

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

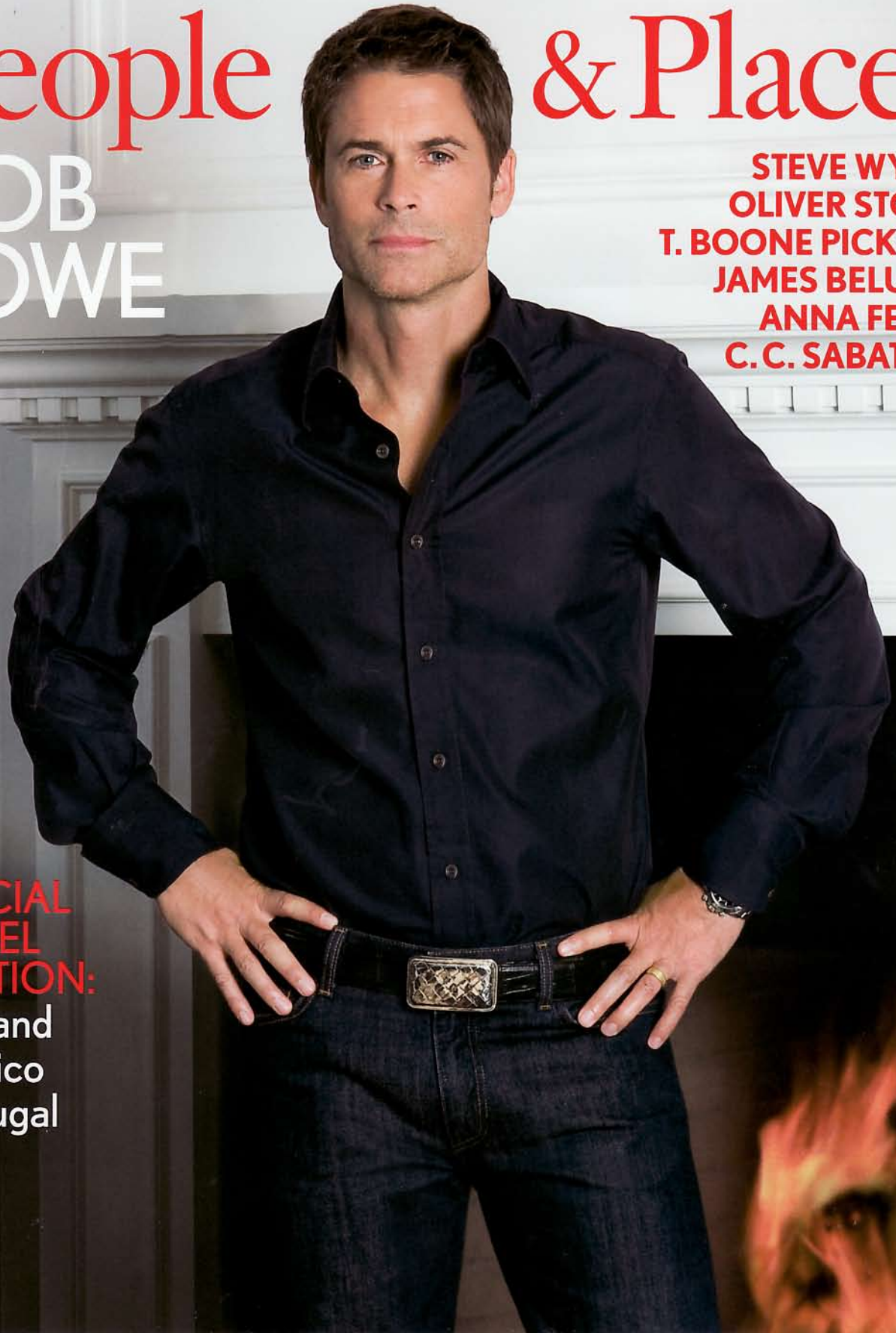
NOVEMBER 2010

## People & Places

ROB  
LOWE

STEVE WYNN  
OLIVER STONE  
T. BOONE PICKENS  
JAMES BELUSHI  
ANNA FENDI  
C.C. SABATHIA

SPECIAL  
HOTEL  
SECTION:  
England  
Mexico  
Portugal





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**COVER:** Actor Rob Lowe at his home in Southern California. Portrait by Jim McHugh. See page 106. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Lowe and his wife, Sheryl, asked architect Don Nulty to use traditional Virginia architectural elements for the house and poolhouse.

## Features

### 106 ROB LOWE

*The Actor and His Wife, Sheryl, Build Their Dream House on the California Coast*

Architecture by Don Nulty, AIA  
Interior Design by David Phoenix  
Landscape Architecture by Mark Rios, FAIA, FASLA  
Text by Nancy Collins  
Photography by Mary E. Nichols

### 114 OLIVER STONE

*The Director Looks to the Water in His New York Apartment*

Interior Design by Geoffrey Bradfield  
Text by Gerald Clarke  
Photography by Durston Saylor

### 122 ANNA FENDI VENTURINI

*At Home with the Daughter of the Great Fashion House's Founder in Her 17th-Century Roman Villa*

Text by Joseph Giovannini  
Photography by Adriano Bacchetta

### 128 STEVE WYNN

*The Las Vegas Mogul Masterminds a New Residence for Himself and His World-Class Art Collection*

Architecture by Butler Ashworth Architects  
Interior Design by Roger Thomas  
Landscape Design by Lifescapes International  
Text by Judith Thurman  
Photography by Mary E. Nichols

### 136 C. C. SABATHIA

*The Yankees Southpaw Is Pitch-Perfect at His New Jersey House*

Architecture by James Paragano, AIA  
Interior Design by Martin P. Mitchell, ASID  
Text by Michael Frank  
Photography by Durston Saylor



# Rob Lowe

THE ACTOR AND HIS WIFE, SHERYL, BUILD  
THEIR DREAM HOUSE ON THE CALIFORNIA COAST







Architecture by Don Nulty, AIA  
Interior Design by David Phoenix  
Landscape Architecture  
by Mark Rios, FAIA, FASLA  
Text by Nancy Collins  
Photography by Mary E. Nichols



**L**ike a great relationship, a great house is more than the sum of its parts. And so it is with Sheryl and Rob Lowe's sweeping 20-room Georgian-style home, nestled on four exquisitely landscaped acres near Santa Barbara. "I've always been drawn to a historic, East Coast American aesthetic," says the actor, a Virginia native. "But a house also has to be comfortable, able to withstand the simultaneous traffic of teenagers playing football on the lawn, barbecuing on the patio, me slipping off to write. Our challenge was extrapolating our views on how to live our lives and raise our children into what we need in a home. Working in TV and film, my strengths are composition and sight line, while Sheryl works great spatially. When it comes to design, she's as good as it gets."

Rob Lowe (above) and his wife, Sheryl, looked to East Coast precedents in designing their California home. "It was inspired by the Virginia-area style," says architect Don Nulty. Mark Rios of Rios Clementi Hale did the landscaping.



"Like Rob, I loved the idea of a big lawn rolling up to an understated manor house perfect for mud boots or high heels," says Sheryl Lowe. "Building from scratch, I could finally have everything we've experienced, loved, wanted to have or do under one roof—a meld of our personalities. Besides sleeping," she laughs, "my husband's favorite things are reading, writing and music. Who else would have a piano bar? My mantra was that it reflect my non-conformity: a black, white and gray palette, lots of different rooms for the gypsy in me who has traveled the world. And loving entertainment, I wanted a place not so much to entertain friends as ourselves."

And what a snazzy playground it is, put together with the creative posse of architect Don Nulty, interior designer David Phoenix, landscape architect Mark Rios and feng shui master David Cho. Part chi wrangler, part Freud, Cho looked at everything from furniture arrangements to accessories to determine what he describes as the most propitious "energy patterns to optimize wealth, wellness and charisma" in the couple's lives.

"The minute I drove onto this land, I said, 'This is it!'" Sheryl recalls. "To understand the integrity of the property, we walked it for three weeks before pouring the foundation"—guaranteeing, adds Rob, "that our house sits in the ground as if it's always been there." Mount Vernon, for instance, with its white walls and scarlet roof, is a Lowe favorite. "Part of me wanted to go for a red roof," he notes, "but that was a no-fly zone—our only argument, since our taste is so in sync," as it was with their architect. Says Nulty, who traveled to Mount Vernon for research, "We all liked the clean, efficient lines and proportions of traditional Virginia detailing."

The couple's shared appreciation of history, modernity, sophistica-

"Sheryl loves beautiful things and is definitely a collector," says designer David Phoenix. "She has a very clean vision." **RIGHT:** An English dog painting is set over the living room fireplace, while a photograph by Lyndie Benson is above the Dutch secretary. Stark sisal rug.













“I always wanted that house where everybody wants to go—full of energy, dogs, music, fun,” says Rob Lowe.

tion and graciousness starts with the treelined motor court. “Don did an amazing job siting the house among the existing mature oaks,” says Phoenix. “Looking through the living room windows from the front door, you see the ocean; from the pool, you see the mountains. Though large, the house has a human scale. It welcomes you.”

The seduction continues on the expansive veranda that stretches from the master suite to the white-wood Ping-Pong table, a battle site for sons Matthew, 17, and John, 14. Besides two guesthouses, there are four kitchens. The largest (and family hub) was designed by Phoenix with floors of reclaimed French oak, a Calacatta marble-topped island and a breakfast room with a motorized pocket door. “The wonderful thing about Sheryl,” he says, “is, presented with some-

thing she likes, she makes a decision. When I showed her my sketch, she said, ‘That’s it’”—ending up with a kitchen, Sheryl adds, “to take your breath away.”

Which is exactly what happened when Rob Lowe (currently writing his memoirs) walked through the realization of their long-held dream—“different,” Sheryl muses, “from our other houses because of the phase Rob and I are in now that the kids are getting grown.”

“I always wanted that house where everybody wants to go,” says the actor, “full of energy, dogs, music, fun. I wanted ours to be *that* house, and it is. ‘Family home’ is a trite phrase, but that’s exactly what we have. Nothing makes me happier,” he adds, a seeming catch in his voice, “than the life that goes on within these walls, the history that’s being created here every minute, every day.” □



**LEFT:** The master bedroom opens to views of the Pacific. Notes Sheryl Lowe, “I wanted a light, airy feeling with dark woods.” Cowtan & Tout Roman shade fabric. Sisal rug by Stark. **ABOVE:** One of two old oaks on the property shades the veranda. Rob Lowe, who recently wrapped up a starring role in the television series *Brothers & Sisters*, often reads scripts near the reflecting pool in the distance.







Nulty emphasized clean lines and what he calls “almost contemporary styling” in designing the house, which evokes George Washington’s Mount Vernon in Rob Lowe’s native Virginia. “It’s a large house,” adds Phoenix, “but the scale fits the property. It’s very peaceful, very relaxing.” Perennials fabric covers the seating around the pool and spa.

