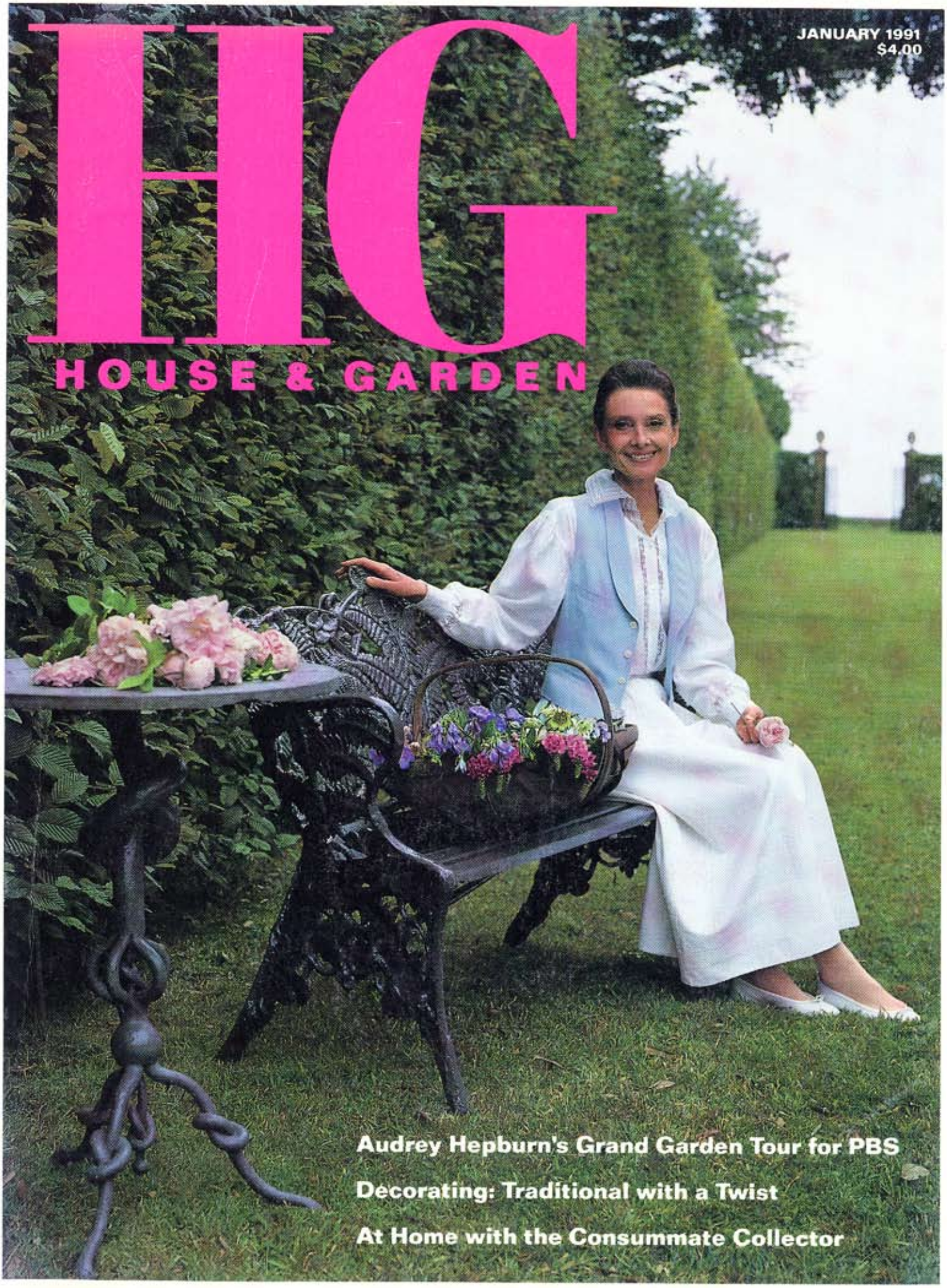

HG
HOUSE & GARDEN
JANUARY 1991
$4.00
Audrey Hepburn's Grand Garden Tour for PBS
Decorating: Traditional with a Twist
At Home with the Consummate Collector

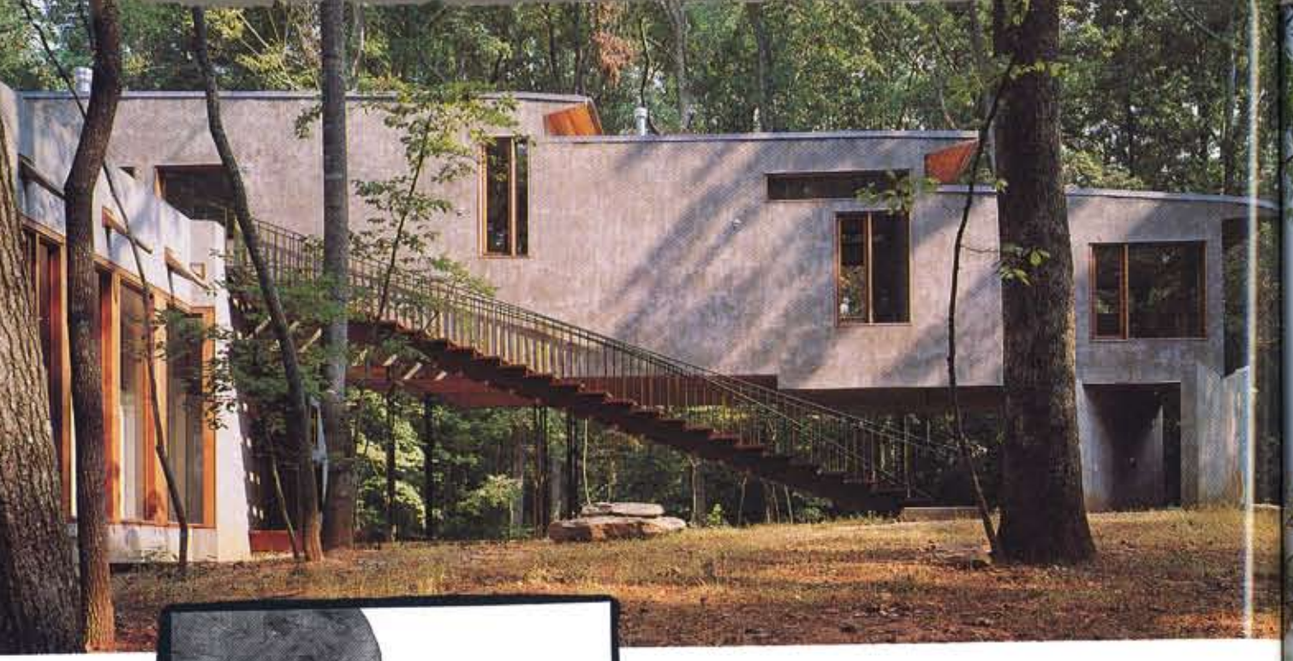
With its razor-sharp prow turned due south, the Chmar house looks like some futuristic vessel slicing through the forest. *Opposite:* Inside, the same pointed gesture is repeated to acknowledge the significance of a meditation loft suspended above the living room.

Atlanta Aloft

Harvard's Mack Scogin makes his maiden voyage into residential design with a startling house in Georgia

By Charles Gandee

Photographs by Timothy Hursley

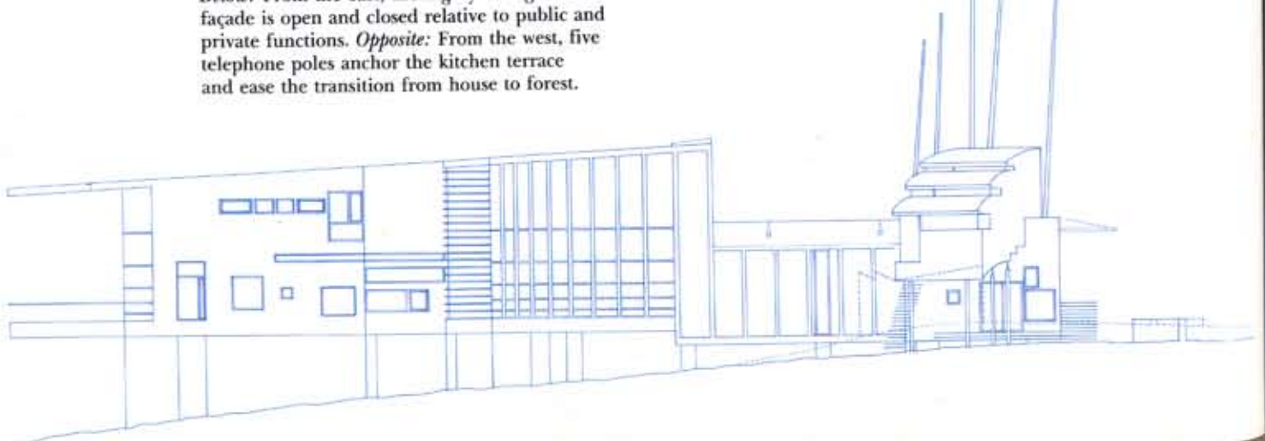


MICHAEL ROMANOS

Architect Mack Scogin, *above*, "floated" the north wing of the house, *top*, not only to create a carport but also to signify the detachment of the guest wing. The stairway leads to a roof terrace. *Below:* From the east, the highly variegated façade is open and closed relative to public and private functions. *Opposite:* From the west, five telephone poles anchor the kitchen terrace and ease the transition from house to forest.

THE IDEA BEHIND A CUSTOM-DESIGNED house, like the idea behind a bespoke suit or a couture dress, is that it fits the person who inhabits it—and no one else. Considering the time, trouble, and trauma (financial and emotional) involved, it is not altogether unreasonable to expect that every physical quirk, every stylistic predilection, every programmatic idiosyncrasy will be accommodated, indulged, satisfied. An octagonal laundry room-cum-library with leather floors, copper walls, cork ceiling, and a northern exposure? Why not? It's your house. Think of it as a self-portrait executed in the medium of architecture, an autobiography written in the language of building.

At first glance, Tod and Linda Chmar would seem to be a couple who would have no trouble finding their dream house in the Century 21 computer bank. Attorneys in their mid thirties, Tod met Linda in 1985 while recruiting at Emory law school for his firm. They married in 1986, and last year added baby Ian to the family album. A redbrick colonial with three bedrooms and a two-car garage might do very nicely. But things are not quite as conventional, as straight out of *Thirtysomething*, as they might sound. Witness the Chmars' new house,



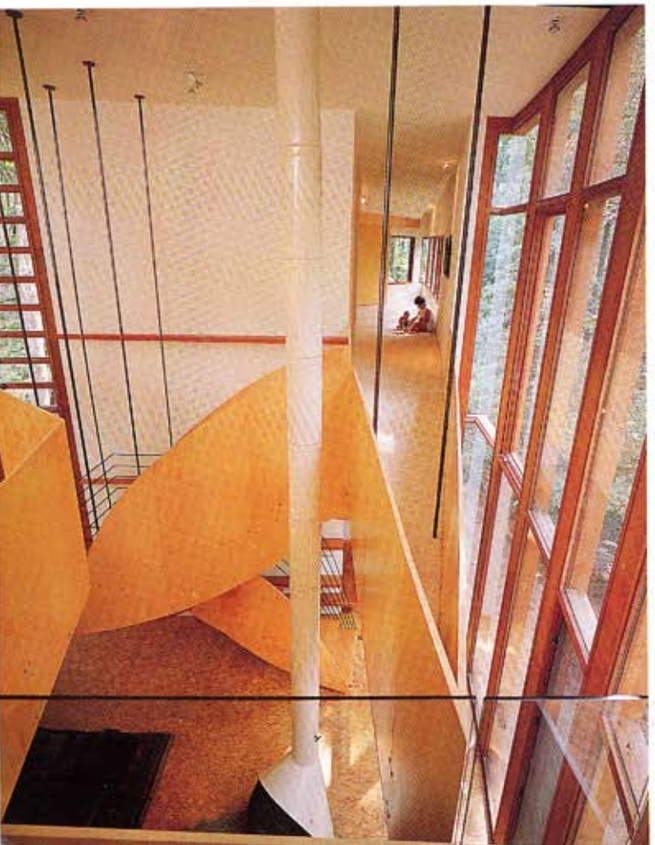
emphatic testimony to the couple's unique set of psychological, environmental, and spiritual priorities as well as to the prowess of architect Mack Scogin, whose task it was to transform his clients' complex program into wood, stucco, steel, concrete, and glass.

Until last year the Chmars lived in a perfectly pleasant 1920s Tudor-style house. According to Scogin, they decided to move because the original builder had "stabbed" the house into the ground. Their new house would be designed with greater consideration for the heavily wooded three-acre site they had purchased three miles from downtown Atlanta in Druid Hills, the genteel neighborhood where *Driving Miss Daisy* was filmed. Their goal was to achieve a certain equilibrium between man (or at least the man-made object) and nature. Nothing less. No trees would be felled. No earth would be moved. The terrain would not be violated. The new house would coexist peacefully with the land.

In terms of style, the Chmars expressed a preference for natural materials and a modern aesthetic, by which they meant flowing spaces and abundant light, an open-plan living-dining-kitchen arrangement, and a clear acknowledgment of the fact that busy people like to keep the walk from the car to the front door short. As for the couple's program, there was nothing especially unusual about the Chmars' practical needs. They asked for the standard retinue

Tod and Linda Chmar with son, Ian, *above*, in the Goshinden room, the spiritual and physical heart of the house. *Right:* The meditation area is suspended above the living room, where four Charles Eames lounge chairs surround a Noguchi coffee table on a flakeboard floor intended to recall the forest floor in autumn. *Below:* At dusk the living room takes on the quality of a Japanese lantern. Details see Resources.

"I'm always surprised by some people's reaction to our work," says architect Scogin. "I don't think of it as radical or risky"



of rooms, the standard division of public and private spaces. They did, however, also require a Goshinden room to accommodate an altar and the ritual "giving and receiving light" practiced by followers of Mahikari, a Japanese spiritual discipline to which the Chmars religiously adhere.

Although such a disparate assortment of expectations might seem difficult to satisfy—no preconceived notions about residential design apply—the Chmars had complete confidence in Scogin's ability to do so. They felt, in other words, that he would design a house for them—not him. And rightly so. Scogin likes to think of himself as a responsive designer who, rather than peddling a single autocratic aesthetic from one client and site to another, responds to individual problems with individual solutions. "I don't have a style," he notes. "I have an attitude, which is to let the architecture evolve out of the situation—the client, the context, the place." This attitude, according to Scogin, explains why his firm's Emory University chapel looks nothing like the Buckhead branch library, why the Atlanta showroom for contract furniture manufacturer Herman Miller looks nothing like the downtown outpost for the High Museum, and why the Chmar house looks nothing like anything you've ever seen. This attitude also explains why in five years Mack Scogin has catapulted Atlanta-based Scogin Elam and Bray Architects' regional practice to national significance and himself to the chairmanship of the Department of Architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design.

First impressions are telling, and the first impression of the house Scogin and his colleague Susan Desko designed for the Chmars speaks volumes, including a whole chapter on why, as the "always surprised" architect puts it, "some people think of our work as radical and risky." From a tortuous path winding around the trees you glimpse, through a veil of foliage, what might have happened had H. G. Wells collaborated with Frank Lloyd Wright, had Russian constructivist theory incorporated an American *(Text continued on page 123)*

Architect Scogin emphasized the length of the house by creating seductive perspectives that draw the eye through the various rooms—and beyond. From the zigzagging kitchen, *top*, the view encompasses the dining and living areas as well as a corridor to the master bedroom suite that ends in a prow-like redwood terrace, *opposite*. *Left:* Upstairs, the view looking toward ten-month-old Ian's suite is no less compelling.

Grand Garden Tour

(Continued from page 44) path effect' that is so disconcerting in many garden documentaries," he explains. "At Giverny, for example, we deliver an overview, like one of Monet's panoramas, then gradually concentrate on smaller areas and groupings of the plants he loved, before moving back again to the larger view for reference."

As a counterpoint to episodes focusing on individual flowers—predictably, the eight-part series opens with a segment on the rose, the world's most popular flower and the showpiece of the most romantic gardens—some segments take on larger principles of garden design. Yet even when reflecting on what Hobhouse speaks of as the "grammar of formality" and a television crew member calls the "religion of space," Hepburn relates abstract ideas to intensely personal landscapes. For the finale of the episode on formal gardens her location is not Versailles or its Dutch counterpart, Het Loo, but Hidcote Manor Garden in Gloucestershire, an intimate country garden created in the twentieth century by one devoted plantsman, the American expatriate Lawrence Johnston.

The crew behind the camera was amused when John Brookes, one of the coauthors of the companion book, was filmed at Hidcote village and talked about explaining the origins of the cottage garden "for our Americans." The importance of reaching beyond familiar cultural terrain into foreign ground preoccupied everyone connected with the series. Hepburn initially planned not to go to Japan, owing to other commitments. She changed her mind, however, when she saw a location list for Kyoto that included a fourteenth-century monastery garden now planted with hundreds of different mosses and a contemporary stroll garden massed with sculptural evergreens.

The series ends with a tribute to public gardens and trees. "This is a very important piece," says Blackschleger. "It's about the days when children dressed up to go to the park." Her comment simultaneously conjures up the garden etiquette of the past and the altogether different concerns of the present. Hepburn emphasizes the timeliness of *Gardens of the World* and its relevance to her work with UNICEF: "Everyone's concerned with the environment, but of course environment includes flowers and trees as well as children. One cannot survive without the others. Today more than ever, gardens remind us of the beauty we are in danger of losing." ♠

Atlanta Aloft

(Continued from page 88) warmth-of-wood sensibility. By some herculean feat of engineering, a 130-foot-long arm appears to be cantilevered off a small knoll. The structure rises 32 feet in the air and seems undecided whether it's a wall or a window. On closer inspection it turns out that the house was merely hinged to the knoll, then hoisted up by a graduated series of concrete walls as the land drops off. The siting traces the spot where an ancient tree had fallen and inadvertently cleared the way for the Chmars. A second structure, perpendicular to the first and shorter by 50 feet, reaches out like some sort of cubist waterfall spilling down to greet visitors, who are asked to park under the elevated guest wing. To amplify the passage from outside to in, the front door opens onto a small vestibule where guests remove their shoes. A bench and sandals accommodate the ceremonial change of footwear.

Although the rooms Scogin carved out of his transparent monolith are as notable for volumetric interest as they are for material richness—flakeboard floors allude to the forest floor in autumn—it is the quality of light that most distinguishes the interiors. The slightest shift of the sun, the sudden appearance of a cloud floating by and dappling the leaves, is amplified rather than obscured. You are constantly reminded that although you are inside the house, you are also inside a larger context, the natural one. Nowhere is this sensation more intense than in the Goshinden room, a luminous loftlike space hovering above the living room with windows looking out in all directions—including through the floor. If the goal was to create the impression of floating on a cloud, it was achieved. A special stair allows access to the aerial meditation room, which Scogin planned as the central focus of the house. Although he is the first to admit that he neither understands nor shares his clients' Eastern slant on the world—"I'm a Georgia boy, born and raised in the southern Baptist church"—Scogin nonetheless understands the significance it plays in their lives. Which is precisely what he needed to understand. ♠

Interior Landscape

(Continued from page 50) Biedermeier secretary, which, being over ten feet high and broad in the beam, is big enough for much of the paperwork on his projects. The overflow goes into a stack of interlocking baskets he made with one of his favorite woods, cherry. Each room is decorated in variations of burgundy and pale gray. ("That peach and blue," says Peyrone, "ugh. It is finished.") He shares the house with Tabui, a mongrel whose egregiously affectionate nature Peyrone attributes to a Montessori education.

The pebbled driveway, patterned in stars and fleurs-de-lis, is certainly elegant, but Russell Page might look askance at the rather casual conglomeration of trees surrounding the house. Peyrone saves his more ambitious designs for his commissioned projects; the most ambitious of all involves an entire village—Bicocca, on the outskirts of Milan, which is being built by the Pirelli company. Peyrone will create parks, avenues, squares, and, of course, a hill of cherry trees.

He also has aspirations in the way of clients, having made the acquaintance of the Queen Mother. She has not yet asked his advice, but he is hopeful. "I am waiting for the boy, for Charles. He has been asking three clients about me, so in a year or two . . ." Paolo Peyrone smiles, cultivating his garden. ♠

Editor: Deborah Webster