

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF INTERIOR DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE



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COVER: The guest bedroom of a Stinson Beach, California, house. Architecture by Walker & Moody. Interior design by Sally Sirkin Lewis. Photography by Tim Street-Porter. See page 106.
ABOVE RIGHT: The living area of Michael Connors's New York loft. Photography by Scott Frances. See page 124.



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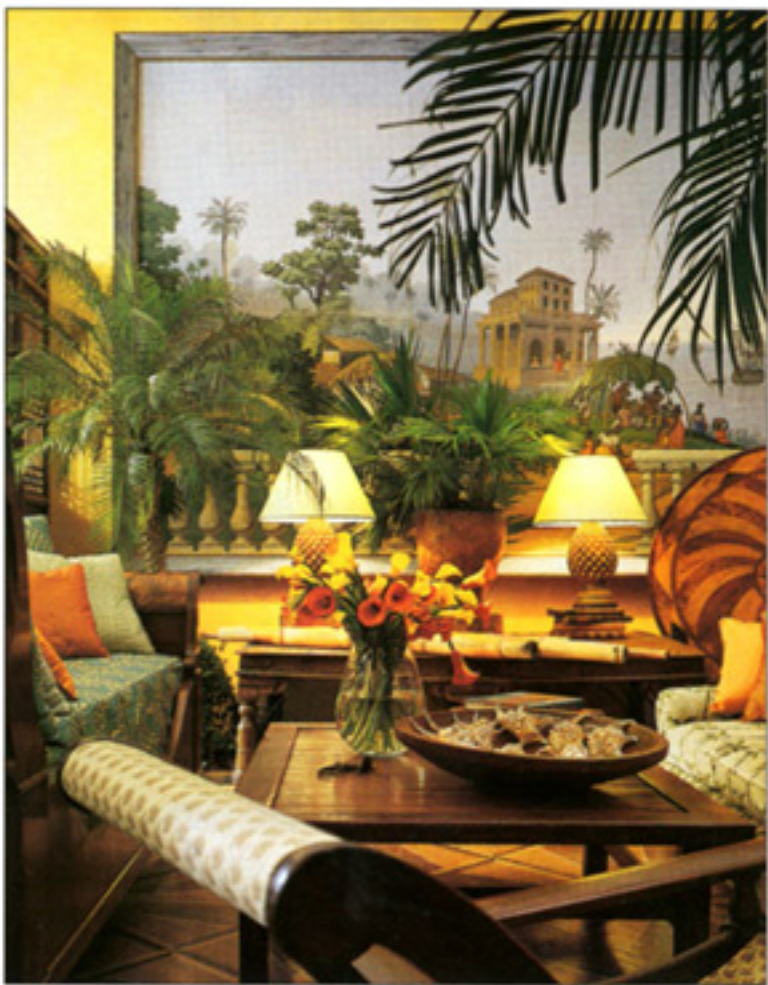
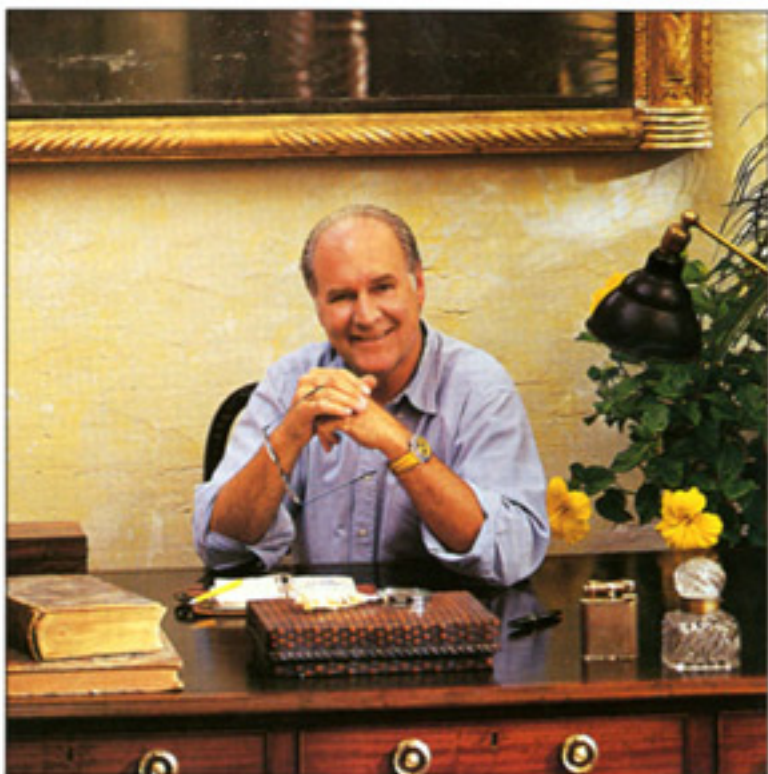


Text by Dana Micucci
Photography by Scott Frances

There's a look of awe and surprise from people who walk in here for the first time," antiques dealer and decorative-arts scholar Michael Connors says of his new tropics-inspired loft in the NoHo Historic District, a gritty art and antiques enclave in lower Manhattan. "They feel as if they've been transported to another land and era." The 3,200-square-foot living/showroom space, which occupies the first floor of a late-Renaissance Revival building, combines the colonial West Indian furniture that adorned his former SoHo gallery and residence (see *Architectural Digest*, July 1997) with colonial pieces from other tropical countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, India and the Philippines.

Connors began collecting exotic eighteenth- and nineteenth-century treasures from beyond the West Indies four years ago, when Milling Road, a division of Baker Furniture, asked him to help launch a new line of furniture. "I initially traveled the tropics to research antiques for the purpose of creating the reproductions, but I couldn't stop myself from buying the best pieces I could find," he says. (The resulting Colonial Legends line was introduced in 1997 in the wake of Baker's successful West Indies/

RIGHT: Standing before a circa 1830 Zuber panel, *Views of Brazil*, in the living area is a circa 1830 Jamaican marquetry table. "It was part of a suite of furniture made for Lord Sligo, an 1830s governor." Pineapple lamps from Lewis Mittman. Clarence House sofa fabric.



OPPOSITE: "After a day of riding in the cane fields, the planter would recline on the chair with his swollen feet and legs raised on the extended arms until the swelling subsided and he could remove his boots," Connors (below left) says of the planter's chair's original function.

Whim Museum Collection, for which Connors also acted as a consultant.)

"I'm still buying West Indian antiques," explains Connors, a leading expert on the subject, which captured his interest more than two decades ago while he was exploring the Caribbean. "I'm just expanding that look, whether I'm in the Philippines searching for Spanish colonial furniture or in Indonesia looking for Dutch colonial furniture. All these pieces complement each other because they're from the same period, they're made from tropical hardwoods like mahogany, rosewood and satinwood, and they're a sophisticated combination of European design and indigenous execution. They also tend to be oversize, so they're ideal for a large loft."

Connors's refined eye and eclectic taste have turned the raw space into a tropical urban paradise. The azure-walled showroom entrance, furnished with a nineteenth-century serving table from St. Croix, an early-twentieth-century brass pineapple lamp that Connors picked up at a Paris flea market and a massive nineteenth-century carved and gilded Chinese bed, leads through antique Mexican doors to the living quarters' dramatic dining area. The space is reminiscent of those found in colonial houses around the world, from the sugar plantations of the Caribbean to the spice and tea plantations of Indonesia. Further enhancing the area's atmosphere is a nineteenth-century bone-



LEFT: The dining area contains an assortment of 19th-century pieces, including a Philippine round table; mahogany chairs from Trinidad; a Chinese shipping jar, purchased in Java; a Jamaican lolling chair; and a Swedish chandelier, found on St. Bart's. Cowtan & Tout silk.



ABOVE: In the adjacent showroom, Michael Connors Fine Art & Antique Furniture, are a 19th-century Chinese bed and, along the wall at right, 18th- and 19th-century colonial West Indian armoires. Toby Nuttall painted the walls; Chris Pearson painted the floors.

inlaid sideboard from the Philippine island of Luzon, whose native craftsmen began making formal furniture three centuries ago for the town houses and haciendas of well-to-do Spanish colonists, Chinese merchants and Filipinos. "I tried to create something totally unique with this interior," says Connors, who is constantly updating his collection. "It's based on an object-oriented aesthetic in which each piece of furniture maintains its individuality within a harmonious whole. The novelty is in the integration of objects from around the world. They all share a timeless casual elegance, which appeals to me. I don't look for anything specific. When I find something I love, I buy it, keeping the overall tropical theme in mind."

To define the long, narrow space, Connors chose nineteenth-century fretwork Chinese doors to serve as screens and commissioned Chris Pearson to paint the floor of each area with a different pattern. A masterpiece of trompe l'oeil design, the

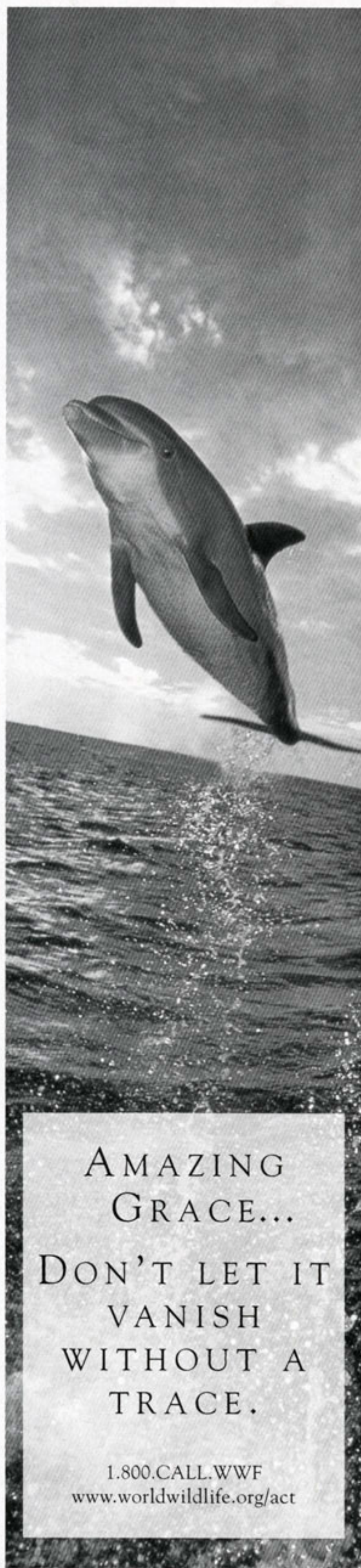
floor was inspired by the hardwood parquetry found in the tropics and incorporates geometric motifs from the loft's furnishings.

In the central living area, the tropical colonial aesthetic finds expression in a West Indian mahogany planter's chair with a palm-tree-patterned sling seat, a Philippine mahogany low table, a nineteenth-century mahogany daybed from Martinique and a nineteenth-century Indian teak charpoy, or bed, that is used as a table and holds a pair of painted wood pineapple lamps. Of special interest is an antique Jamaican table, with a marquetry top composed of thirty-two indigenous woods, which stands near a large nineteenth-century wallpaper panel depicting a Brazilian scene.

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A circa 1840 four-poster from St. Thomas "displays the carving talents of the West Indian craftsman," notes Connors. "The rails of the bed are high to take advantage of breezes, and the tester held netting to protect against mosquitoes." Baker Furniture club chair.



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STINSON BEACH

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black-and-white-marble mantelpiece, which the designer purchased in London. "When I saw it, I screamed," she says. "It's so hard to get black Belgian marble." For all its postmodern lines, though, it's actually eighteenth-century Irish.

Lewis envisioned the guest bedrooms as either masculine or feminine. The latter—a small second-story room overlooking the pool—is mostly white and is dominated by a canopy bed. "I love to do draped beds in very tiny rooms," she says. "It takes away the look of tiny." Besides, she asks, "What more do you really need for a guest bedroom than a bed?" In the "masculine" guest bedroom—a larger space on the first floor—a very different sensibility is at work. There's an ebony bed, and there are black accents throughout.

This is the only room in the house that has mostly Asian art—in this case, nearly thirty pieces of Han Dynasty pottery acquired by Lewis for the clients. Arranging them was a chal-

The husband favors sleek, modern lines. The wife describes herself as being from "an English-chintz-type background."

lenge—"They were all sizes; it was like a jigsaw puzzle"—one she met, in part, by the strategic use of Lucite stands.

Both there and throughout the house, Asian pieces "soften the modern art and give it a depth," the wife points out. A perfect example of the symbiosis between the two can be found in her husband's dressing area, where a Robert Mapplethorpe image of flowers—"one of the largest formats he ever worked in," the husband says—is elegantly juxtaposed with the equally strict contours of two Han Dynasty terracotta pots. This is just a small corner of the house, but in its quiet way it sums up all the rooms. As the husband puts it: "It's all about the art." □

TROPICAL NEW YORK

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"The wallpaper scenes punch out the narrow rooms and give the illusion of more space," Connors notes. "Since lofts tend to be rather dark, I also used a lot of mirrors to reflect the light that pours in through the skylight and the French doors in the bedroom. I was inspired by Sir John Soane's Museum in London, where mirrors produce a similar effect."

Connors's painstaking attention to detail is evident throughout. A pale yellow hand-painted brick wall, with a distressed antique plaster effect executed by Toby Nuttall, extends the length of the loft and provides a soft backdrop for the richly grained antiques and the luxurious, colorful fabrics, selected by designer Karen Reisler, a former Parish-Hadley associate.

"I chose fabrics in natural fibers like silk and linen to highlight the colors in the wallpaper panels," says Reisler, who collaborated with Connors on the loft's design. "There are soft blues and greens and a shimmering apricot to complement the warmth of the woods. I used palm-tree motifs as well as designs that I found in the Parish-Hadley archives."

The linen coverlet and pillow shams on the circa 1840 West Indian mahogany four-poster in the combined bedroom and study is hand-printed with Albert Hadley's Tree of Life design. A pair of Philippine side tables and a Danish West Indian Neoclassical armoire complement a leather club chair and a nineteenth-century English desk. Antique gilt mirrors and a chest of drawers from Connors's latest collection, Island Woven Mahogany, complete the light-infused room. French doors and jalousies designed by Connors open onto a bamboo-laden garden terrace, which, along with the bedroom's towering date palms and ceiling fans, creates an oasis of refined tropical serenity.

Whether it is a coffee grinder from the island of Hispaniola that functions as a planter or a Philippine hardwood rice bowl filled with seashells, the exotic objects displayed throughout the loft are all an expression of Michael Connors's adventurous sense of style. "The whole idea," comments Reisler, "was to create a stimulating yet comfortable and calm environment that reflects Michael's worldliness and passion for the things that he loves." □