

# LUSH LIFE

Nestled in the leafy hills of Los Angeles, an interior designer and her writer husband revel in the bohemian history of their neighborhood among cabinets full of curiosities.

By GEORGINA SCHAEFFER

“I SWEAR THEY BREED IN THE NIGHT,” interior designer Madeline Stuart, an Angeleno since she was three years old, says of the ever-expanding topiary collection at her house in the Outpost section of the Hollywood Hills. Stuart and her husband Steve Oney

moved to the area from the flats with Beatrice, their Parson Jack Russell terrier, in 2000. “I used to garden on Sundays, but I would spend so much time tending to my roses and tomatoes that it became another workday,” Stuart says. “So when we moved here I started this topiary garden that would be impossible for me to tend. I am not Edward Scissorhands.” Now the garden is the designer’s Sunday rest. “I spend all day on the chaise with a pile of papers and magazines that I have put aside, and I emerge at the end of the day. Steve will ask me what I’ve read, and I can’t remember because I’ve consumed so many visual calories that I am totally satiated and gorged on information,” she continues. “I think it’s the only thing that keeps me from being truly mad and totally bonkers.” Stuart, a statuesque brunette who has a penchant for vintage caftans, very high heels, and armfuls of bangles, speaks in a rapid-fire staccato. It is difficult to imagine her ever at rest.

Since 1994, Stuart has restored houses designed by such architectural icons as Gerard Colcord, Cedric Gibbons, Sylvanus Marston, and Paul Williams. Her client roster includes Larry David, art collectors David and Susan Gersh, 20th Century Fox Television chairman

Gary Newman and his wife Jeanne, movie producer John Goldwyn, and hotelier Jeff Klein. She creates her own furniture and lighting lines, which are available at eight showrooms across the country, and she designed the green room for the 2013 Academy Awards.

“The work for my clients is often very clear: streamlined modern, Spanish colonial. My own house is very different. It’s not a collection of noteworthy elements

but a personal reflection,” she says. “It’s the stuff I drag in, the bits and bobs I’ve collected, and the things I’ve inherited.” If this method sounds haphazard for a design professional, it also seems to fit quite neatly with this particular house, a classic 1930s Spanish Revival “in three-quarter scale,” as Stuart puts it. “It’s not grand. It’s not important. It’s not palatial. But it is charming, romantic, and private. To me it represents the old 1930s Hollywood Hills living, which was bohemian, unpretentious, and

quirky, and I embrace all of that.”

Stuart was born in New York City but grew up in Beverly Hills, the daughter of Emmy-winning director and producer Mel Stuart and decorator Harriet Rosalind Dolin, who designed for Neil Diamond and Alan Alda.



*Photographs by* JONATHAN BECKER





#### FANCY PLANTS

Beatrice, one of Madeline Stuart's Parson Jack Russell terriers, commandeers a vintage wrought iron chaise (in Perennials fabric) in the topiary garden designed in conjunction with Eric Solberg. *Opposite:* Stuart wears a vintage Yves Saint Laurent caftan in her dressing room.



### GARDEN DELIGHTS

From left: Stuart and Oney in the topiary garden (Stuart wears her own Maria Cornejo tunic, with Sacai pants and Gucci heels); Stuart with her younger brother Peter on the set of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* in 1970.

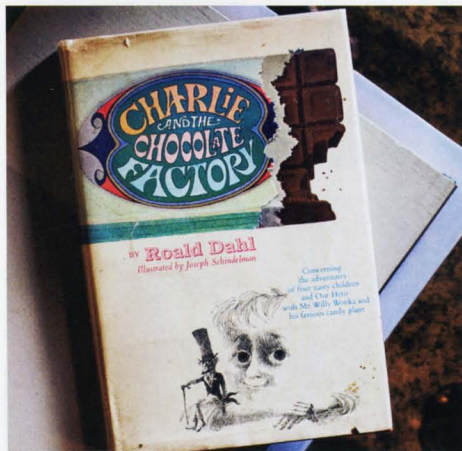
Stuart visited the house the first day it went on the market. “I walked over the threshold and knew this was going to be my home,” she recalls. “When we moved in, there existed this little niche above the fireplace. Amid the tumult of unpacking, and all this stuff piled up high, before I did anything else I found my bear skull, which was a gift from an old beau who was a big game hunter. Then I dug for my little starburst mirror. Those were the first pieces I put into place. It’s just a perfect moment. Maybe one day I’ll find some incredible, expensive thing, but for now this makes me so happy. It says something about me, and I just love it.”

Another Madeline moment, part of her self-described “Bronze Period,” takes place in the entryway, on a Chinese root table where a bronze Chinese lamp sits alongside a French 1940s pottery head and a bronze vase by Danish artist Just Andersen. “I’m sort of the opposite of a magpie,” she says. “You know how they’re attracted to shiny things? Well, show me something with a dull patina and I’m all over it.” The bronze fly sculpture that completes the group was a gift from Joel Chen, whose 34,000-square-foot gallery and showroom, JF Chen, hosts museum-quality collections. “He’s one of my heroes in the business. I coveted this for ages,” Stuart says. “I must have stroked it for a year or two before he finally said, ‘This is ridiculous. You have to have it.’”

Such assemblages of cherished objects are found on every table, so perhaps it isn’t surprising to hear why Stuart is so pleased with her most recent addition to the living room. “I’m so grateful to have two tiers,” she says of

her new glass and polished brass coffee table, which she created for her own line. “For years I have lived with just the top, and things were always resting on the cliff, but now I have all this extra real estate! I’m just crazy mad for this table.”

There’s something a little madcap about the way Stuart speaks about her collections, but it’s a refreshing zaniness. From a large vintage linen collection tucked inside a Swedish armoire to an exceptional CD collection (an obsession with David Bowie recently led Stuart to make a special trip to London for the show at the Victoria & Albert Museum), Stuart’s range of interests is wide. Her caftans and high heels command their own bedroom, with garment racks and stacks of shoeboxes. “The closet space is seriously compromised,” Stuart says of one the few shortcomings of the house, which, she also notes, has a smaller than average kitchen. The bathrooms have strange shapes and color schemes (one is green and black, the other mauve and black), but all the tiles



are original. “There are some people who would have torn this place apart, but I really don’t have the stomach for it. I have too much respect for the workmanship and the materials to take a sledgehammer to them. We are delighted to have saved something rather than destroyed it.”

Would Stuart and Oney ever leave their little hilltop Xanadu and move back to the flats? “Now that I’m up here, I don’t think you could ever get me back down,” Stuart says. “I’m not looking to trade up to impress anyone. Besides, I have too much stuff to be a house flipper.”

