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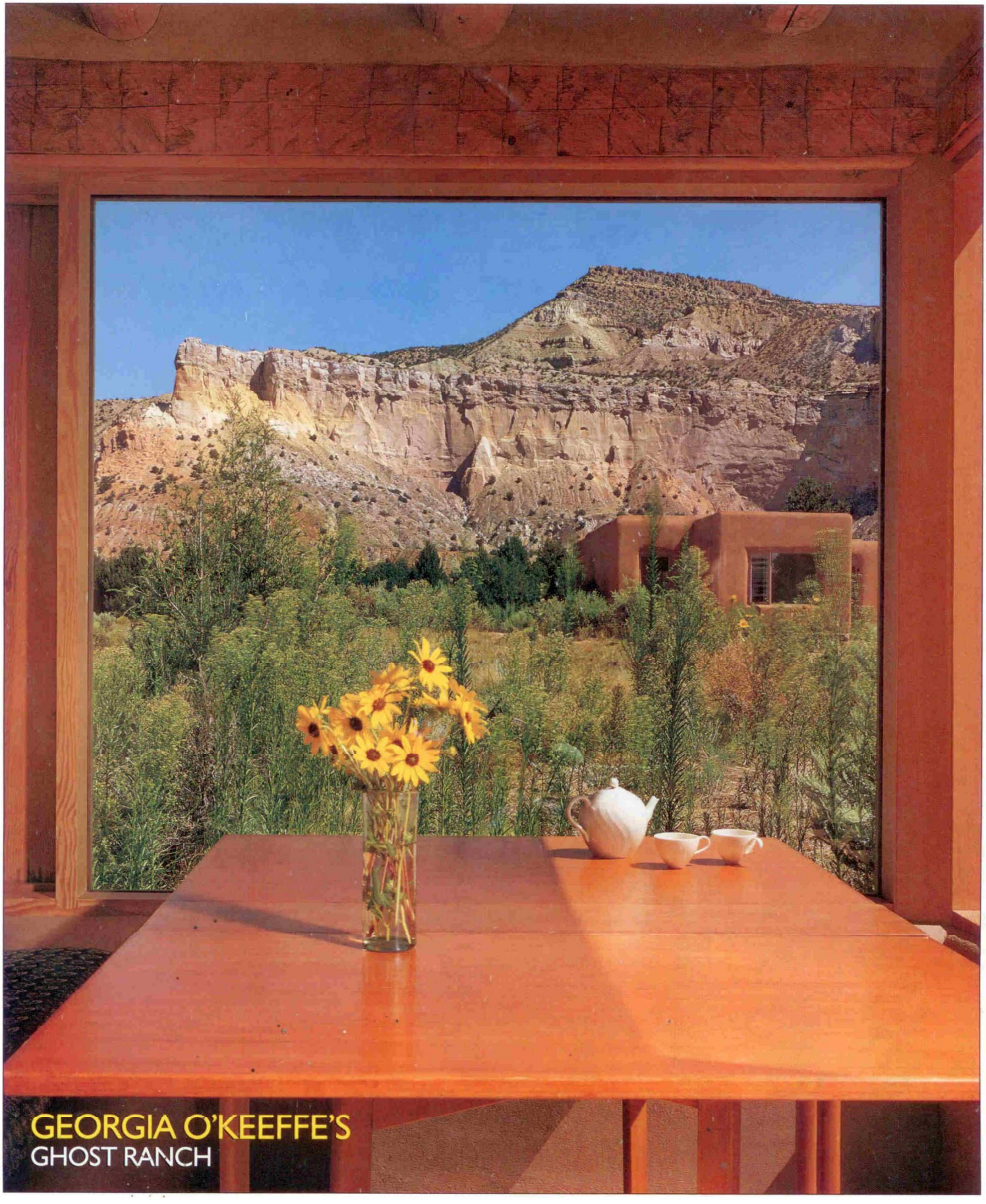

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE'S GHOST RANCH

Mediterranean Makeover

A Beverly Hills Residence Is Meticulously Revamped in the Spirit of Old Hollywood

Text by Michael Webb/Photography by Alex Vertikoff

LEFT: "This house is unique for its richness and authenticity," Erika Glazer says of the Mediterranean Revival house she restored in Beverly Hills. Architect Marc Appleton consulted on the project.

A FEW BLOCKS FROM THE real Sunset Boulevard is a house that would have provided an ideal location for that classic movie. Dense plantings screen the Mediterranean Revival façade from the street, and a cactus jungle separates the formal garden from the terrace in back. Light filters in through grilles and stained-glass windows and gleams off richly carved furniture. Rudolph Valentino may have tangoed across the tiled floor of the music room when he stayed here in the mid-1920s, and Gloria Swanson could have watched her latest pictures in the basement screening room when her producer, Joseph Kennedy, was a resident. There's an underground speakeasy with vault doors and another hidden room, for an organ, with ducts to carry the sound to every part of the house. "Growing up here in the '60s, I thought it must be haunted, for I often heard voices in empty rooms," says Erika Glazer, who bought the

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ABOVE: Glazer retained the plaster ceiling and the mantel in the living room. RIGHT: Two Italian armchairs, from Newel Art Galleries, are opposite a George Smith camelback sofa. Osborne & Little daybed pillow fabric.

BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY BEN LUNSKY; BOTTOM RIGHT: DOUGLAS PIBLIRN

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house from her father five years ago and has just completed an elaborate restoration.

The original building and its makeover owe more to creative inspiration than to scholarship. Architect Marc Appleton, who built a compound of weathered wood and stone for Glazer in Telluride, Colorado (see *Architectural Digest*, June 1997), describes the residence as "a designer's version of Mediterranean—picturesque and ornate." Of the restoration, he remarks: "I stayed on the sidelines, lending support where necessary and urging Erika to go for it. She understood, as few people do, how to preserve the patina that gives a house period flavor, leaving some of the dust and rough edges and choosing vintage fixtures over sleek reproductions."

Begun in 1924 as the centerpiece of an estate, with cottages to the north and south, the three-story house is one of the most impressive to survive from the first, formative decade of Beverly Hills. Glazer describes it as "high Hollywood camp," in which themes and genres are as freely mixed as in a romantic comedy of the era. "Nobody builds this way anymore," she says. "The concrete walls are 18 to 20 inches thick, and the cost of the ornament would be prohibitive today. The original Otis elevator and the basement bath and sauna are still in working order. I could have sold the double lot and made a big profit, but it would have been a crime to destroy this house," she says.

LEFT: The foyer was turned into a den/bar/game room. A pair of antique enamel plaques hang over the sofa near an R. Kenton Nelson painting. The armchair is by Carlo Bugatti. Aga John rug.

Though the bones were good, openings had been blocked off, the interior spaces had become drab and dark, and much of the detailing had been covered up. "We tried to use everything that came with the house and to give it a new lease on life," says Glazer.

Her family was in the construction business, and she had plenty of hands-on experience, so Glazer was convinced she could direct the restoration herself, with help from artisans and engineers. She studied the Hearst Castle records and the Adamson House in Malibu, California, researching the period before beginning work. "Images floated through my head," she recalls. "I had a general idea of the spaces I wanted, but there were no blueprints, so all the struc-

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ABOVE: "The dining room was drab," says Glazer. RIGHT: Crimson paint was mixed with plaster to give the walls a rich hue. One of two antique chandeliers hangs over a set of Jacobean chairs, foreground. Mansour rugs.

"She understood, as few people do, how to preserve the patina that gives a house period flavor."

chandeliers and wall sconces were put back in operation.

Much of the original décor, including the tiled baths with their etched-glass doors and charmingly painted nightlights, had survived 75 years of changing tastes. The house was originally entered from a motor court to the side, and the foyer currently serves as a game room. A tiny entrance hall now leads directly into the living room, which steps down through arches to a music room with a tiled fountain and an arched window framing the garden. A spacious open kitchen was created from three small rooms, and a shift in ceiling levels was masked by a carved wood frieze that ties into the mahogany cabinets and quarry-tile floor. Glazer created her own bedroom from those

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ABOVE: Two small bedrooms were combined to create the spacious master bedroom. TOP: Coraggio sheers with Brunschwig & Fils trim top the Mimi London bed. The rug is from Aga John.

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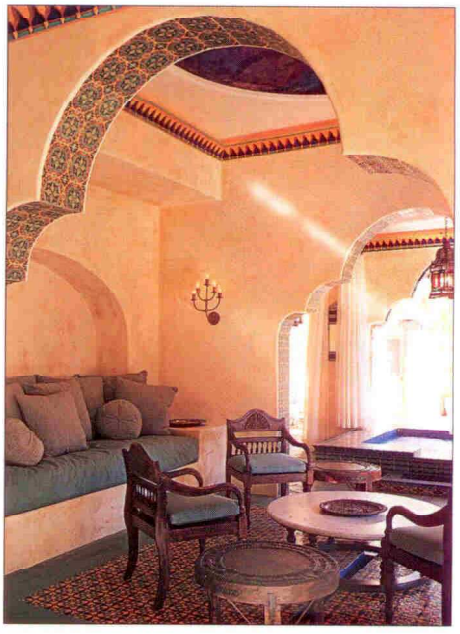
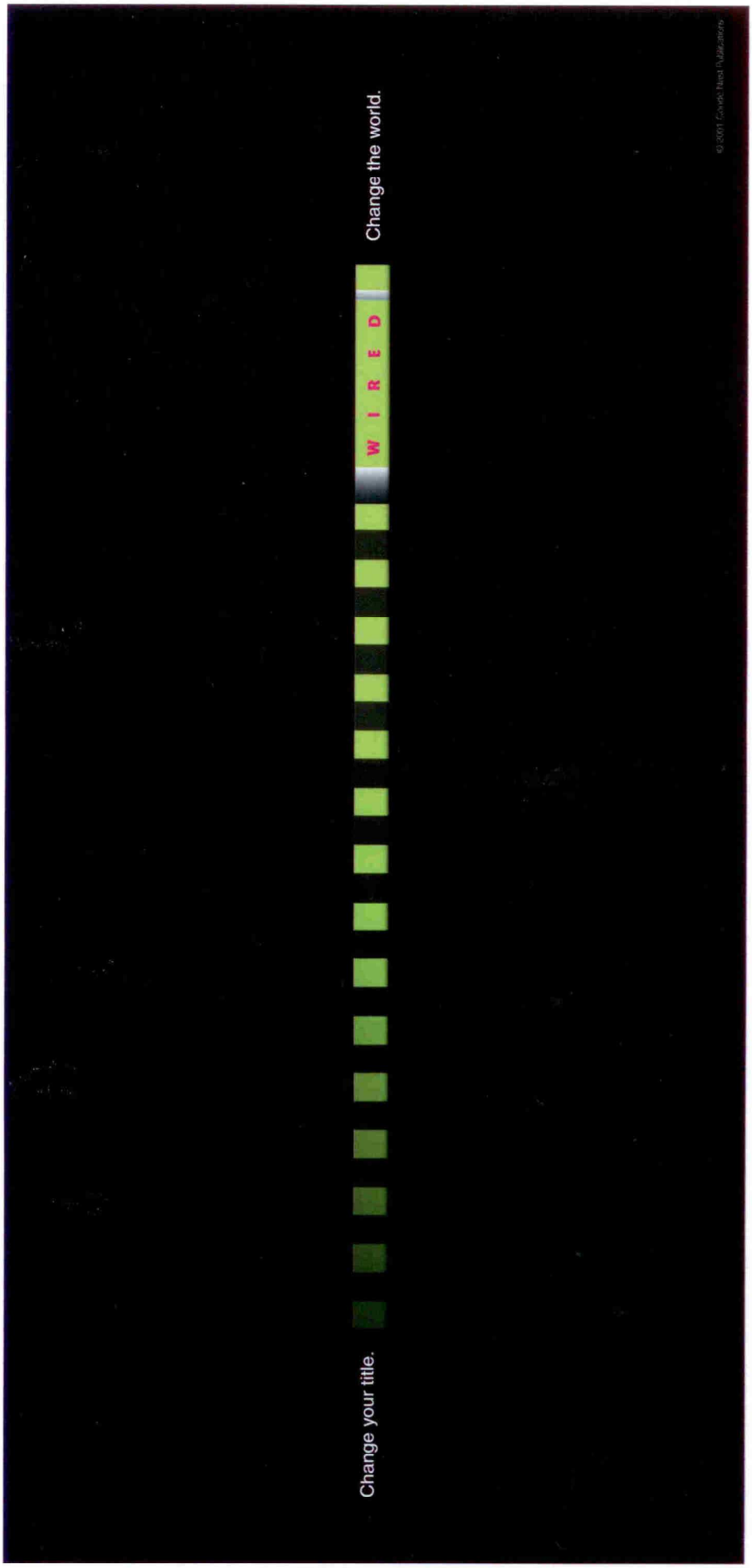
tural decisions were made on-site. I was here every day and was involved in every decision. After that, it was a matter of stripping away, removing paint and revealing hidden niches and electrical connections. We knocked on every wall, and whenever it sounded hollow, we got out the sledgehammer."

Wood floors with elegant marquetry borders were discovered beneath fitted carpets and layers of black stain. Ceiling moldings were repaired or replicated, and integrally colored plaster was waxed to reflect the light. Glazer chose an ocher tone to give the living room walls a sunny character and then discovered a similar hue had been used in a long-hidden niche. A rich burgundy was selected to give the walls of the dining room the look of old leather, and a pair of lacquered Gothic-patterned swing doors that were found in the basement were reinstalled. Vintage wiring and plumbing were replaced, and forgotten connections for

BELOW: Tiled archways and floors highlight the Moorish-influenced poolhouse, which Glazer designed. The teak armchairs and brass low tables are from Bali. An antique Moroccan lantern hangs at right.





Before & After

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that she and her brother had slept in as children, and she turned a sun porch into a small sitting room with ceramic leaves scattered across the plaster as though they had blown in on a gust of wind. Her daughter got the original master bedroom, and she asked Michael S. Savoia, who supervised the selection of fabrics throughout, to canopy twin beds in swagged taffeta. The new poolhouse is an *Arabian Nights* fantasy, with a dome and a columned arcade, murals and a tiled spa spilling water into a channel that crosses the floor.

Within this enhanced shell, Glazer indulged her passion for collecting and arranging, drawing on a hoard she had accumulated at estate auctions and in flea markets. "You have to be consistently crazy to mix things up as I do," she remarks, but, though the juxtapositions of old and new are often startling, there's a consistent logic to her choices.

Some of the artworks in the dining room are inspired by food, and the George Segal and David Hockney in the lobby by the idea of sitting. The wrought iron base of a pool table in the music room and the sheer curtains in the game room take their cues from the curvilinear window screens. Peacock motifs recur in stained glass, tiles and painted "eyes" on the stair risers. Seating ranges from comfortable jewel-toned sofas to triangular wood chairs with carved posts that dig insistently into your spine, Florentine mother-of-pearl-inlaid side chairs and one-of-a-kind pieces by Carlo Bugatti. All are grouped to play off each other and the ornament of the room.

Like so many owners who embark on restoration, Erika Glazer had no idea how long it would take and how many challenges she would have to master, but her enthusiasm never flagged. "The more I got into it, the more determined I became to do it all and get it right," she says. "We seldom found what we expected, so it was essential to stay calm, think up solutions and maintain a balance between the new elements and what was already there." In contrast with Norma Desmond's decaying mansion, this house captures the optimism and the eclectic spirit of the 1920s, period style and a timeless love of life. □