



# HIGHER GROUND

A MALIBU REAL-ESTATE BROKER FINDS PEACE IN A HILLSIDE HOME THAT DESIGNER MARTYN LAWRENCE-BULLARD INFUSED WITH TOUCHES OF AFRICA  
TEXT BY ANNE BOGART · PHOTOGRAPHED AND PRODUCED BY TIM STREET-PORTER

Where do you go for a weekend getaway when you already live in a gorgeous ocean-view house in one of the world's most coveted spots? Chris Cortazzo, who spends his busy weekdays in Malibu vaunting the merits of lavish seaside estates as one of the area's top Realtors, heads to the rustic wilds of the Malibu Hills, a mere 20-minute drive inland from his glamorous home base.

Nestled in a secluded, lushly forested canyon, his modest 1920s Spanish-style ranch house represents a stark contrast to the densely clustered

beach villas that are his stock-in-trade. "I call this the Holy Land," Cortazzo says with a laugh. "When I'm here, it's my time to recharge. It's a place for inspiration, where I reconnect with my life and gather my friends and family around." He had been pining for the property, with its thick white-stucco walls, terra-cotta roof tiles, and abundant fruit trees, ever since he first saw it for sale 14 years ago. Back then he couldn't afford it, but two years ago it went on the market again, and he jumped at the chance to buy it.



In a sunroom at Chris Cortazzo's Malibu Hills, California, weekend home, which was designed by Martyn Lawrence-Bullard, photographs by Nick Brandt (left) and Herb Ritts, a Syrian table from JF Chen, and club chairs and cotton pillows by Lawrence-Bullard. Facing page: The façade of the 1920s house. See Resources.







From top: A guest bedroom features an armchair by Martyn Lawrence-Bullard upholstered in a linen from the designer's fabric line; the giraffe prints are by Nick Brandt, the throw is a vintage Turkish horse blanket, and the patchwork rug is by Amadi Carpets. An English Windsor chair, Hundi lantern from JF Chen, and vintage rug from Amadi Carpets in the master bath; the tub and fittings are by Waterworks. Facing page: The walls of a guest bedroom are covered in a linen by Lawrence-Bullard, and the photographs are of African children; the bed and oak picture frames are from Martyn Lawrence-Bullard Design, the glass lamps are from Hollywood at Home, and the antique indigo throw and pillows are from Dan Marty Design. See Resources.

another world here," says the designer, who created much of the outdoor furniture with overscale proportions and a Victorian vibe. An 18-foot-wide scarlet opera settee is plunked down in the middle of a meadow. A dining table headed at both ends by whimsical wing chairs appears to await the Mad Hatter. Curious tree stumps serve as side tables for a meandering high-backed sofa near a small stone bridge that fords the creek. Behind one hedge is a vine-covered pavilion, complete with an enormous rock-lined fireplace, flat-screen TV, and swimming pool edged by potted ficus trees.

Cortazzo is deeply committed to his role as caretaker of the natural landscape and wildlife. "I won't even kill a bee that gets trapped in my swimming pool," notes the lifelong vegan. He is known to start his mornings by leaping *au naturel* into the ice-cold creek running by the master suite—before racing into the bath's state-of-the-art steam shower. Pesticides are banned in the garden, and only green cleaning products are used in the house, where, Cortazzo proudly reports, newly installed insulation is made from recycled denim jeans.

Perhaps that explains the "amazing karma" he says he feels here. "There's a quietness," he reflects. "The ocean has a very different feeling—it's always moving. I would never give it up completely, but now I have the best of both worlds." ■







handcrafted Moroccan rug are mixed with gutsy leather club chairs, one of the home's original hunting-lodge-style fireplaces, and plush seating with chocolate-and-white ticking stripes. "I guess you could say the effect is *Out of Africa* with a twist," Lawrence-Bullard observes. However, it's not colonial fantasy that comes to mind, but rather a culturally and environmentally sensitive aesthetic. Many of the materials and furnishings are antique or salvaged, including the home's reclaimed-white-oak floors, Indian saris fashioned into cushion covers, and a vintage Turkish horse blanket that serves as a coverlet in a guest bedroom. The dining table is bedecked with a flea market's worth of mercury-glass candlesticks, while the lanterns above the kitchen island originally came from London's Waterloo Station.

The house and a few guest cottages are perched on a 30-acre property and overlook a curving belt of lawn that follows the line of a creek cutting through the grounds. Hiding behind topiary hedges and landscaped twists and turns is a fanciful series of vignettes that Lawrence-Bullard says were inspired by *Alice in Wonderland*. "We wanted it to feel like



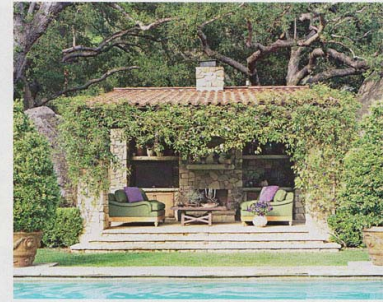




In the kitchen, French lanterns found at Ann-Morris Antiques and a console table from Dan Marty Design; the farm sink and fittings are by Waterworks. Facing page, from top: Photographs by Leni Riefenstahl are displayed in the living room alongside Jean de Merry leather armchairs and a ladder-back chair from Amy Perlin Antiques. The dining room light fixture is from Martyn Lawrence-Bullard Design, the oak chairs are by Ralph Lauren Home, and the table was designed by Lawrence-Bullard; photographs by Herb Ritts (left) and a self-portrait by Peter Beard flank the French doors. See Resources.



A view of the property's main pool, which is surrounded by a lush garden and a hillside in the background.



Cortazzo promptly called on his close friend Los Angeles-based interior designer Martyn Lawrence-Bullard to help him reconfigure the small, dark rooms. The cramped layout notwithstanding, the decorator was immediately charmed. "It felt like one of those locations where all the energy key lines have come together," Lawrence-Bullard says, waving his hand. "It's a magical destination." In a fit of enthusiasm, he told Cortazzo all it needed was a fresh coat of paint—a surprisingly minimal prescription from the ebulliently stylish, English-born talent whose portfolio tends toward sophisticated opulence for clients from European socialites to Kid Rock and the Osbourne family. Though they ended up going well beyond using merely a brush and roller, the mountain haven retained its soulful simplicity. Lawrence-Bullard created an airy, open floor plan by painting wood-beamed ceilings and backgrounds white and removing some doors and walls. The decor, meanwhile, reflects the favorite locales of the homeowner and designer, who travel the globe together with a close clan of Los Angeles and London friends. One of their frequent destinations is Africa (Elton John hosts their annual safari), which inspired the home's dominant motif. In fact, Lawrence-Bullard and Cortazzo were visiting a luxurious game lodge in South Africa when the latter received news that the California house was finally his. A striking assortment of iconic photographs from that continent is displayed throughout the space, including images by Peter Beard, Herb Ritts, and Lars Riefersdal. In the living room, African objects like the dagger-shaped artifact above the mantel and a



