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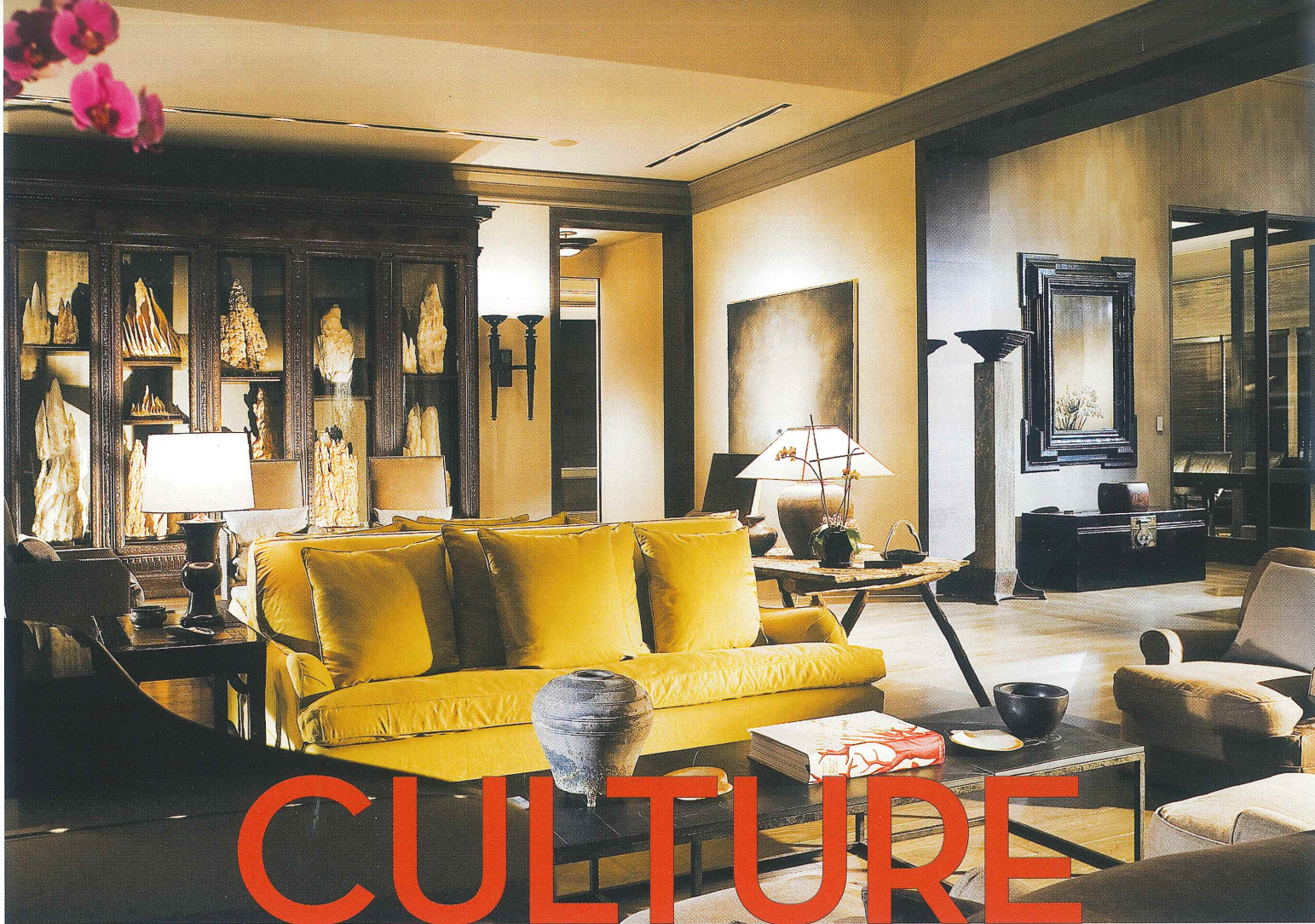
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CULTURE

ON FISHER ISLAND

A FLORIDA PENTHOUSE EVOKES A MANSION IN THE SKY

BY JORGE S. ARANGO > PHOTOS BY DAN FORER

“There is nothing that hasn’t been done,” says the owner of this handsomely appointed, über-wired Fisher Island condominium. “It’s a technologist’s dream.” As a fortysomething venture capitalist in the healthcare industry with a wife and two adolescent children, he wanted this residence to be a private Xanadu, comfortable enough for full time family living and equipped with every amenity that two generations could require. Every aspect of the project—from room placement to the technology to the wall finishes—is 100 percent custom.

The residents bought this 8,500-square-foot space (including a 900-square-foot front terrace and an 1,800-square-foot ocean terrace) when the building that houses it was still in its renderings stage. “I went to the island’s owners and said, ‘I want nothing in there,’” the husband recalls. “No plumbing lines or anything, so that we could really position the rooms the way they would work for us.”

The resulting configuration is very adaptable, he adds, because many of the rooms can be divided without much difficulty. For example, there

are three bedrooms, but one readily accommodates two people with the slide of a pocket door. The expansive gym can also be transformed into a bedroom. Among the other spaces to play with are a living room, a family room, an enormous foyer that now holds the dining area, a master bedroom with an adjacent sitting room, an office, a huge kitchen, a laundry room and more.

Whatever the next occupants decide to do, however, they will be all set with nine plasma TVs, two of them with 61-inch screens. When the whole family craves a more cinematic experience, the 61-incher in the media room, which is subtly tucked into the millwork, disappears behind a 110-inch movie screen that rolls down from its concealed home in the ceiling. A Sony Qualia 004 projector drops down from above also, and it can upload any one of 450 DVDs stored (along with countless music selections) on the home’s Kaleidescape library.

Al Reinhard of Advanced Home Theater in Miami provided the technology, along with partner Robin Bogle. He adds that the home has a

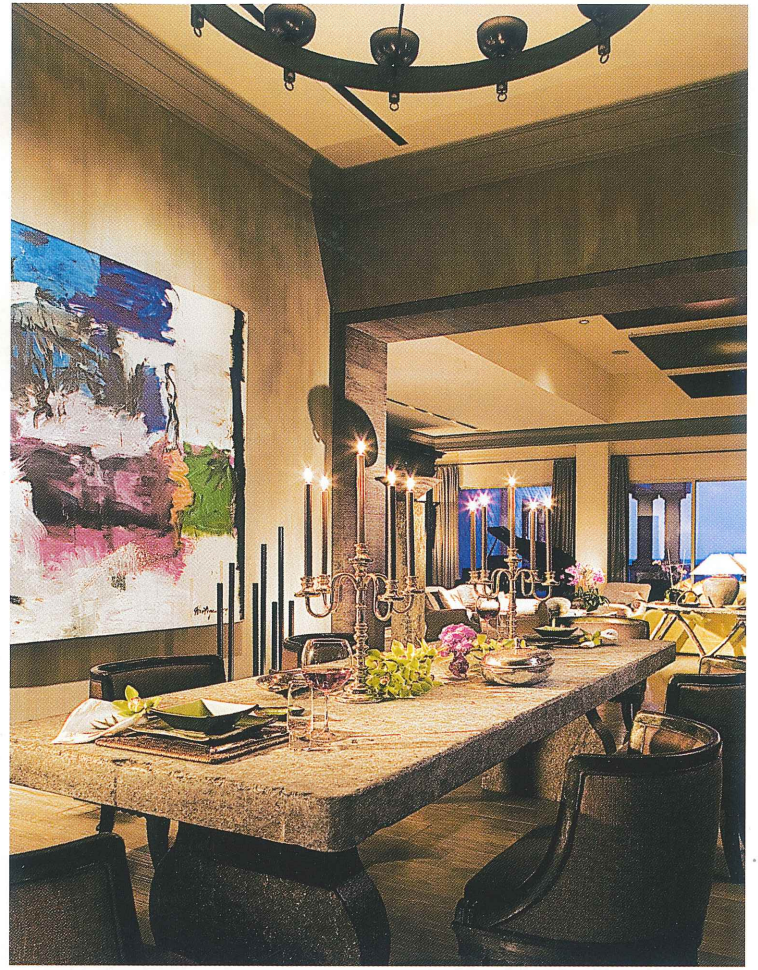
Opposite: The living room exudes dramatic elegance. Right: The foyer of a penthouse on Fisher Island, Fla., which doubles as a dining area. Local designer Lorraine Letendre worked with the owners to incorporate art, such as the abstract painting *Fourth of July, 1957*, by Grace Hartigan. Below: The stainless steel Bulthaup kitchen.

fully integrated Crestron system that is programmed to control temperatures by room (rather than by zones), 14 security cameras, lights, all the audiovisual equipment and even motorized drapes in both the master bedroom and the media room. Best of all, it is so simple to operate that, Reinhard says, “everybody in that household knows how to use it.”

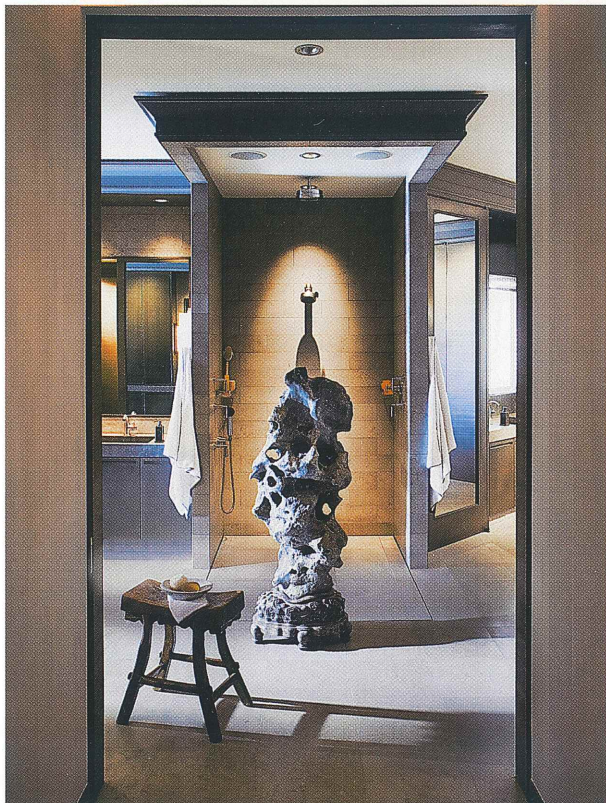
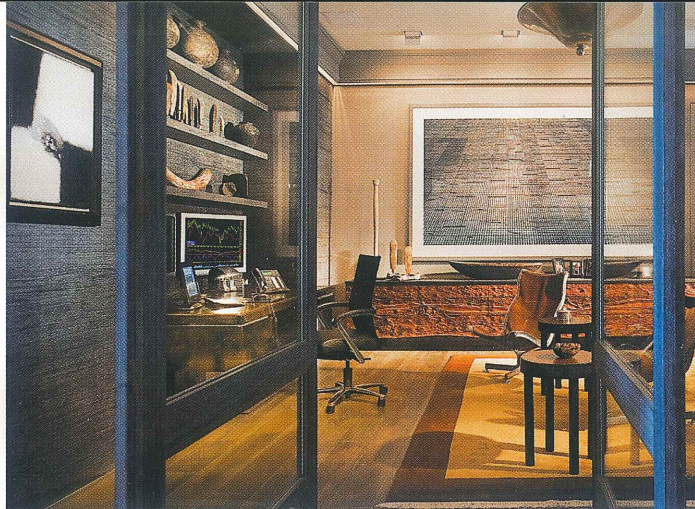
But the place is not just about amazing technology. The owners worked with designer Lorraine Letendre, who understood exactly what was needed. “We wanted to create a home that would be kind of hip and inviting for young people, so they could have their friends over,” she says. “But it also had to be sophisticated enough for the lifestyle of the adults.”

Additionally, Letendre went to great lengths to incorporate the parents’ individual tastes—the wife is a Japanese-American from Los Angeles, the husband is a Canadian native from Vancouver—throughout the home. “They were very different people stylistically,” Letendre remembers. Her solution was to deploy lots of woodwork (to appeal to his Northwest upbringing) in a contemporary setting (to please her California modern tastes). She also filled it with objects from a broad cultural spectrum that appealed not only to each one’s own background, but to the many places to which they had traveled. “It’s such a *mélange* of objects that somehow didn’t collide,” says Letendre, “a cross-section of cultures and centuries.”

Letendre started by designing a luxurious shell for their things. An eight-man team of Belgian artisans were imported for about 10 weeks to develop and execute complex finishes on the floors and walls. Under the supervision of general contractor Jerry Rowland, the team took



Right: In the office, which is just off the entrance, a Frank Thiel photograph from Sean Kelly Gallery in New York hangs above a burl chest from Wyeth. Danish leather chairs, ethnic artifacts and copper accents complete the room. Below: A Chinese scholars' meditation stone from Antik in Tribeca is the focal point of the pared-down master bath. Below right: A 19th-century Chinese ancestral portrait graces the sitting room, which is off the couple's master bedroom and serves as the wife's sanctuary. A pair of daybeds temper the verticality of the room.



wire brushes to the wide-plank ash floors to make them look like aged barn wood. They mixed marble powder and liquid and slathered layers of it onto the walls, burnishing each layer with river rocks to create an ancient *tadilak* look. They also sprayed ground-up metals onto other surfaces and buffed them.

Rowland concealed the HVAC system in moldings and installed perimeter pocket lighting. He constructed doors that vanished into millwork, including, he says, some "monster doors" measuring up to 10 feet high and five feet wide. For a weighty collection of coral, rocks and minerals housed in a pair of gargantuan 18th-century Italian specimen cabinets with false backs, Rowland devised an adjustable shelving system cantilevered from the wall that could support up to 400 pounds per shelf.


"I never ask about budget," says Letendre. "It's about finding the right thing." And, certainly, no expense was spared to make this an exquisite and completely unique abode. "We shopped the world with Lorraine," the husband reports. "Virtually all of what's here was acquired for this unit. It took three years to find and build the collection."

That collection includes a wall-size Abstract Expressionist painting by Grace Hartigan in the dining room and an assortment of contemporary photography. Tenth-century Asian temple guard statues stand at the end of one hallway, and a Chinese scholar's contemplation stone the size of a small teenager greets guests at the entrance to the master bath. Chinese portraits

on silk and a many-paneled antique landscape screen adorn the walls of the master bedroom.

There are also elegant modern and traditional furnishings mixed in with a number of oddities, such as a slab of Belgian bluestone weighing over a ton that serves as the family's dining table. "We had to use cranes to get it in," says Letendre. The look is sleek, yet the many upholstered pieces make it feel comfortable. "It's modern without being cold and sterile," notes Letendre.

But what would a seaside condominium be worth without a view? This one has a panoramic vista that the husband says "is 95 percent unobstructed." At the kitchen window (the kitchen, by the way, is Bulthaup and includes two refrigerators, several freezer drawers, a large island and a cappuccino station), the residents have a front-row seat to the year-round parade of cruise ships making their way to and from the Port of Miami. "We're looking straight out at the Bahamas," the husband says.

Still, to the family that lives here, the most amazing feat Letendre and her crew pulled off was to create the illusion of a full-fledged freestanding residence. "People say that what shocks them the most," the owner concludes happily, "is that once they come in here, they've lost the feeling they're in a condo on Fisher Island. It feels like a home." 

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