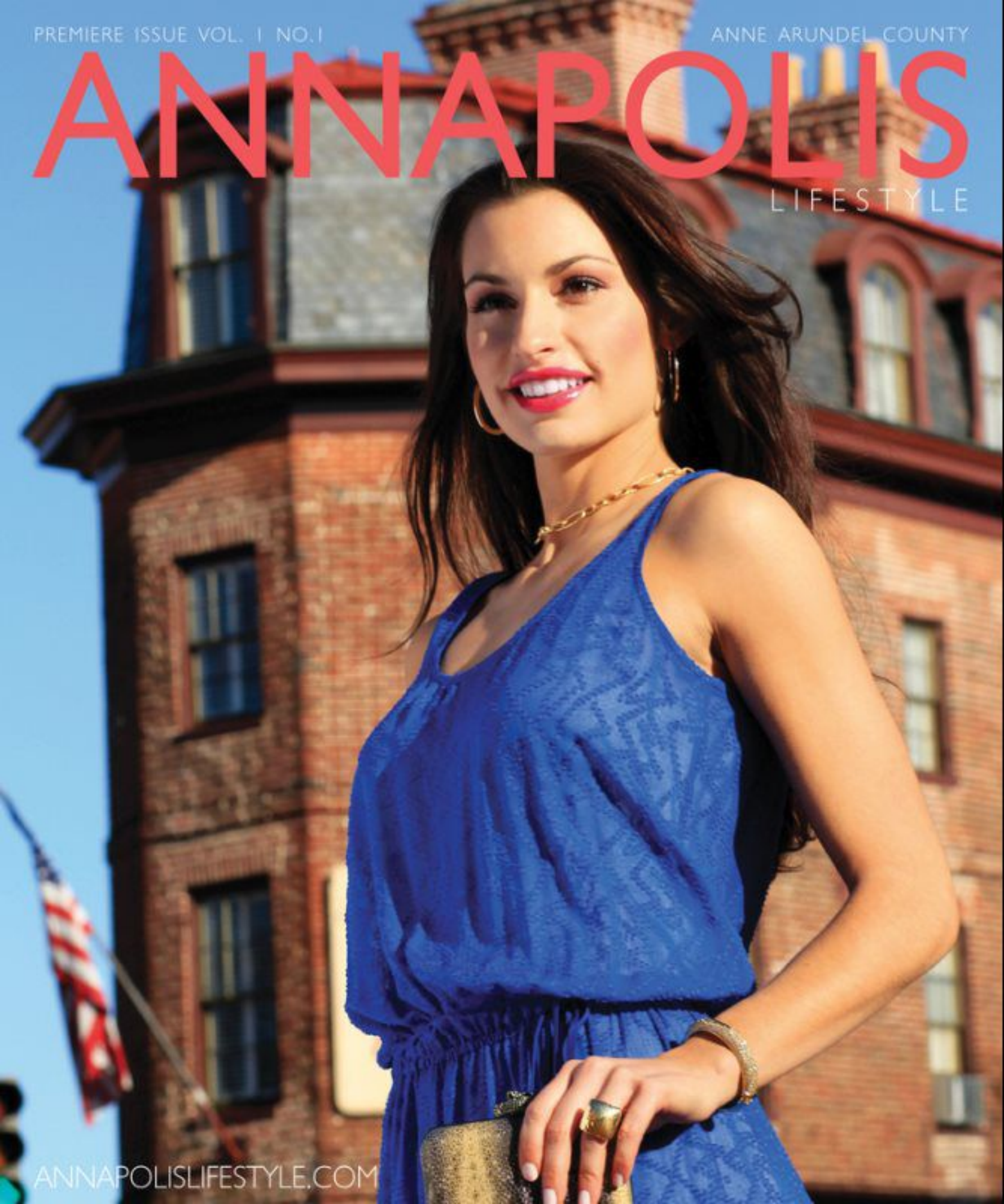


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A STUDY IN "EUROPEAN TRADITIONAL"

Old World Elegance With Arlene and John Critzos

By Reen and Linda Waterman, Gordon Beall.

Elegant and distinctive homes quietly tucked away on inauspicious suburban backstreets typify much of Annapolis. The influential and creative people who inhabit these homes never cease to captivate. One such couple is Arlene and John Critzos. Their home is elegant and distinctive...as are they. Arlene Critzos, Founder and President of the Annapolis-based Interior Concepts Inc. (www.interiorconceptsinc.com), is a world-renowned and acclaimed award-winning interior designer. Her company specializes in high-end residential and commercial interiors and a division of award-winning model home designs. Her husband, John, is a practicing personal injury lawyer in the Washington, DC area as well as American martial arts fighter, Champion, and instructor at the United States Naval Academy.

Arlene is a global sojourner. Studying in Holland, the United Kingdom, and Rome, with an internship under the tutelage of the famous Billy Baldwin, her European education equipped her to develop a signature design style which she calls "European Traditional." Her meteoric rise to fame came after redecorating the home of a highly successful real estate agent in Washington, D.C. International dignitaries attended a party in the newly redecorated

home and were so impressed that they not only wanted every feature in the home...they wanted the home itself. So they asked Arlene to recreate homes with the same interior design in their native countries. Numerous high-profile projects came from this one and served to launch her career. Her work is now found in many countries including China, Jordan, and Spain.

With over 32 years of interior design experience, Arlene Critzos possesses a superlative talent for marrying the plethora of details involved in design into an artistic creation that truly brings dreams to life. Arlene explains that interior design is the art of connecting clients' hopes and dreams to the reality of space, financial scope, time, and location. We quickly learned that the multi-faceted process of designing and building the Critzos' custom home is a typical example of the product she assists her clients in achieving every day.

One chilly Sunday afternoon, John and Arlene invited us and their builder (now a close friend) Brad Lundberg to accompany them as we walked the halls of the their custom-designed and specially engineered 16,700 foot French Norman home built on



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9.6 acres on Whitehall Bay, just minutes from downtown Annapolis. Getting to know the Critzos was as intriguing as exploring and studying the detail and intricacy of their stunning retreat. When you interview someone concerning their home, their story is equally as important as the house by providing insight into personalities and preferences. We were delighted to be offered the opportunity.

Impressed by our first glimpse, we listened closely as John mentioned that he considered their home an "informal country house with a formal flair." It represents the perfect blend of old world European charm and style combined with modern conveniences. They originally purchased their lot from the widow of Carlton Mitchell, famous yachtsman and author of several books and numerous articles including "Islands to the Windward."

Although many homes are designed to fit the constraints of the lot, the Critzos home was instead designed around key pieces of art and furniture. Gathered over a period of years from their travels around the world and stored in a private warehouse, the furniture and art from these worldwide treks determined the dimensions and layout of their home.

The first piece of furniture they chose was a set of 12 foot tall antique French glass doors from the mid-1800's purchased in Europe. These defined the 17 foot height of the walls, ceilings and windows for the main living area. Other carefully selected pieces included a turn-of-the-century English fireplace and an ornately handcrafted 18th Century Belgian Tapestry that adorns one wall at the entry foyer. In front of it are torchieres from F.W. Woolworth's Palm Beach house.

In another room, a Tibetan Monk's bed platform makes an indestructible family room coffee table. The large and spacious kitchen takes you back in time. With an

oversized fireplace and an authentic 1700's French butcher block table that was retrofitted to make a "sink surround"...they created the look and feel of an early French kitchen.

When asked about the variety of pieces they acquired, Arlene's smile brightens, "the hunt is as fun as the find. If you are looking for key accent pieces, you can never tell where you might find a real trophy.... from roadside shops to Christie's auctions...even from Goodwill (where she found six Limoges plates for \$12) to little antique shops and auctions." She sighs, "This can be a frustrating process though, for there doesn't seem to be enough time to find the good thing... or when you do find it, you don't need it anymore. All the more reason to solicit the help of a trusted interior designer."

While John and Arlene admit that taking approximately 10 years to collect their key treasures, manicure the lot and develop a design concept may be slightly unusual...they are ecstatic with the end result and know it was worth the wait. As John says, with obvious pride of ownership, "We built this home to be a legacy for our family... something that could last 200 years. If you have forethought, homes last longer. They don't make homes like this anymore."

Arlene, acting as both client and consultant, created an environment that reflects her family's personal taste and lifestyle. Two common themes flow throughout the house—Arlene's love of horses and their shared love of travel. One wall on an outside loggia has a fresco of Austrian horses and every room contains some depiction of a horse. There is also unique artwork from around the world in every room reflecting their international explorations. On the screened porch hangs a custom chandelier made out of tree branches that reminds John of their cabin in Montana. Other ap-





“informal country house with a formal flair.”

pointments reflect their two sons', Alexandros and Constantinos, very active sports pursuits. This is truly a custom built home... from design to construction to décor.

Other elements of the home and grounds include the French walnut front door salvaged from a Boston Public Library, the Great Room/Billiard Room, a loggia that acts as a gallery, pool, outdoor fireplace near the main home, a pier area and beach, vegetable and herb gardens where Arlene fulfills her gardening passion, modest potting shed made with 80-year old wood from an old barn, and finally a large, rustic barn which is actually a complete fitness health center.

As we walked around their casually elegant and very restful home, we discussed what they described as their “partnership” in crafting this home. With the design and building process eminent, they placed their home in Davidsonville on the market. Surprised that it sold quickly, they bought a home directly across the street from their lot, so they could be actively involved in the design and crafting of their home. Working with local architect Dave Reigal, it took about 3-4 months to translate their dreams and ideas into working blueprints.

With over three decades in successful design, Arlene was quick to point out that “the best concept on any project is a harmonious teamwork between the architect, builder, and designer. Each person brings something key to the table. The architect is focused on everything from roofs to eaves... but not what goes in it. The designer brings the client's desires and practicalities of daily living to the blueprints. The builder merges these with the realities of systems, materials, cost, and time.”

With the site prepared for construction and the plans drawn up, the last key detail for Arlene and John to consider was the builder who would bring their long awaited dream home to life. John led this interview process. As he described his interviews with builders it was clear that he was very detail-oriented and pursued this task with great vigor. I later learned John's background, then understanding his very active involvement in every aspect of the building process. John won the All American Open (in Madison Square Garden) for the 5th time as Heavyweight Champion (1989),



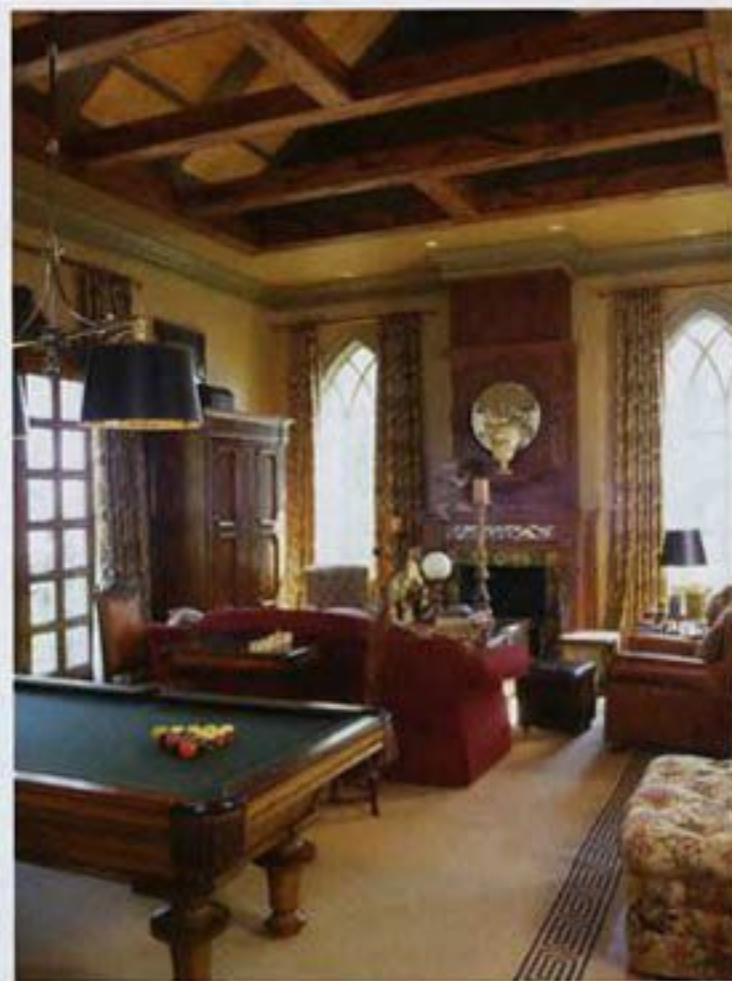
the U.S. Open for the 5th time as Heavyweight Champion/Grand Champion (1994), and was inducted into Henry Cho's All American Open Hall of Fame, the United States Naval Academy Karate-do Hall of Fame, the Keystone State Championships Hall of Fame, the Tae Kwon Do Hall of Fame and the Hellenic Hall of Fame. To have accomplished these feats one would have to be intensely focused, dedicated, with a keen eye for detail.

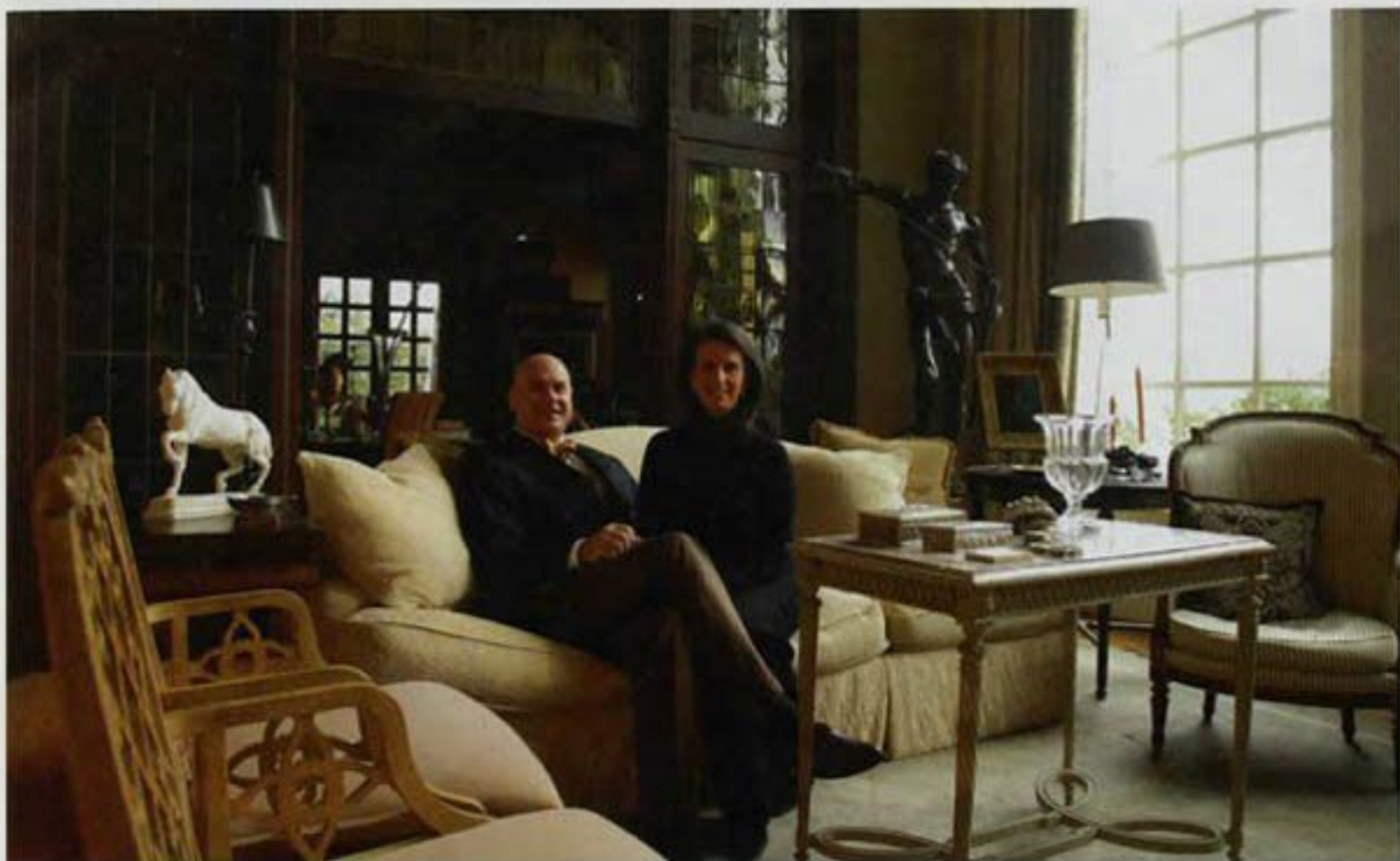
In describing the interview process for builders, John quickly shared, "A lot of builders were courting us, so that they could claim they built Arlene's house. I asked all sorts of detailed questions. When they didn't know the answers and it became apparent that I knew more about certain aspects of building than they did, I knew this was not the builder for us. But when Brad Lundberg came into his meeting with us, he brought his longtime superintendent and friend, Bob Moreland. Within a few minutes, I knew this was the builder for us. I excused myself and went in to tell Arlene that we found the man who would build our home. She was surprised as I hadn't asked my usual barrage of questions. But I just knew. And she agreed."

Arlene and John were both very quick to point out that there was a natural synergy between them and Brad. Both the client and builder were by nature systems-oriented and client-focused. When I asked her what the #1 tip is for someone thinking of building a luxury home, she unashamedly said, "You simply must connect with your builder!" She went on to say that, "dollars and cents are as important as the relationship. The three key things to consider when interviewing a builder are: chemistry, pricing and trust."

"We brought things to Brad and Bob. They brought things for us to learn and consider as well," John said. "For example, the plans called for the upstairs wall to end near the garage roof. Brad showed us that by using a different roofing truss system, we could gain over 1,000 feet over the guestroom, which we did. The huge kitchen butcher block sink surround is another example of his capabilities. Many other builders would have been unable or unwilling to retrofit this antique into a superbly functioning sink surround. But Brad and his designer, Bob, love to think outside the box."

"Brad's recommendations for subcontractors was another asset he brought to this project. For example, he recommended a 6-zone heating and cooling system for this large house. The contractor he recommended and we went with was Bay Heating. They did a superlative job and what most impressed us was that there were NO corners in any ductwork, eliminating the extra noise caused by the system having to force air around the corners. On top of this, all of the ductwork was insulated inside and outside for noise reduction."





"Everything Brad built was overdeveloped. I came up the stairs one day and jumped up and down to be certain they didn't move. They observed this and could tell it concerned me. That afternoon they added further reinforcement far beyond normal specs. The next day when I came through the house, they asked me to try the stairs again. The stairs didn't budge...as a matter of fact, they are probably the thing that will last the longest in this house," John chuckles.

"The house was so well built that in Hurricane Isabelle we didn't lose a single shingle or get a single drop of water in the crawl space. Around the foundation Brad didn't just backfill the dirt from excavations, which most builders do because it is there. He brought in a different kind of sand that drains moisture even quicker. Now that's detail."

John spoke so highly of Brad Lundberg, that I decided to do some research. I learned that Brad Lundberg, (www.LundbergBuilders.com), is a consummate perfectionist and detail-centric builder. Unlike many other builders, Brad is not just a general contractor...he gets actively involved in every project. Brad has built a reputation as one of the area's finest custom home builders. Why? He meticulously listens to his clients, exceeds expectations, and maintains exceptional control over his jobsites—even making it known that smoking and cursing by subcontractors and employees is not allowed. He has created a culture in his company that we "do it right or not at all." A man of high integrity, he will walk away from a project if he doesn't feel he can put his name on it.

John and Arlene appreciate Brad so much for not only his work, but his process and ethics. "The partnership with Brad and Bob was great," John added, "we had a great team. The client and the builder were integrally involved, and we had weekly meetings. This is the team. This is essential. How do football teams win? It's the team. Building a house is the same way."

When asked about this project that took 20 months to complete, Brad stated, "When I was building the Critzos' home, I would come in early before the workers just to look at it...such a neat house. The Critzos were unique as clients in that they knew exactly what they wanted and were decisive. The hardest part of building a custom home is if the clients are not in agreement over key details. Arlene and John knew what they wanted, but at the same time were also very open to suggestions and improvements."

Every inch of Arlene's personal home was designed as a process—just as she does for every single client she has...a logical and tracked process. When I asked Arlene what three tips she could share on building a luxury home, she quickly pointed out three key things:

Really know what you want, clearly defined. If there are two people involved, discuss together and arrive at compromises.

Put a plan together 100% taking in consideration space, financial expectations, quality and finish expectations before purchasing anything.

Interview at least three builders and look for chemistry, reputation, trust, and experience.

Turning to John I asked him the same question, and he responds by saying, "In real estate the key is—location...location...location. In business the key is—volume...volume...volume. In building it the key is—Lundberg...Lundberg...Lundberg."

With our most fascinating tour and conversation coming to a close, I asked Arlene how one selects the right interior designer. She deftly pointed out that there are four key things necessary: experience, referrals, research, and chemistry. You are going to be working day and night with this person to create your environment, and this is a very personal thing, so you have to truly make the right connection."

We could have easily spent the rest of the afternoon in this inviting home with truly gracious owners. Spending this time with Arlene, I could easily see why her clients hold her in such high regard. For a woman who has accomplished so much, and has so many awards, Arlene is someone you would feel comfortable sitting down with over lunch and getting to know as a friend...yet also could trust implicitly with designing the home your family could live in for centuries to come. Her own home is testimony to that fact.

