

ELLEDECOR

Style Across America

Napa Valley Romance
Ralph Lauren's Montauk Retreat
Continental Flair in Florida
Chic Modernism in Nashville
Ben Stiller in
the Hollywood Hills

JULY/AUGUST 2005
USA \$4.50/CANADA \$5.50
ELLEDECOR.COM

01152



0 270811 5

On the terrace of Ben Stiller and Christine Taylor's Hollywood Hills house are a sofa and chairs by Robin Standefer and Stephen Alesch of Roman and Williams, who designed the interior; the upholstery fabric is a Great Plains linen by Holly Hunt, and the bronze light fixture is Moroccan. Facing page: A view of the Mediterranean-meets-Middle East pool area. See Resources.





SETTING THE STAGE

BEN STILLER AND HIS WIFE, CHRISTINE TAYLOR, TURN TO
THEIR FAVORITE PRODUCTION DESIGNERS TO CREATE MODERN DRAMA
WORTHY OF OLD HOLLYWOOD

TEXT BY MITCHELL OWENS · PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREY CRAWFORD

PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSIDI

ONCE UPON A TIME American movie stars lived in Spanish Revival houses and were attended to by maids in frilly aprons, elocution coaches, and uniformed chauffeurs on call. It was how life in Hollywood was crafted back then: utterly artificial. At the end of one of those driveways, it still is. (FYI: That's meant in a good way.)

Ben Stiller, the comic antihero of *Meet the Fockers*, and his wife, Christine Taylor, who played Marcia in *The Brady Bunch Movie*, don't have hot-and-cold running staff. But the family, which also includes three-year-old Ella, with another baby on the way, does live in an

Andalusian setting. This being Hollywood, it's not the real thing, at least not entirely. What started out as a modest 1920s stucco hacienda has been gutted, stretched, and reworked into a rambling flamenco-hip home whose dark beams and Iberian ironwork give it Oscar-worthy depth. The style may be fabricated, but it feels authentic. Instead of ubiquitous handcrafted Malibu tile, there is a shimmering version of Moroccan *zellige*. The original Inquisition-esque iron chandeliers, popular at the time, were eschewed in favor of lighter Scandinavian models (same period, different look). And since Stiller and Taylor had





Standefer and Alesch designed the living room's bookcases and the bronze-and-leather library ladder; the vintage vases are from Wyeth, and the iron chandelier was found at a flea market. Facing page, from top: A set of 19th-century chairs from Amy Perlin Antiques surrounds an antique French Colonial table on the terrace. In the entry, photographs from Stiller and Taylor's collection mix with flea-market mirrors; the 19th-century plate rack and table are both Spanish. See Resources.



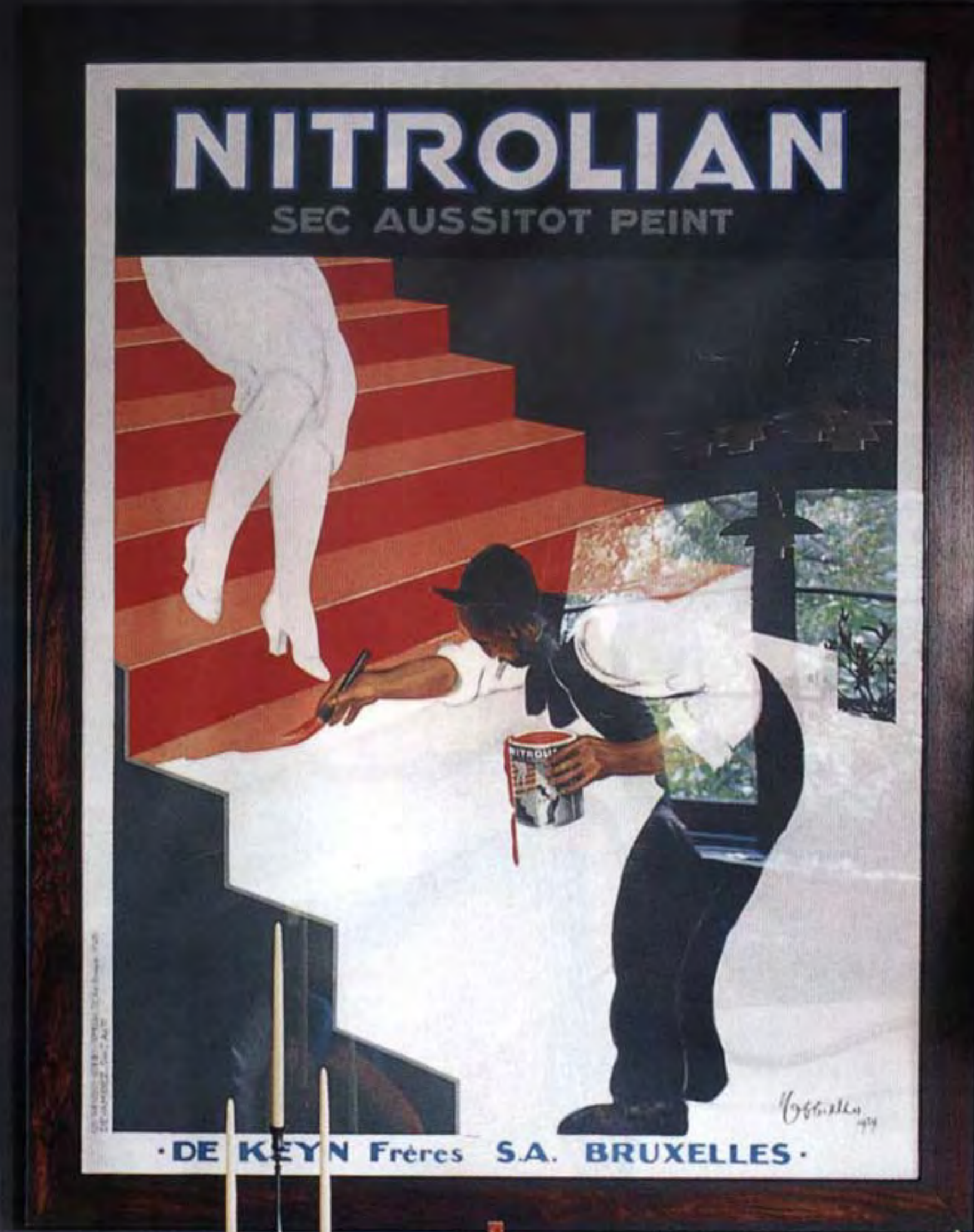
no intention of sitting on carved furniture fit for a conquistador, designers Robin Standefer and Stephen Alesch trucked in Dunbar-style sofas, along with Scandinavian vases and a bronze-and-leather library ladder that looks like it might have been wrought by Pierre Chareau.

"To keep things fresh, you have to look for references that fit into the framework," says Standefer. "We didn't want it to be generically, historically accurate. I like houses that are complex, sexy, and livable." Make that movie sets, too. Her previous day job was production designer, and she and Alesch, her companion and business partner, created some of the film world's most admired on-screen environ-

ments, including the sets for the Stiller comedies *Duplex* and *Zoolander*, where they all met. The partners have since designed a neo-Egyptian veranda for Kate Hudson and Chris Robinson, and are currently at work on a hotel in New York's meatpacking district for André Balazs.

"The late 1920s and early '30s were a great time for architecture out here," says Stiller, proudly noting that the original bungalow was one of the first houses built in Outpost Estates, a landmark development in the Hollywood Hills where superstars like Dolores del Rio lived in Hispano-Moorish splendor. "It's a commitment to live with a particular style," says Taylor, "but if you can update it to make it functional and still

The atrium's Opium chair and Oscuro cabinet are by Christian Liaigre from Holly Hunt; the light fixture is by Poul Henningsen. Facing page: In the living room, Dunbar-style sofas from Wyeth are covered in a Great Plains velvet by Holly Hunt; photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto and Matthew Barney are displayed on ledges. See Resources.







The high-ceilinged kitchen was designed by Standefer and Alesch; the sink is by Michael S. Smith for Kallista, and the vintage chairs are from Wyeth. Facing page, clockwise from top: The antique tile-top table on the front terrace echoes a wall covered with hand-cut Moroccan-style tiles. A garden chaise is covered with a custom-made French mattress; the 19th-century Moroccan table is from a flea market. Vintage tiles and Spanish lanterns on the stairs leading to the front courtyard. See Resources.



maintain the integrity of the house, it's a great combo." Adds Alesch, "Everything can't be historically perfect—that would be like eating cake for breakfast, lunch, and dinner," though he admits it took him years to loosen up after his early architectural training and just have fun.

The foursome pored over books about Spanish architecture and its Moorish influences and took field trips around the neighborhood—"It was like show-and-tell for grown-ups," Taylor says. Maintaining the Spanish feel was key, but so was practicality. "Function came first, then design details came second, though a very close second," the actress explains. "This is where Robin and Steve's experience as movie designers was invaluable. They understood how to make things look like they had always been there." The plumbing is modern but the look is vintage; the garage doors are made from battered 300-year-old wood; and the cabinets in the gleaming white kitchen are supported by hand-turned spindles inspired by those Alesch saw in an old bakery.

But unlike Hollywood stars of yore who rejoiced in formal living rooms, Stiller and Taylor decided that the heart of their house would be the family room, adjacent to the kitchen. "Every family nests in a home differently, but everybody hangs out in the kitchen," says Stiller. "It's just a universal law of nature, like gravity or aging." So the designers created a combination library and kids' room, with blackboards set into the cabinet-lined walls so Ella could draw to her heart's content and, above it, a frieze of stars and planets that Alesch painted on wood. "I still can't get over how cool it is," says Stiller.

So what's here for adults? A jungly garden, for one thing, conceived by landscape architect Mark Bartos and shaded with massive trees. There's an outdoor fireplace for kicking back on cool summer nights. A terrace is party-ready with a massive wood dining table, and in the master suite, there's an enormous white bathtub for soaking away post-shoot tensions. Some movie-star requirements never change. ■





Pier sconces and an antique medical cabinet from Urban Archaeology and a tub by the Water Monopoly in the master bath; the tub filler is by Lefroy Brooks. Facing page: Standefer and Alesch designed the family room's cabinetry with an inset blackboard; the children's chairs and table are by Tyler Hays from BDDW. See Resources.