

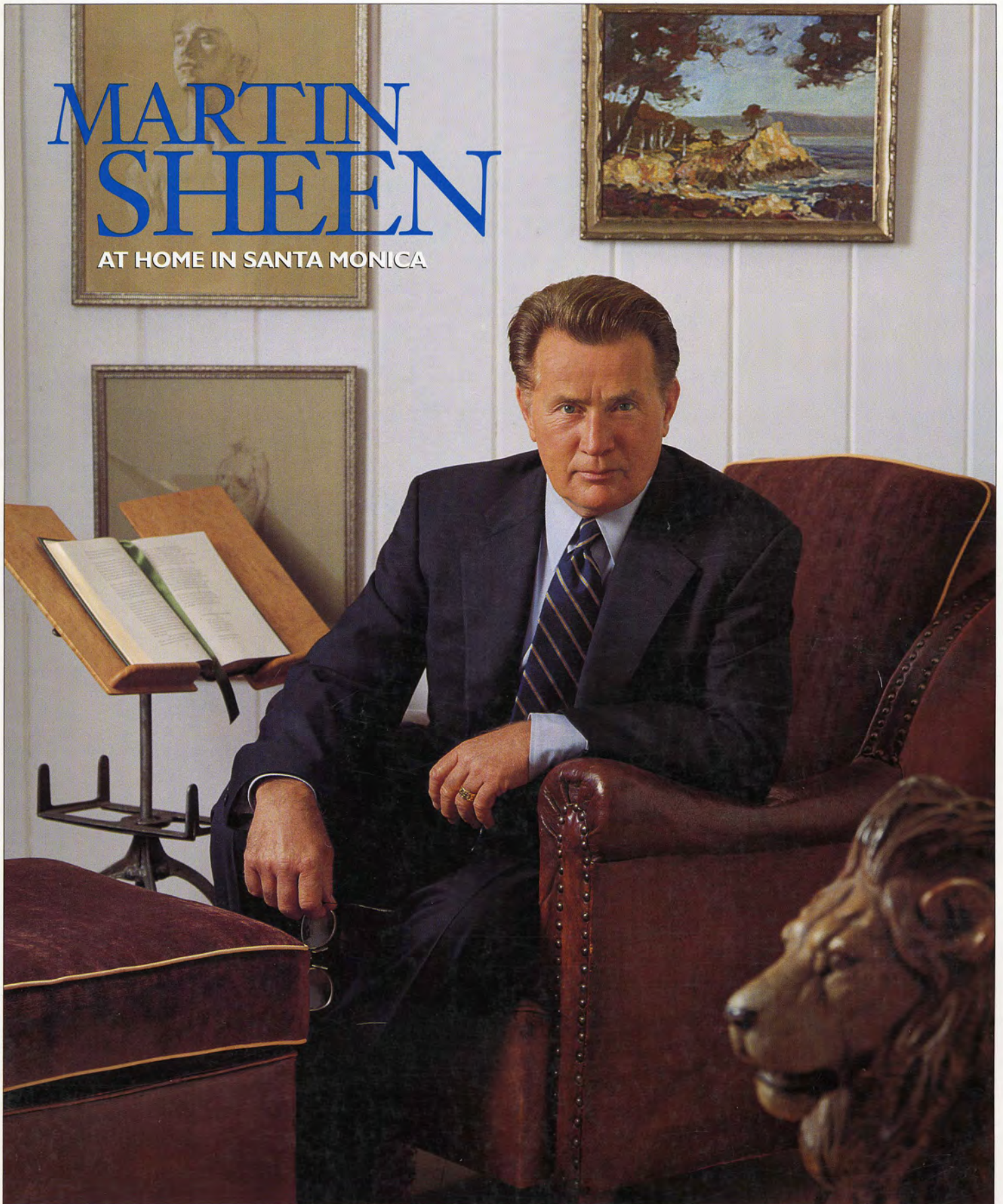
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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MARTIN SHEEN

AT HOME IN SANTA MONICA



1001 Nights

AN EXOTIC INN IN SANTA FE FIT FOR SCHEHERAZADE

Text by Wesley Pulkka/Photography by Robert Reck

The sound of a sitar is all that's missing in the south courtyard of Seret's 1001 Nights Inn, an unexpectedly exotic space in Santa Fe that evokes the feeling of a Himalayan mountain village. A long, single-story adobe building faces a teak swing from India, a Jain altarpiece and a bronze Islamic astronomical instrument. Guests are thus enlightened that this is not a typical Southwest hotel.

In 1996 Santa Fe designers and importers Ira and Sylvia Seret opened their 22- (soon

"We want our guests to feel both at home and in a far-off land," says Ira Seret, who, with his wife, Sylvia, combined Far Eastern art and objects and Western-style comfort at their 1001 Nights Inn in Santa Fe. RIGHT: Some of the 22 suites are in the Old River Rock House.



to be 23-) suite inn; it occupies both sides of East DeVargas Street in the Barrio de Anasco, the city's oldest neighborhood. The compound, which includes a large two-story New Mexico river-rock building, is within easy walking distance of Santa Fe Plaza and Canyon Road art galleries, museums and restaurants.

"Each suite is named after an Asian city," Ira Seret points out. LEFT: The Shiraz living room, with a beam ceiling, has a sofa upholstered with a Maimano kilim, an Afghan chair, an Indian tapestry and an antique Gabbeh carpet. The wood window room divider is Peruvian.

"Our design philosophy is hard to define," says Sylvia Seret. "We have the *Thousand and One Nights* theme, of course, within which we blend a patchwork of materials and patterns. Our interiors are not intentional reproductions of a certain look or cultural origin, however, because our designs come from what we love

OPPOSITE: The exoticism of the hotel is fully expressed in the hall of the Herat Suite, where a 19th-century Tibetan chest stands before an Afghan wall hanging. Carved pillars and a Swati crossbeam add architectural interest. "We decorated within the original adobe walls."







LEFT: A kiva fireplace warms the Kashmir bedroom, which is framed by adobe walls; the in situ 100-year-old hand-hewn beams were refinished. An antique Turkoman embroidered kilim was used to create the headboard and the bed skirt. The bench and the painted armoire come from the Valley of Swat.



ABOVE: "You can have breakfast there or a glass of wine in the late afternoon and enjoy the sunset," Seret says of the south courtyard. A teak swing and hand-carved marble chairs, all from India, stand near a Chinese pot and a Jain altarpiece. "It's hard to believe that this quiet spot is in the heart of old Santa Fe."

to surround ourselves with at home." "We wanted fantasy as well," adds her husband.

Their fantasy was born in prewar Afghanistan, when Ira Seret traveled there in 1965 from his residence in New York City. "Afghanistan was a beautiful and timeless place filled with fabulous art handmade by kind and lovely people," he recalls. "I was drawn to it because of its extraordinary landscape and rich cultural heritage. I ended up discovering my muse and a passion for fabrics and textures."

Ira Seret met his wife, a clothing designer, during a 1974 visit to New York and invited her to Afghanistan. They found they enjoyed working together and helped each other design new items for ex-

port. The couple left the country with their one-year-old son seven months before the 1979 Russian invasion.

They express their enthusiasm for fabrics and textures in each of 1001 Nights' unique suites; the tales of Scheherazade come easily to mind. Their baroque interiors are inundated with Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and Native American art. The collections are complemented by comfortable down-filled chairs and sofas upholstered with bold Afghan dhurries and Turkish kilims that the Serets manufacture. New Mexican architectural authenticity is upheld by the adobe interior walls and sculpted ceilings, with either natural-finished vigas or copper-clad rafters.

The juxtaposition of serene Spanish-inspired exteriors and colorful Asian-enhanced interiors makes for an extraordinary environment within a city where imaginative fantasy is commonplace. In the sitting room in the Herat Suite, for example, shamanic Navajo

sand-painting motifs were translated into copper beadwork strung by Afghan women; they also appear in the Afghan dhurrie and the Persian carpet. The combination of Oriental textile patterns, Native American motifs and Mexican ceramics is softened by historic Moorish designs now interpreted in Pueblo and Navajo weavings.

"Here at our inn one can be romantic, have fun and try to forget the problems that we have in today's time," says Ira Seret. "The Buddhists teach us that everything is an illusion—and we believe this—yet we felt that if we could create a place that gives our guests just a few days where problems didn't exist, we'd be successful." □