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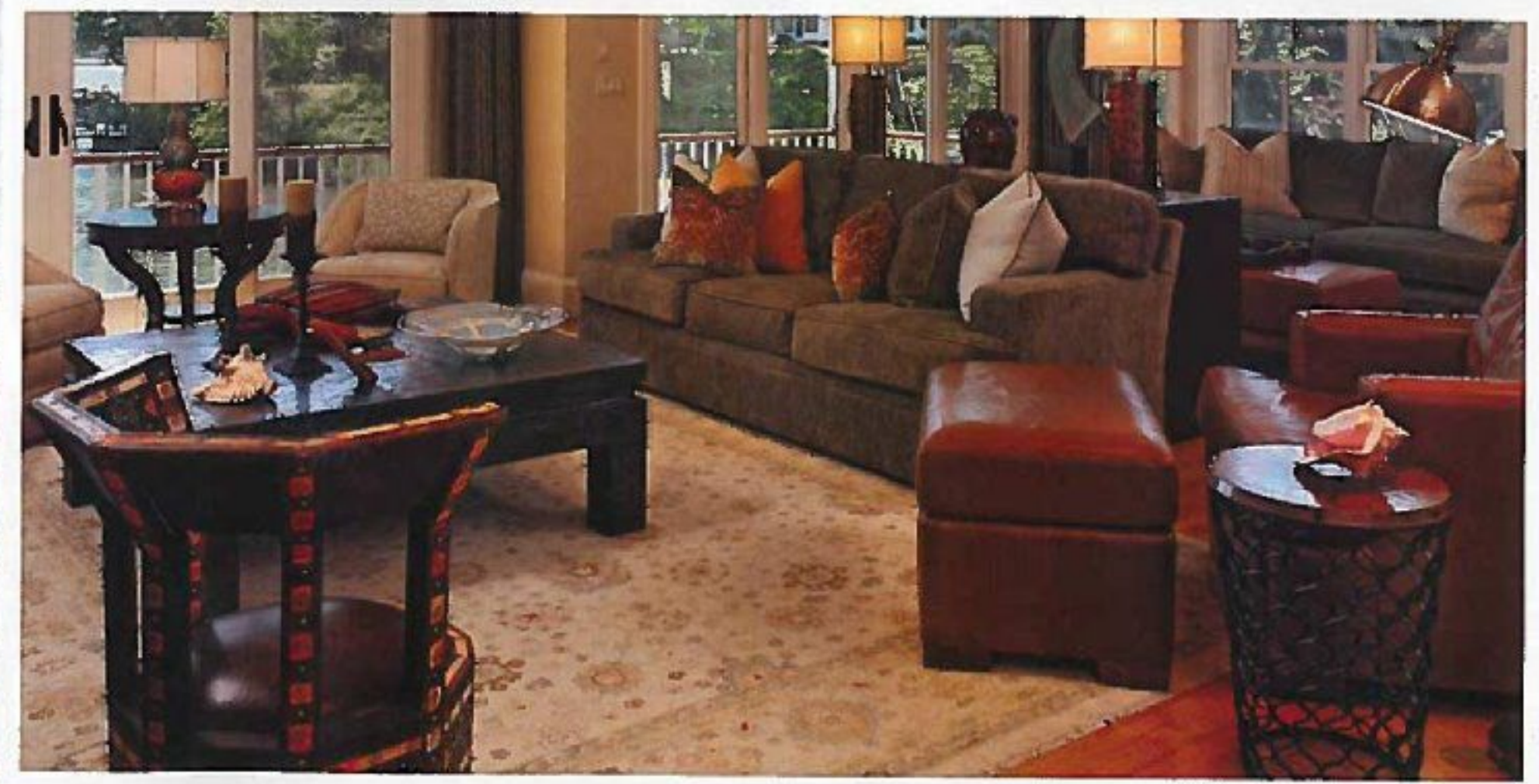
Interior Concepts

A New Kind of Coastal

By Kimberly Taylor
Photography by Bob Narod

When it came to furnishing her 10,000+ square-foot new home on the South River in Annapolis and integrating treasures from world travels, owner Chris Ventura discovered that good interior design is much more than a clever arrangement of furniture. After working with Arlene Critzos for many months, Ventura reflects, "I was looking for her help to make it fabulous, but found out something even more valuable . . . she looked at the plans and saw them from an entirely different perspective. She asked me, 'How is it going to feel? How are you going to use the space?' Or said stuff like, 'this foyer has no sense of entry!'"

Ventura learned from Critzos, founder and president of the Annapolis-based Interior Concepts, that exceptional interior design has no formula. Rather, it is about manifesting beauty from the odd bits and quirky materials that make up a life, conjuring an atmosphere where orchids, river stones, and elephants cohabit, fashioning a home that makes one's husband happy.





"My husband had been to Morocco when we were dating, picked up this crappy, dumpy Moroccan musket, and dragged it around in the basements of my homes for two decades. I was showing Arlene this, and said, 'I am assuming this goes to the dump and she said, 'Oh no.' So, the musket is center stage over the lion. She made an instant friend of my husband."

In this informal fashion, floor by floor, relic by relic, Critzos and Ventura shaped a décor that breaks with classic Chesapeake coastal design, defined loosely by lightweight fabrics, crisp whites, vibrant colors, and nautical blues. Critzos introduces a new kind of coastal, a design centered around water but composed of complex earth tones, the warmer hues and moods of foreign seas and shores.

Critzos' challenge was to unite disparate geographies, time zones, and personal histories. There are artifacts from Bali in the music and dining room; the Steinway baby grand was from a previous rental home; the chandelier in the dining room is from Ireland. "There's a traditional look in the chandeliers, a contemporary look in the kitchen. Critzos chose a look in the dining room that bridged the rooms perfectly," notes Ventura.

While the entire home references the spirit of water, the lower level reflects the geography of the Sahara. "It was kind of the nature of the theme. We went on several safaris; we went to game reserves, to Botswana, Cape Town, and throughout South Africa. The thrill of the whole time was spent on land rovers and finding animals in all different places with our two kids," recalls Ventura.

To pay homage to many safaris, Critzos and senior residential manager Joyce Pearl chose large sage green tiles imprinted with elephant and acacia trees as well as smaller accent tiles with giraffes, gorillas, and lions. Ventura took over 2,500 photographs. A selection has been framed and covers an entire wall. "The Africa wall has morphed into a world wall, a multi-adventure wall. It all blends," says Ventura. Here you'll find carved wooden masks from completely different places, from Masai mara in Africa, and villages in Fiji. There are sea treasures from scuba dives in Australia, a boomerang from Indonesia, a handmade sword. There is even a didgeridoo, a wind instrument developed by Indigenous Australians of northern Australia around 1,500 years ago.

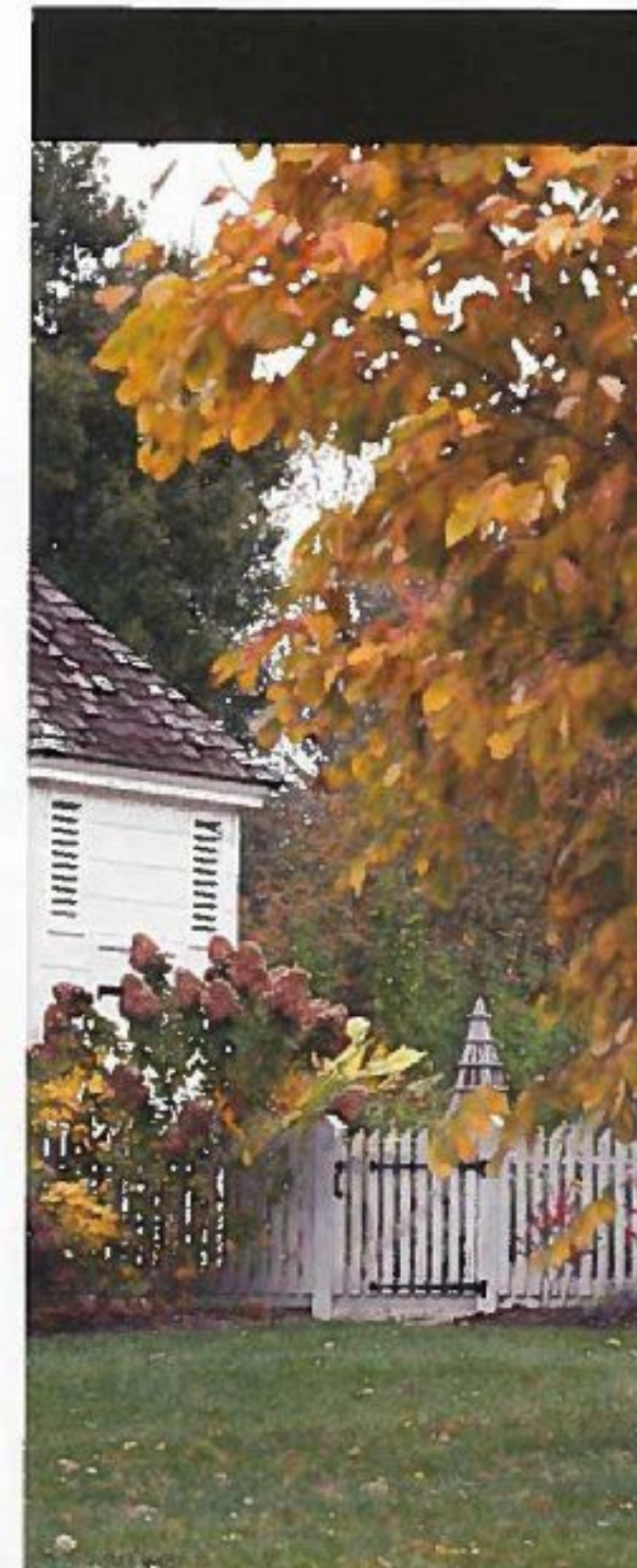
Only the bar presented a problem. The wall behind it was bare so Critzos and Pearl came up with the idea of a spectacular elephant-filled mural that wraps around the room. "The mural creates movement and gets your attention, as does the texture of the stone and tiles. We chose textures to feel like the earth," says Critzos.

Ventura's favorite room is the conservatory where she grows roses, gardenias, African violets, and orchids. An avid gardener, she carries on the tradition of her father, who was a professional plant exhibitor in the 1960s. Orchids grow inside pots inserted neatly into cast iron rings attached to a custom-made wall trellis. Its floral, lyrical composition and itinerant blooms connect the Ventura's Annapolis home to their home in Maui, which is also on the water, light filled, with thirty rose bushes and countless orchids. (Their Annapolis home has seventy-five.) The best part of this room may be the floor, which is composed of river stones. Lighter pebbles form a meandering stream begins at the entrance and ends at the granite sink.

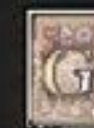
Similar streams of life and currents of creativity recreate the meaning of "flow" in this home. One is swiftly carried every which way—to the giant elephant mural, into the graceful arms of an amber chair, to a kitchen island with glistening tiles. Critzos notes that she is asked often to incorporate artworks and objects into a single room. This project, though larger, was not that different, she says. She merely went global, and integrated the wide world into a single house. **AR**

Resources:

Arlene Critzos, Interior Concepts, Inc.: interiorconceptsinc.com
Kitchen Design, Joni Zimmerman, Design Solutions, Inc.: dsikitchens.com
Winchester Construction: winchesterconstruction.net
Atlas Marble & Tile: atlastile.com
Barks Road Landscape Architecture: barksroad.com
Metal Work, Cardine Studios: cardinestudios.com



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