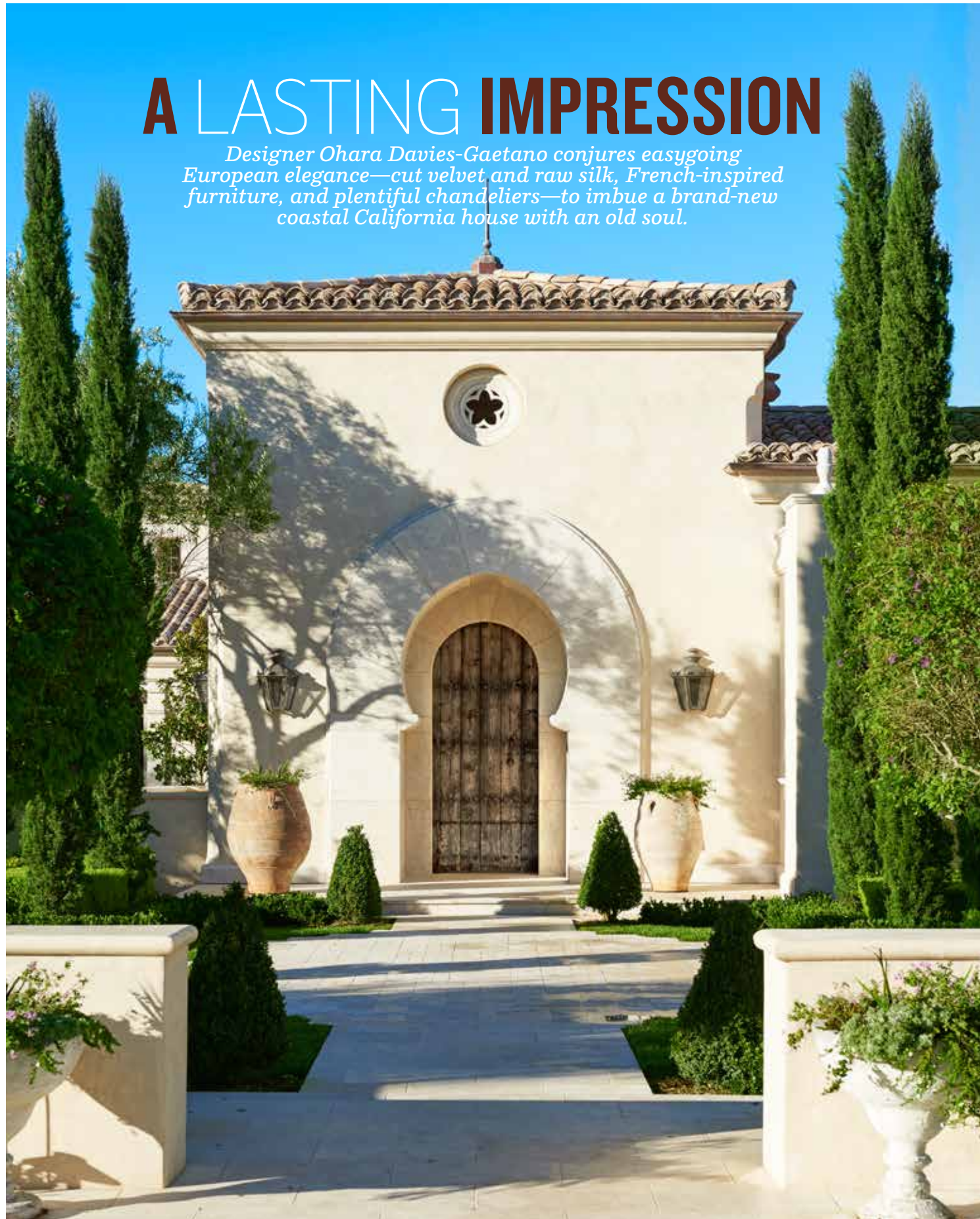


A LASTING IMPRESSION

Designer Ohara Davies-Gaetano conjures easygoing European elegance—cut velvet and raw silk, French-inspired furniture, and plentiful chandeliers—to imbue a brand-new coastal California house with an old soul.



A central courtyard serves as an enticing indoor-outdoor space for the Spanish-style house. Davies-Gaetano chose a sofa and chairs from Century Furniture's Andalusia Collection that marry well with the wrought-iron parapet. Hurricanes are from her store, Bliss Home and Design. Floor tiles are antique French terracotta. **OPPOSITE:** A Moorish arch frames the front door of the newly built house.



The creamy palette in the great room harmonizes with the hues of the carved mahogany ceiling, finished with gesso, and the other plastered walls. To add to the air of historical authenticity, the custom-made chaise, in Lee Jofa's Flannel Suede, and chairs, in Schumacher's Vasur silk, are based on antique French pieces. A mirror framed in 18th-century wood fragments tops a cabinet from Bliss Home and Design. Coffee table, Oly. Rug, Caravan.

BARBARA KING: Decorating an entire house in a quiet tone-on-tone palette takes real commitment. What was the impetus?

OHARA DAVIES-GAETANO: It was in keeping with the overall tranquil mood of the space. My goal was for everything to come together in a harmonious way and tell a cohesive story. This is an Andalusian-style house overlooking the Pacific Ocean, and I didn't want any single element to grab your attention or compete with the stunning architectural details and the sweeping vistas of the Southern California coastline.

A sea of neutrals could have been a snore, and yet you've made it feel rich and dreamy. How did you pull that off?

By making sure there were subtle variations in shades and textures. If there's no contrast, there's no depth, and if there's no depth, it's just flat-out boring. The biggest mistake people make when they're doing neutrals is not creating enough contrast. The effect in here is very understated. The bits of concentrated color I brought in are washed-out, grayed-down hues, so the spaces still read as neutral. You walk in, and at first you respond to the general atmosphere—Oh wow, how beautiful! Then you almost have to study the room before you register all the nuanced layers in play. This rug! That table! It's like an amazing dish in a restaurant. As you work your way through it, you keep discovering all these layers of flavor, the delicate complexity. **I see what you mean, such as the mix of nubby and smooth textures.**

I used a range—from fine-gauge and open-weave linen, to raw silk and taffeta, to cotton velvet and distressed velvet. Not only that, there's also the contrast of matte sheens that absorb the light, and lustrous sheens that reflect it.

How did you strike a balance between past and present?

I took my cues from the interior architecture, which was created by Rob Glass, a designer and builder who specializes in reinterpreting romantic old-world styles in a contemporary context. The intricately carved ceilings, the graceful Moorish



ABOVE: A teardrop chandelier from Eloquence adds a glamorous note to the kitchen. Handmade Arabesque tiles on the backsplash. Rosso Verona marble counters. **BELOW:** Designer Ohara Davies-Gaetano.



arches, and the ocher plastered walls were inspired by the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. To imbue the house with the patina of age, he imported reclaimed antique materials from the South of France and Morocco—terra-cotta tiles, limestone mantels, wooden doors, that kind of thing. Those elements are what give the house its aura of authenticity. I wanted what I did to have a fresh, spirited air, but at the same time it needed to feel collected, as if it had been around for a long time. There are

elements that are more modern, but the core furnishings that anchor each room have a classical European elegance. Even the big pieces have a lightness in their proportions. Nothing is overscaled or cumbersome. Everything is timeless, and that's the key to good design. Don't fall into the trend trap, because you'll get tired of the look.

You designed a lot of the furniture, didn't you?

Yes. In large rooms, you have to get the proportions right. In the great room, for instance, I based the chaise and chairs on antiques I had seen in France. I amped up the size because French antiques are

way too dinky for the scale of the space, and they're not comfortable enough for modern living. I also balanced the weight of the fireplace with a pair of consoles and large mirrors that a French artisan made out of 18th-century wood fragments. And I had two antique French wood columns mounted on bases like sculpture to flank the entry from the courtyard. Speaking of which—I absolutely love interior courtyards! There's something really nice about having various rooms connect to a central, communal space.

What makes this courtyard special?

It has a very intimate presence that lends itself well to entertaining and conversation, as opposed to large ones where you just get lost. And it's so welcoming. Instead of walking through a front door and into a foyer, as you typically would, you walk into this courtyard before you enter the home. It comes as a surprise, a lovely sort of greeting.

I'm very drawn to the soft glow that suffuses the house. It has an ethereal quality that makes everything seem to float.

And when there's a fiery sunset, the rooms have a dazzling pink-orange luster that just takes your breath away. It might sound hokey, but the whole place feels magical. We started working on the project in 2009, and we didn't finish until 2013. It was a little nerve-racking, and to see it all come together so fluidly amazes me. Everything has an organic feel, as if it just sprang gloriously into being all on its own.



Davies-Gaetano designed the breakfast room to double as a place to work, furnishing it with a big, square, custom-made table and armchairs, upholstered in Kravet Ultrasuede. Panel chairs, Lee Industries. Table lamp, Baker. Curtains in Beacon Hill's Nievre. Griffin rug, Michaelian & Kohlberg.

A four-poster bed curtained in patterned sheers creates a sense of intimacy in the master bedroom. The headboard is covered in Rogers & Goffigon's Soussous. Embroidered bed linens by Dea. Rug, Michaelian & Kohlberg. **OPPOSITE:** A seating area by the fireplace is a dreamy spot for lounging. The daybed is upholstered in Kravet's Luminous. Side tables, Oly. Sconce and chandelier, Canopy Designs. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

