance with an antique Guatemalan display cabinet from Dos Gallos," says Palevsky. "Music is a big part of Mike's life, so in the living room we created a niche around his grand piano, defining it with back-to-back custom sofas, Art Deco armchairs from Novecento and French leather club chairs from Dispela and Empiric. The vintage Moroccan rug adds warmth." Large pencil sketches by Ethan Murrow were found at Obsolete. In the bright sunroom at one end of the living room, the designers re-covered vintage sofas from Novecento and found burlwood coffee tables at Lawson-Fenning. A branching chandelier and blue linen poufs were sourced from Cisco Home, and sisal rugs contribute to the informal tone.



The dining room is simply furnished with a beehive pedestal table, custom upholstered chairs and a 19th-century Tansu chest. The circular Stilnovo chandelier is from Downtown. "It's a room for everyday dining," says Shetter, "and we furnished it with eclectic pieces that Mike could have acquired on his travels." The traditional kitchen has a brick boveda ceiling and opens onto a breakfast room fitted out with a rustic dining table from Obsolete, vintage bentwood chairs from Nickey Kehoe and a 1930s Venetian storage hutch from Novecento.

"Mike wanted the upstairs master bedroom to be cozy and contained," Shetter explains, "so we had the custom bed and television cabinet made from oiled walnut that complements the wood floors and vaulted ceiling." To lighten the room, a faceted gold-mica pendant from Lawson-Fenning is suspended beneath the roof lantern.

For the expansive outdoor living area, the designers selected an iron chandelier, wood-and-iron coffee table and woven side chairs from Cisco Home. Kilim-covered ottomans from Rummage and a teak daybed from Mix Furniture provide ample seating options. "Modern and rustic, with a hippie vibe," is Palevsky's description of the project's overall aesthetic. "It's a reflection of Mike more than of us." And while the principals of AP Design and Sarah Shetter Design are moving forward with their individual firms, they are sure to find more opportunities to work together. ■

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