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AUGUST 2006 \$3.99 US

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ART HOUSE

Designer Roger Thomas' home blends modern lines with a vibrant palette

EAGLE HILLS

ARCHITECT: MARK MACK

CONTRACTOR: MERLIN CONTRACTING

STORY: MATT JACOB

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFF GREEN

5,000 SQ. FT.





Previous page: The sofa is by A. Rutilin, as designed by Jean Michelle Frank, covered in fabric from Kneeder-Fauchere, and the coffee table is by Antoine Proulx from Thomas Design Source L.V. The painting above the sofa is by Christopher Brown, purchased at Paul Thiabaud Gallery in San Francisco. This page: The round dining table is by Wendell Castle at Thomas Lavin in Los Angeles, and the chairs are by Christian Bunn for Holly Hunt. Opposite page: The dishes are from the Roger Thomas Collection by Lewis Milman in New York. The figure on the stand is an ancient Roman sculpture purchased through Sotheby's. See Resources.





Roger Thomas knew what he wanted. Then again, Roger Thomas always knows what he wants. Usually, the only challenge lies in the process of getting from "Here's what I want" to "Here's how I did it" in as swift a manner as possible. It's this decisive approach to design and execution that helped him become a leading interior designer, the kind entrusted by no less a perfectionist than Steve Wynn with decorating some of the world's most exquisite hotels.

So when it came time to build his dream house in the upscale Eagle Hills subdivision in Summerlin back in the mid 1990s, you better believe Roger Thomas came armed with a meticulous plan. How meticulous? Well, let Roger explain it.

"I wrote a three-page program of how the house

needed to function for myself, my family and my housekeeper," he says. "I wanted to have a public wing and a private wing. I dictated the number and types of spaces. I dictated that I wanted to have 12-foot ceilings and thick walls—I didn't want to see any architecture other than my own from any part of the house. I wanted it to be very private, I wanted the house to be extremely quiet, I wanted to be able to perform any task I wanted to during the daytime without turning on lights, and on and on and on. You can imagine—I'm a designer!"

Thomas handed the program to his Los Angeles-based architect Mark Mack and local developer Merlin Contracting and then did the unthinkable—he pretty much got out of the way.

Why would a man who at the time was decorating



the swank Bellagio—and later would do the same at the equally opulent Wynn Las Vegas—relinquish the controls of his dream house? First, designing and furnishing Bellagio was, at the time, a 24/7 task. Secondly, Thomas had complete faith in Mack—who had built a home for some friends in Reno that Thomas immediately fell in love with upon visiting—and Merlin Contracting.

"He had a lot of confidence in Mark Mack and he had a lot of confidence in us," says Bart Jones, who oversaw construction of the home as a superintendent with Merlin and who has known Thomas since childhood. "It was like, 'Here guys, I'm happy with the team. I've got a Bellagio to help build. So keep me informed, and when something comes up that there's a question about, let's all work on it together.' And it literally went as smooth as that."

A year later, the 5,000-square-foot, one-story home was done. Seven years hence, it still stands as a testament to the wonder of forward-thinking architecture that's as fully functional as it is cutting edge.

Knowing his passion for art, and knowing how he's dressed up the likes of the Golden Nugget, Mirage, Treasure Island, Bellagio and Wynn, it's difficult not to paint a picture in the mind's eye of what Thomas' home would look like before ever setting foot in it. Words such as "plush," "elegant" and "extravagant" spring to mind. Then the grand, 500-pound Crapaudine front door swings open, and all of those preconceived ideas vanish.

With a mélange of primary colors adorning the walls, and concrete floors leading from one room to the next and then out into a majestic courtyard that the house surrounds, the place is much more hip than posh, more inviting than intimidating.

Start with the walls that are set back from the windows. The colors—which alternate from periwinkle blue to brick red throughout the open areas of the home—are as striking as the texture. Lime-based Venetian plaster was colored with a natural-occurring mineral, mixed into a kind of thick soup, then ragged on the drywall in multiple layers. For a unique finishing touch, they were then painstakingly waxed by hand.

What's most impressive about the colored walls is



The vases on the Wendell Castle table are from the Roger Thomas Collection for Trell. Opposite page: The kitchen cabinets were custom-designed by architect Mark Mack in enigre, ash and mahogany veneers. See Resources.



the effect they have on the opposite walls that contain windows and separate the house from the courtyard. Mack intentionally kept those walls white, so that when the sun's rays shone through the windows, they would bounce off the red and blue walls, as well as the yellow-painted concrete floor, and subsequently project ever-changing hues onto the white. "[The white walls] are influenced all day long as the sun comes across [the house], so the place is always alive," Jones says. "The house is constantly changing colors."

While that kind of detail is immediately noticeable to anyone who visits, several elements throughout the house are not. For instance, if you were to take a look down at the baseboards, you'd eventually notice that there are no baseboards. Instead, Mack employed a then-little-used tactic called "negative-edge reveal," where the walls stop a couple of inches from the floor then cut back in a few inches, leaving a gap between the bottom of the wall and the floor. The negative-edge reveal was also carried out at top of the walls and in all the door jams.

Another architectural trick that's difficult to catch at first glance: Every edge of every wall lines up with the edge of another wall—same for the lines on the floor and the edges of the countertops. Not only did this provide a perfectly linear experience, it ensured that there was no way to cut corners in construction. "You couldn't even be



off an eighth of an inch," says Jones. "An eighth of an inch was a mile on this project."

Being the perfectionist that he is, that's exactly how Thomas wanted it. "The reason the house is so successful for me is because all of the rooms share the same kind of light and character and intentional placement," he says. "The windows are aligned on axis with the exterior, so that as you move through the house, surprises and tangencies happen. It's a delight whether you're sitting or moving. It's a highly successful piece of sculpture."

It's not by accident that Thomas would use an art term to describe his residence. There are few things in life he loves more than art, as evidenced by the dozens of paintings, sculptures and various artifacts that adorn the home, not to mention furnishings and mirrors that serve as works of art themselves. One of the more interesting pieces in the home is a long daybed that sits in the left-hand corner of the family room, a piece Thomas designed himself as part of a new project called the Roger Thomas Collection for Trevi, a locally based manufacturer. In fact, Thomas is introducing a number of new products including mirrors, bowls, cylinder containers and small furniture, such as benches and tables.

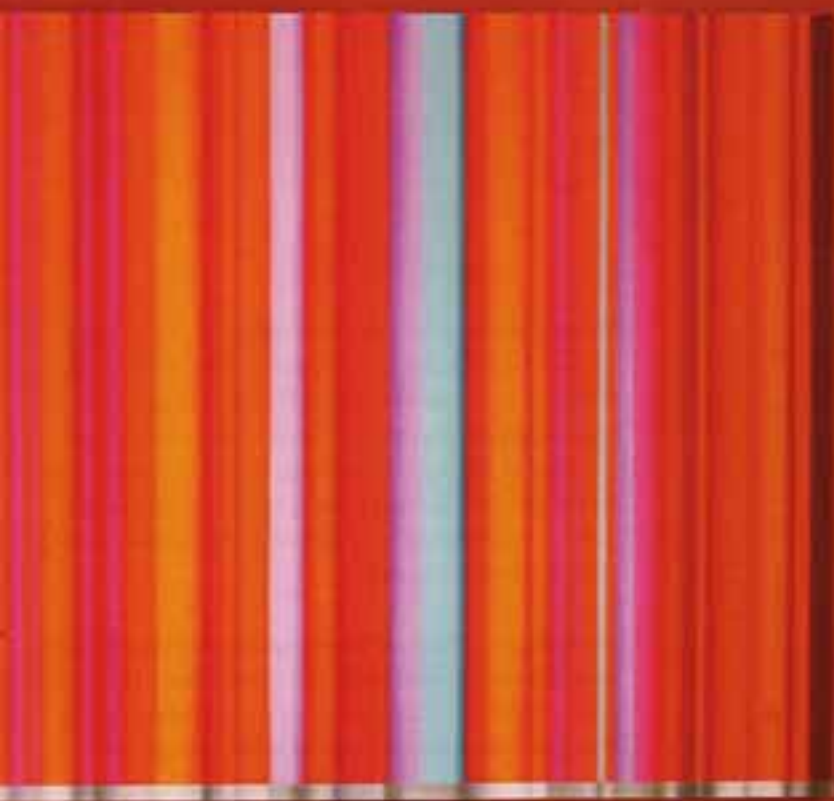
Of all the art elements in the home, none turns more heads than the portraits of Thomas by the late Andy

Above left and opposite page: Views of the main hallway reveal the colorful Venetian plaster walls that create ever-changing hues on the white walls and concrete floor. **Above right:** The wood feature in the ceiling is an 18th-century Moroccan roof, which the homeowner found in a Berber dwelling in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains.





The sofa is by Christian Liaigre from Holly Hunt, with custom pillows from A. Rudin in Los Angeles using fabric from Nancy Corzine. The painting is "The Fibonacci Equation" by Las Vegas-based painter Tim Bavington. See Resources.





Warhol. The colorful silk-screened pieces of a younger Thomas hang on the wall adjacent to the family-room fireplace. As for how the Warhol portraits hang, here we have yet another hidden detail in the home: a track installed at the top of the ceiling, from which wires drop down, allowing Thomas to hang—and quickly change out—artwork throughout the house without ever having to drill a hole in the wall.

Technically, Thomas' home, which sits on half an acre, consists of four bathrooms and three bedrooms, plus a studio—which is cleverly concealed behind the wall that contains the family-room entertainment center—for his live-in housekeeper. Really, though, there's another room: the courtyard, which is as aesthetically impressive as anything inside. First, there's the large cantilever that stretches from a wall opposite Thomas' bedroom across the courtyard to the wall opposite the kitchen/family room. It not only provides shade, but thanks to a round oculus cut into the beam, a colorful exterior "ceiling" is subtly exposed—the sky.

Then there are the four 12-foot-high, 12-inch-thick rectangular walls—painted the same periwinkle blue and brick red as those inside—that jet out toward the modest swimming pool. "That was Mark's reaction to me saying, 'I don't want to see any other architecture from the house but my own,'" Thomas says. "Mark, who is Muslim, understands the magic of Islamic architecture, so he built it that way very intentionally. He calls that the 'outdoor room.'"

Any way you measure it, the Thomas residence is a masterpiece. Still, it's always nice when strangers and friends alike recognize it as such, and he's certainly had his share of admirers, including a certain hotelier and art lover who—as Thomas knows all too well—is as tough to please as anyone on the planet: Steve Wynn.

"Steve and Elaine came for dinner one night, and he was so enchanted with the house that he insisted on coming back the next day to see it in daylight," Thomas recalls of his boss' reaction to the house. "He did. And he stayed for five hours." ■







The chair in the master bedroom is Eero Saarinen's Womb chair from Knoll, covered in fabric from Kneidler-Fauchere in Los Angeles. The window treatments are by Coast Drapery with hardware by Industrial Interiors, both from Las Vegas, and the fabric for the shades is from Fabricut from S. Harris & Co. in Los Angeles. Opposite page, top: The master bathroom. Opposite page, bottom: The large cabinet in the bedroom is 14th century Spanish, acquired by the homeowner from his favorite antique dealer in Florence, Paolo Romano. See Resources.



The Galileo mirror in Water, from the Roger Thomas Collection for the A.P.F. Group in New York, features inset Swarovski crystals available in the shape of the constellation of your—or a loved one's—Zodiac sign. The African mahogany desk is circa 1930s, designed by DeCoene Frères. Opposite page: A lithograph by Andy Warhol hangs above a side table in the guest bedroom. The chair is 18th century Venetian upholstered in Spinneyback leather. The bed is Juno design from IRONIES at Kneedler-Fauchere and the bedding was custom-made by Anichini. The square pillows on the bed are from West Elm. See Resources.