ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST
THE INTERNATIONAL DESIGN AUTHORITY MARCH 2024

AD

HOLLYWOOD AT HOME

starring
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RYAN MURPHY's midcentury marvel in Bel Air

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In his rule-breaking redo of an iconic LA house, Hollywood hitmaker *Ryan Murphy* redefines the meaning of midcentury modern

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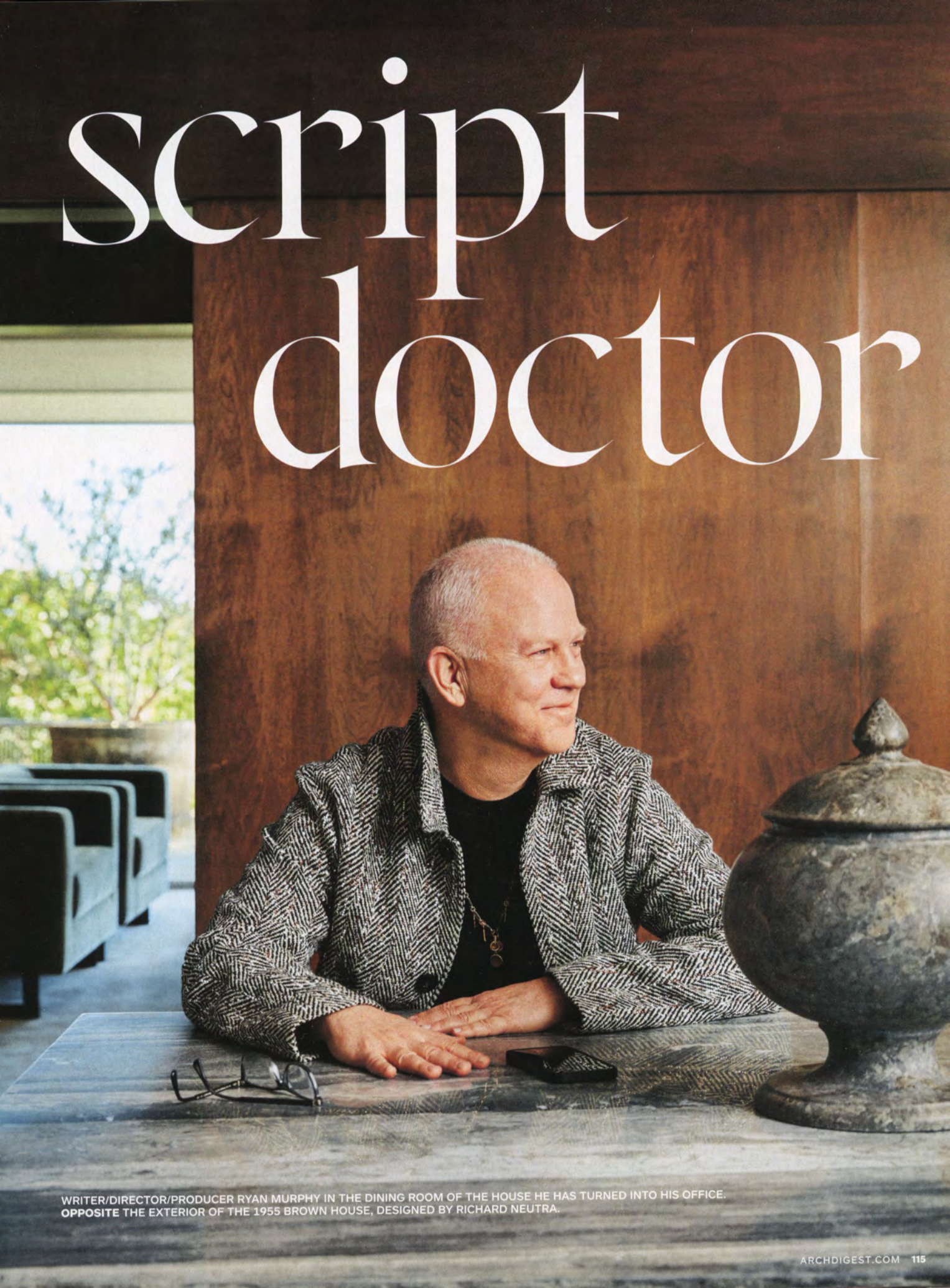
script doctor



WRITER/DIRECTOR/PRODUCER RYAN MURPHY IN THE DINING ROOM OF THE HOUSE HE HAS TURNED INTO HIS OFFICE. **OPPOSITE** THE EXTERIOR OF THE 1955 BROWN HOUSE, DESIGNED BY RICHARD NEUTRA.

LIVING ROOM SEATING INCLUDES RATTAN CHAIRS AND A SOFA BY JANSEN AND AN ORIGINAL BUILT-IN BANQUETTE DESIGNED BY NEUTRA.

Who wants to live in a strictly midcentury house? After purchasing one of the most renowned ones in America, I soon realized that I did not.

Built by Richard Neutra in 1955, the Brown House is a tour de force of glass, wood, and concrete, instantly recognizable for its huge living room with floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors. The view—sweeping across the sapphire Pacific Ocean to silver jetliners landing at LAX—is take-your-breath-away dazzling.

Fashion designer Tom Ford, a friend, had bought this crumbling masterpiece in 1997 and, working with architect Ron Radziner of Marmol Radziner and designer Brad Dunning, turned it into a new kind of classic. Everything was dark wood, with furniture covered in mohair and ponyskin. Ford was so enamored of this reborn house that he supposedly modeled all of the Gucci stores of that era around its sleek lines and modern rigor. He sold the place in 2019 to a lovely couple who in turn were now moving onward to a bigger house with their growing family.

When I went to look at it on a sweltering August day in 2022, it struck me that this landmark needed a big swing à la the one Ford gave it. I intended to use this jewel box of a building as an office and entertaining space, and it needed a new perspective. Over the years I have been turning more and more to a young designer Trevor Cheney, owner of LA's hot Seventh House Gallery. Trevor is a genius at mixing high-end styles, and he doesn't believe in any rule other than "Do you love it? Then that's enough." (I also enlisted landscape designer Scott Shrader to help revive the outdoor spaces.)

When Trevor and I walked the property the first time, we hit upon an organizing principle: Instead of surrounding ourselves in one particular midcentury style that had long gone out of fashion (and was actually uncomfortable), why not invite objects and furniture from other mid-centuries? The mid-1700s, perhaps, or the mid-1800s. I loved the idea of making the house a tribute to the best of design from the past 500 years. It felt challenging and exciting.

A PAINTING BY JEAN-HONORÉ FRAGONARD IS PAIRED WITH A HARRY BERTOIA SCULPTURE IN THE POWDER ROOM.

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MURPHY WORKED WITH LANDSCAPE DESIGNER SCOTT SHRADER TO CREATE A COMPOSITION CENTERED AROUND AN EARLY-19TH-CENTURY ITALIAN SCULPTURE OF CUPID THAT WOULD APPEAR LIKE A STILL LIFE PAINTING THROUGH THE DINING ROOM'S LONG RECTANGULAR WINDOW. 1950s JANSEN CHAIRS; MARBLE DINING TABLE AND METAL TABLE, BOTH BY RICK OWENS; 1930s JEAN DESPRES CANDLESTICKS.

"In a great midcentury home, the clean-lined architecture is usually the star. But what do stars need to shine? Quirky supporting characters."

A LOUNGE CHAIR BY TERJE EKSTRØM STANDS IN FRONT OF A PAINTING BY JAMIE WYETH IN THE MEDIA ROOM.

IN THE PRIMARY BEDROOM, A PAINTING BY LISA YUSKAVAGE HANGS ABOVE A 1920s FRENCH DAYBED FROM GALERIE HALF, UPHOLSTERED IN A PIERRE FREY MOHAIR.

WE DECIDED THAT THE ART should be largely contemporary, mostly by young artists. And we needed some showstopping furniture by a modern master pushing the design envelope at this very moment. None other than Rick Owens would do. He and his wife and partner, Michèle Lamy, were the first artisans I courted, through my friend Ashlee Harrison at Carpenters Workshop Gallery, once the house was in escrow. They soon began making the decorative centerpiece: a monolithic gray alabaster dining table.

Having been at the home-renovation game for a while, I have discovered that the only thing that truly interests me is a space in which things are in conflict. It's the same in storytelling. A real design conversation starts to unfold when things that aren't supposed to go together, for whatever outdated reasons, begin to suggest unexpected affinities and surprising similarities. A Rick Owens single prong stainless-aluminum table from 2018, for example, feels a little weird perhaps when placed near a tulip-bottomed Biedermeier center table from 1863. Aside from everything else, one is cold and the other is warm. But they are both examples of the most au courant, boundary-pushing design of their times. They are so different, but their DNA—being exemplars of avant-garde design—is what makes the dialogue so fresh and compelling.

With that approach in mind, Trevor did what he does best—he put things together that most people wouldn't. In the sitting room of the main bedroom, for example, we ripped out a brown closet (not done by Neutra, I should clarify). We painted the new wall white and against it arranged a suite of 1969 Soriana seating by Afra and Tobia Scarpa in rust velvet, a 1930s Axel Einar Hjorth cabinet, a 1902 Tiffany lamp, and contemporary bronze cocktail tables. Art adviser Joe Sheftel reminded me I owned a portrait of my friend Gwyneth Paltrow posed in a moment of grief from a scene in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. It was painted by artist Robin F. Williams in 2020, and I had never found the right place to hang it. Once we threw it up on the wall, we all laughed. Was Gwyneth gasping at the combination of violently contrasting styles? We decided she was.

Other artworks, including paintings that my husband, David Miller, and I had acquired over the years, were carefully placed: a Jeff Koons gazing ball portrait of Bacchus and friends getting shit-faced; a controversial silver type painting by Glenn Ligon based on a Richard Pryor monologue; a pale bluish Josef Albers Homage to the Square that suddenly popped when installed against Neutra's gray brickwork fireplace area. And next to the Albers we placed a wonderful Lucite bust of Venus made by the late photographer Herb Ritts's father in 1983, a cherished possession that I have owned since the early 1990s.

ART: © 2024 JAMIE WYETH / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK. © LISA YUSKAVAGE/DAVID ZWIRNER.

ABOVE A JEFF KOONS GAZING BALL PAINTING HANGS IN THE MAIN LIVING ROOM. VASES BY CHRIS BROCK STAND ATOP A BIEDERMEIER TABLE. **RIGHT** A MID-17TH-CENTURY FOUNTAIN CENTERS AN OUTDOOR SPACE BLANKETED WITH DEL RIO GRAVEL.

"I loved the idea of making the house a tribute to the best of design from the past 500 years."

MY FAVORITE ODD COUPLE TURNED OUT to be a 2014 Jamian Juliano-Villani painting of the infamous *Alive* plane crash juxtaposed with a German 1820s Globustisch, its mahogany globe balanced by a very chic, very fit Atlas. The combination felt bracing, odd, and strangely of the moment. Suddenly the house was developing a sense of whimsy and humor.

In many ways, the styling portion of the renovation felt like shopping at home. I've collected many things over

ART: © JEFF KOONS

the years, from far-flung places and historical eras, but they never really felt right together. I had been brainwashed by shelter magazines for decades: Never place something Victorian with something pure and modern. But that's what we did here, with candlesticks, chairs, really everything. It was like a house of misfit toys. In a great midcentury home, the clean-lined architecture is usually the star. But what do stars need to shine? Quirky supporting characters.

The only object that shares the architecture's 1950s vintage is a bronze male torso sculpture. It sits center stage on a 1975 table with splayed silver prong legs that we had lacquered black. But what is near it? What is it talking to like long-lost friends? A pair of Louis XV celestial and terrestrial globes, each one supported on a flaming garland and held aloft by an outstretched ormolu arm. The globes, to me, were a perfect and final touch—a reminder that the world keeps spinning forward, and no style ever stays in fashion forever. AD