

ROYAL PALMS

There's nothing more charming than watching children at the beach building castles in the sand. In a way, that's what I had to do here—create a residence that was both grand in scale and luxury, but also embodied a sunny, relaxed, and beachy vibe.

When my firm took on the assignment, nothing of the structure existed except for its steel frame. But it was quite a frame, for a house of more than 43,000 square feet right on the beach yet also in the midst of Doha, Qatar, called the world's richest city. This clearly wasn't a simple beach shack; rather, it was a place worthy of three generations of an important Qatari royal family, somewhere they could gather, relax, entertain, and enjoy the clear waters of the Persian Gulf.

I struggled with the concept until I remembered how much I enjoyed looking at historic photographs of Palm Beach, Florida, in the 1920s and '30s. "Palm Beach casual"—luxury and glamour tempered by a sunny palette, crisp, clean lines, and a certain relaxed sophistication—became a touchstone for this project. The image we wanted to evoke was not so much a pool house and swimsuits at noon, but a terrace at twilight, the kind of place that brings to mind caftans, palazzo pants, and silver cocktail shakers.

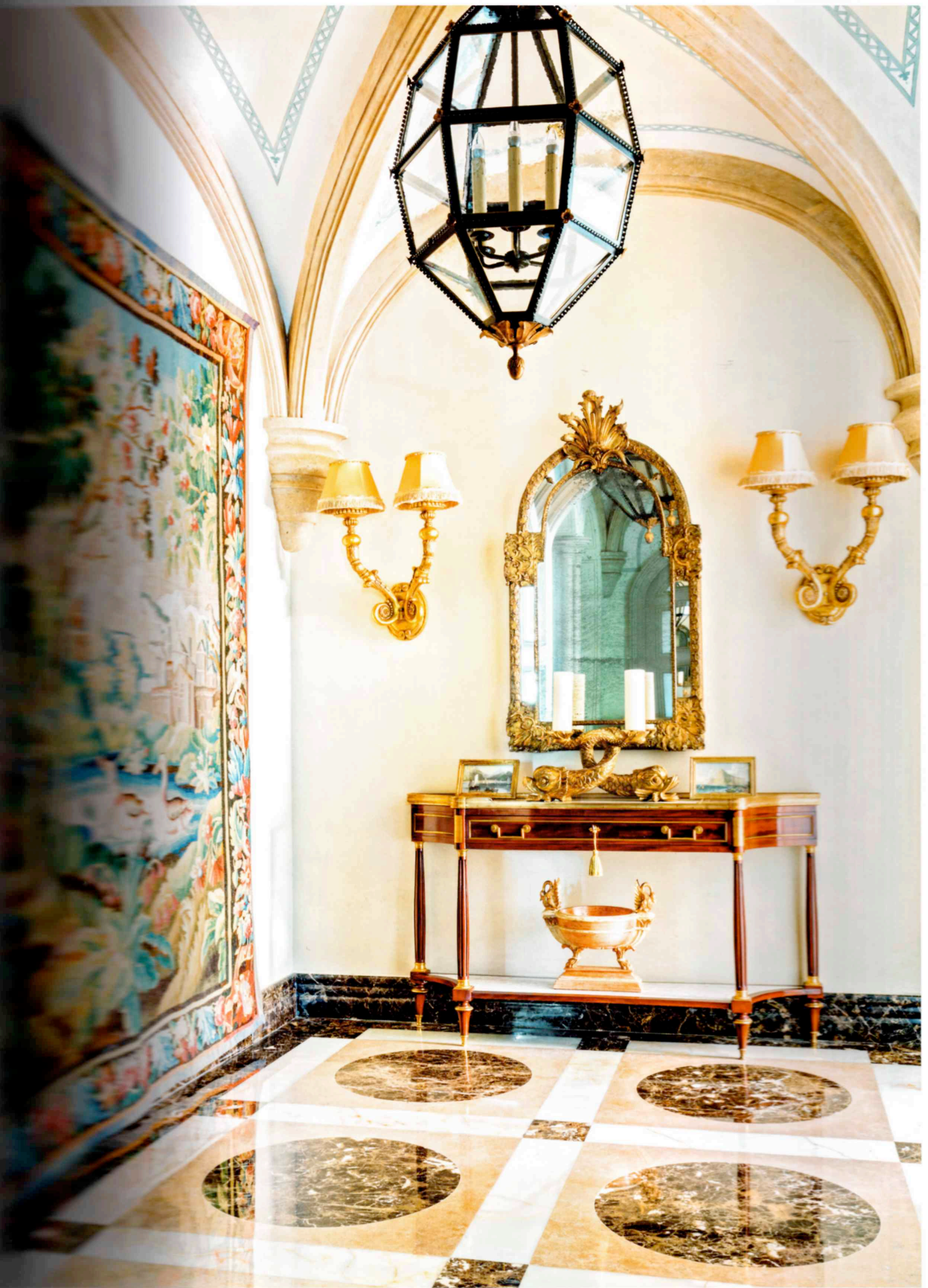
One way to achieve this effect was to define a palette of golden beiges contrasted with a range of rich blues and bright colors throughout the house, to echo the sea visible from the many windows. I also sought to break up the scale of the rooms by establishing numerous sitting areas and embellishing nearly every surface—from walls to floors to ceilings—with a variety of decorative treatments. These range from barely noticeable painted murals to trellising to gold leaf, as well as plasterwork and hand-painted wallpapers. This array of surfaces, treatments, textures, and colors assures that the eye never tires or grows bored.

The mix of grand spaces with subtle details is immediately evident in the entry foyer, with its graphic, circular-patterned marble floor. In contrast, a ceiling mural of soft clouds shimmers above, an effect we created by mixing crushed pearls in with the white pigments. Long before the discovery of the country's immense oil and natural gas reserves, Qatar was a major source of pearls, so it seemed appropriate to use pearls as a symbol of the country's past.

The abundance of arched windows ensures that light is a constant and changing presence in the space. The shallow groin-vaulted ceiling

The seaside rotunda entrance hall of a palatial villa in Qatar features a ceiling mural of clouds enriched with crushed pearls, a Murano glass chandelier, and a floor of semiprecious stones. The eighteenth-century table base is fitted with a top of mother-of-pearl and malachite, and the walls are embellished with a trompe l'oeil mural of gauzy curtains.





PACKING A PUNCH

Los Angeles is a city of dreams and fantasies, a place that has incubated elaborate visions ranging from Walt Disney's *Fantasia* to James Cameron's *Avatar*. It is a city that rewards unfettered imagination and freewheeling daring, and it is full of creative people—actors, musicians, directors, stylists, and set and costume designers—who are encouraged to dream big and bring their wildest visions to fruition.

Except, as the clients who commissioned this project pointed out, when it comes to interior design. The vast majority of homes in the city are somewhat conventional and safe, pretty but predictable, and that is the last thing these clients were interested in. They challenged me to make this house a canvas for creativity at its most unbridled, to unleash my, and their, most outlandish impulses.

And this 1922 mansion in Beverly Hills was no small canvas. One of the largest private estates in the city, it sits high above Sunset Boulevard, with expansive gardens and sweeping views of L.A. below. The house was designed by one of California's leading architects of the time, Gordon Kaufmann, who mixed Spanish Revival elements with the glamour of Art Deco—all on a very grand scale.

The idea here was not to play up traditional grandeur, but to undercut it. We wanted

to acknowledge the traditional elements of a grand mansion, while simultaneously endowing them with humor and surprise. Yes, the entry has marble floors, but here the marble is polka-dotted rather than the conventional squares or rectangles; inset within the floor are circles of glass that allow you to peer down to the room below. A dramatic chandelier hangs down the center of the sweeping iron staircase, with a cascade of glass “bubbles” that appear to be emerging from a giant pink bubble wand, evoking a favorite moment of everyone's childhood. The adjacent grand hall of mirrors is lined with a custom-made runner that conjures an Argentine moss garden, overhead crystal light fixtures are alight with multicolored butterflies, and leather-wrapped torchieres light the way.

In the living room I was again inspired by Josep Maria Sert, but here the silvery architectural murals are offset with renderings of peacocks, and the room itself is a sea of peacock blue, including a custom carpet and a central pouf upholstered in velvet and sporting a gleaming chrome-and-cut rock crystal sculpture of a floral bouquet. Yes, there is a paneled library, but here it is a library of liquor, with refrigerated brass-fronted wine cabinets

To brighten the entry of a historic Los Angeles estate, we worked with the architectural firm Poon Design to remove a wall and flood the three-story space with light. The custom bubble light fixture extends the full length and is topped with a pink bubble wand.



ROYAL RESIDENCE

For a fan of grand French style like myself, the opportunity to update a classic Parisian *hôtel particulier*, especially one on the Right Bank overlooking the Seine, would seem to be a dream assignment. But sometimes the old adage “Be careful what you wish for” applies.

That was the case here. The home was in a classic Haussmann-style building that dated to around 1865. While the exterior retained its period elegance, the space within had been horribly renovated, chopped into multiple small rooms, and stripped of its period details, with a commercial kitchen full of stainless steel appliances that could not have been more out of place.

The client is a world traveler with a passion for Paris that nearly matches my own. He could not be in the city as often as he would like, so he wanted his time there to be spent in a retreat that was quintessentially Parisian, suffused throughout with the elegance and romance of the City of Light. We both agreed that the purest expression of Parisian elegance was the eighteenth century, and that period became our touchstone in the renovation. But while we wanted to restore the sense of grandeur and occasion, it was also essential

that the apartment function seamlessly and efficiently and incorporate the latest technology. So we gutted the whole space, modernizing all its functional systems, and reconfigured the rooms so that they flowed elegantly into one another.

You now enter the house through an octagonal reception room with subtly patterned stone floors, walls painted to resemble limestone, a ceiling adorned with trelliswork and faux vines, and a fanciful landscape painting by Hubert Robert. I wanted to emphasize the transition from outside and evoke the surrounding gardens and the elegance of nearby Avenue Montaigne.

You then proceed literally through a hall of mirrors. I sheathed the hall with aged mirror panels framed in gilt wood, which evoke the glamour of Versailles but also disguise how narrow the hallway and doors are. We added another bit of theatrical trompe l’oeil via a backlit faux skylight, so light bounces off all the surfaces to literally dazzling effect.

The hall leads to a semicircular rotunda, whose shape is echoed by a circular medallion

A view looking from the entry into the living area of a *hôtel particulier* on the Right Bank of Paris. To brighten the space and add glamour, we installed a faux backlit skylight and lined the walls with antique mirrors and gilded trim and sconces.





OPPOSITE: The hallway leading from the kitchen to the bedrooms is lined with murals by Pascal Amblard depicting fanciful scenes set on the Right and Left Banks; the ceiling decoration is by Iksel. ABOVE: The library walls were painted by Atelier de Ricou to look like burl-wood paneling; the upholstered ottoman features small pull-out trays to hold drinks.