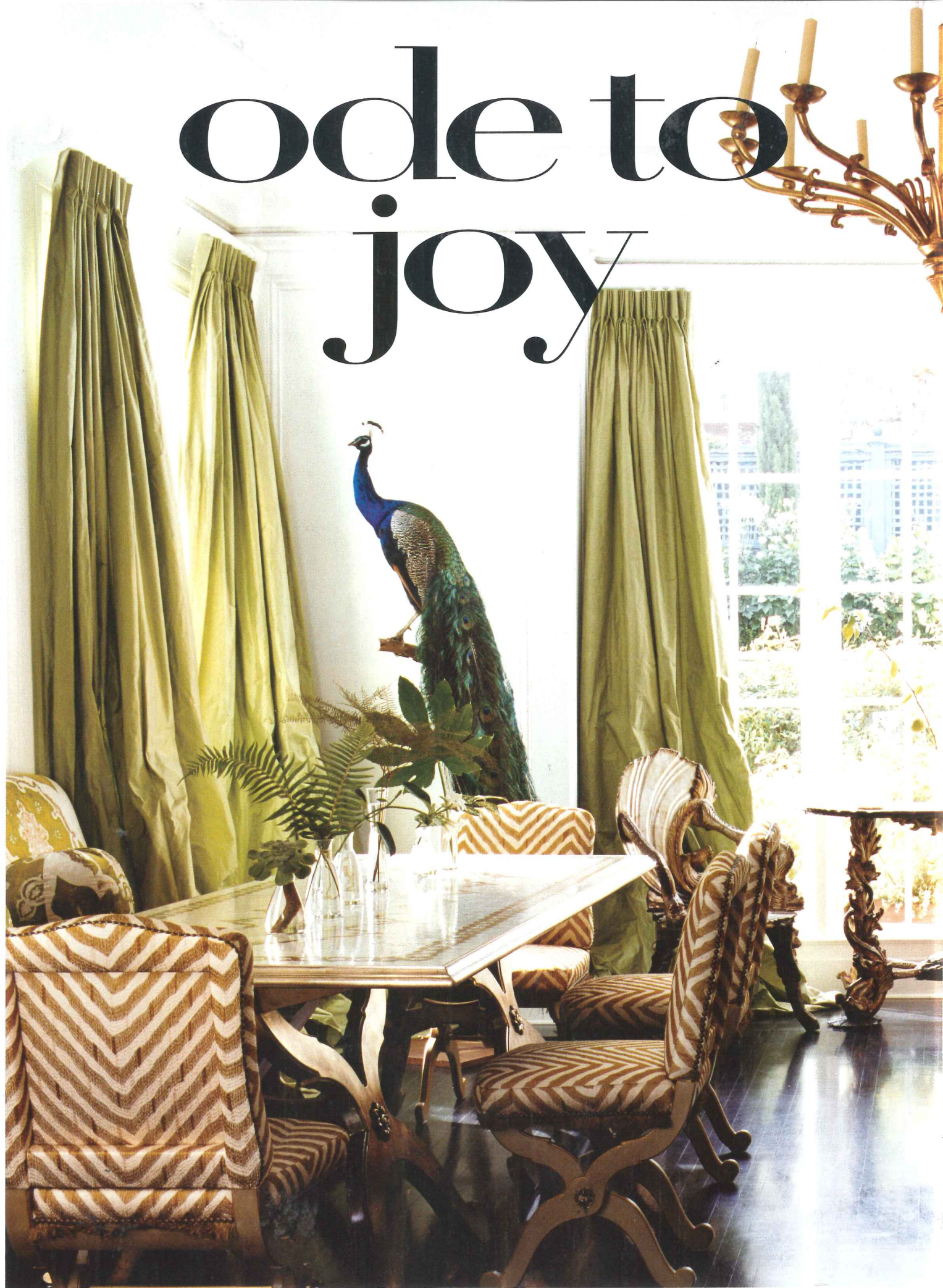


ode to joy



Alexis and Trevor Traina tapped into San Francisco's design history—and the talents of iconic family friends—to create a dramatic setting for their young family.

Hamish Bowles is entranced.

Photographed by François Halard.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

The dining room's music chairs are by Ann Getty & Associates. Andrew Fisher designed the abalone-topped tables. The 18th-century grotto furniture was found at Newel, NYC. The photograph is *The Seneca*, by Alec Soth. The chandelier was found at Coleen & Company, L.A. Flowers by Torryne Choate. *Sittings* Editors: Hamish Bowles and Cynthia Frank.

In the magnolia-scented heights of San Francisco's Gold Coast, the air seems more rarefied. The morning mists roll in from the bay far below, shrouding the prettily fretted Victorian houses that clamber up the hill and the stately Beaux Arts mansions that crown it. It was here that Trevor Traina and Alexis Swanson, gilded children of the city (he a dashing Internet entrepreneur, she a dynamic beauty who works with her family's self-titled Napa winery), set about house-hunting. They were seduced by a light-flooded Edwardian manse—an appropriate setting for Alexis, whose cameo

looks seem fashioned for a John Singer Sargent canvas.

Although the house had survived the 1906 earthquake that devastated the city a year after it was built, it had been in the same ownership for a half century, and its patina of genteel shabbiness had confounded most prospective purchasers. It was some time before the couple worked out how they could unleash its possibilities. Their life at the time was a whirlwind, as Trevor recalls. "We got the house in April, were engaged in May, and married in August," he says. "This was the idea behind the house: Let's fill it with children! It took a leap of faith to get the family house before the family." Children duly arrived; the couple moved in two weeks before their second child, Delphina, was born (her elder brother, Johnny, is now two).

The enormity of the renovation might have defeated some newlyweds. "We had absolutely no idea *what* we were getting ourselves into—the project just grew and grew," admits Alexis; but, she adds, "for Trevor and me, the house was a shameless love poem to each other."

"Alexis has been so patient with me," says Trevor. "She married a man with 300 photographs!" Trevor's collection had its genesis when, aged 22 and newly graduated from Oxford and Princeton, he found himself at the Seagram Building in Manhattan on the first day of his first job. There was a knock on the door, and the company's photography conservator came in to offer a print for his office. "It was too good to be true," he remembers. He chose Nicholas Nixon's *View West from Park Avenue and 55th Street, New York City*, and when the photograph came up for auction years later Traina acquired it—together with a Weegee that had hung in the hall outside his office. These two works formed the nucleus of a sophisticated collection that now spans the decades from Eggleston and Arbus to Gursky and Wall.

To accommodate the photography, Trevor boldly decided to dynamite the granite rock on which the house was built to excavate 3,000 square feet of subterranean space that would prove perfect for the light-sensitive prints. "Trevor has vision that I don't," says Alexis. "He thinks on a much grander scale!"

Trevor in turn applauds his wife's "fabulous and whimsical eye," informed by legendary decorators including Tony Duquette, Michael Taylor, and Thomas Britt. He is every bit as knowledgeable about the decorative and decorating arts. He will discuss Elsie de Wolfe's oeuvre with as much enthusiasm as the capabilities of his beloved Audi R8—which he drove in the infamous Gumball 3000 Rally from Shanghai to Beijing, a trip that also involved one night in North Korea as a guest of Kim Jong Il (who loves cars). Trevor's latest Internet venture is DriverSide.com, a Web site focused on car maintenance.



IN THE PINK

Interior designer Thomas Britt's bravura drawing-room scheme features Sabina Fay Braxton's velvet. Hiroshi Sugimoto's *Queen Elizabeth II, 1999*, is flanked by works by Christopher Williams and John Baldessari.



STAIRWAY TO THE STARS

Thomas Britt's Adler-inspired Lucite banister with Laurie Simmons's *Walking Cake II* (color).



HEROIC FEET

Johnny in the entrance gallery, with Keith Tyson's *Studio Wall*. Drawing: 13th May 2004.



FRAME BY FRAME

Diane Arbus works in the gallery. BELOW: Trevor and Johnny in the dining room.



EYE FOR DETAIL

The 19th-century peacock bench in the library was found at Steinitz, Paris. Ann Getty covered the walls in peacock-feather eyes.

Trevor also applauds his wife's passion for "grandmother chic." "We didn't want flashy-new," he says. "We didn't want to fix everything; we wanted to maintain the patina while adding vitality." "The house became a case study for all of us," Alexis explains, "asking the question, How do we live with young children, romance, and fantasy with all of this art?" Ultimately, as she discovered, "the art lives with us, rather than us with it."

Fantasy environments are certainly a leitmotif in the couple's life together; Trevor proposed in the handbag rotunda of Bergdorf Goodman. At his behest this was transformed after-hours by Linda Fargo into a softly lit bower, echoing to birdsong and filled with ornamental lovebirds and white peacocks, orchids, chandeliers, and silvered Venetian grotto furniture (some of which has made its way into their airy dining room).

"It really was a living fairy tale—complete with Prince Charming," says Fargo, who had gilded the store's skeleton key and placed a heart with the couple's initials in one of the windows.

Both Trevor and Alexis grew up absorbing exuberant taste as a baba soaks up rum. Trevor's childhood homes were concocted by his vivacious mother, Dede Wilsey, in collaboration with the innovative Michael Taylor—dramatically pretty backdrops for dramatically pretty Impressionists. Alexis, meanwhile, grew up in a series of homes that were the bravura handiwork of her godfather, the decorator Thomas Britt, working with her mother, Elizabeth Swanson, whom he describes as "high-octane creative."

It was Britt who set the gutsy tone of the house when he advised the couple on the look of their living room. Trevor "had that *huge* collection of photography, and she likes a much more traditional style," Britt recalls, "so let's blend it all into one big backdrop for pictures." He commissioned Venice-based textile maven Sabina Fay Braxton to create a stamped crimson velvet and, in the tradition of grand eighteenth- and nineteenth-century establishments, "bathed the whole thing in it—walls, curtains, sofas, the *works*." Britt felt that this emphatic backdrop would help the art to pop—which, against all odds, it does. The crimson velvet is dusted with gold; "at night, by candlelight, it's really potent," says Alexis. "It just glows."

The Trainas also looked to some iconic tastemaking neighbors for inspiration. It is an impressive roster. There is madcap Dodie Rosenkranz, whose villa was decorated by Michael Taylor in a style that Britt characterizes as "palace in Calcutta." In a sister manse, Ann and Gordon Getty have assembled one of the world's most bewitching treasure houses, and the Trainas'

elegant nonagenarian friends Adolphus and Emmy Andrews live nearby in a style that is frankly Whartonian.

Along with Britt, Ann Getty worked with the Trainas to realize their specific vision. "On her watch we were really able to discover our styles and blend them," says Alexis. "She was so patient and kind." It also helped that Getty "runs a true atelier, filled with acres of ancient textiles, books, and furniture from every corner of the Earth." Getty's three full-time seamstresses were set to work on the Trainas' maharaja library, sewing a dense tapestry of the eyes of peacocks' tail feathers to its gently curving wall. (Trevor found a Proustian double-peacock bench at Steinitz in Paris to set against it.) There are more peacocks in the dining room, specimens that were a gift from Trevor's stepmother, Danielle Steel.

The Trainas also sought out furniture makers, designers, and decorative painters who could realize their schemes. "We worked with a brilliant, motley crew of talent," says Alexis. "And while each of them was very different from the others, their common thread was the love of drama, romance, and imagination."

The couple love to entertain—Trevor sits on the boards of seven nonprofits, and one of Alexis's projects at the winery is "to partner with companies that celebrate pleasures complementary to wine drinking—including Chicago's Vosges Haut-Chocolat, domestic caviar from Tennessee, and iced coffee from New Orleans." With this in mind, they were careful to create "public spaces separate from our private spaces."

One of Trevor's charities is Venetian Heritage, and the magic of that city informs much of the house's decor.


Trevor wanted his entrance gallery, for instance, to suggest "the idea of a grand entrance in a Venetian palazzo leading up to the *piano nobile*." Here, the eighteenth-century Portuguese chairs and seventeenth-century Chinese shrine set on a dramatic black-and-white marble checkerboard floor are brought vividly into the twenty-first century with the bold vertical stripes of Keith Tyson's monumental *History Painting* (Baden-Baden, 1942). The landscape architect Madison Cox, who created the elegant treillage-framed white gardens, suggested that the front doors be painted lacquer red, an antic touch that hints at the drama inside. "We were both so passionate about creating a home and a family and a life," says Trevor. "The house is the embodiment of that commitment to each other."

"It was born in the peak of love," adds Alexis. "That's such a specific moment in life and time. It was the treat and experience of a lifetime." □



MOM AND POP ART

Alexis, in a Chloé coat and Dolce & Gabbana heels, with Johnny in the entrance gallery, beside Keith Tyson's *History Painting* (Baden-Baden, 1942); 18th-century Portuguese chairs flank a 17th-century Chinese altar.



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HOT HOUSE

The Trainas added an English conservatory by Amdega. The octagonal table and rustic chairs and the Jansen-inspired tufted banquettes and plaster stools are by Ann Getty & Associates. The chandelier was found at Partridge, London. Landscape architect Flora Grubb designed the plantings.