



# ETERNAL SUNSHINE *of the* SPOTLESS MIND

The secret to Madeline Stuart's success is a curious mind that never stops learning

By ABIGAIL STONE

Photography by JOSÉ MANUEL ALORDA

**W**hen architect Paul Brant Williger asked Madeline Stuart to work on a Spanish Colonial Revival-style home in Woodside, California, she said yes and then she did what she always does: She went back to her copious library of architectural and decorative tomes. "My library is a nerd's answer to Pinterest," Stuart confesses. "I feel as though my education is never complete." She shares more of her knowledge in her first book, *No Place Like Home: Interiors by Madeline Stuart*, out this fall. Self-taught, Stuart, who grew up in Beverly Hills in the model for this style of home, cites her parents as strong influences. Her film director father ensured she was schooled in movies and history, art and music, while her mother, an interior designer, was inadvertently in charge of her daughter's design education, setting the example of expertly combining old pieces with new ones. "The style of these homes is second nature to me," says Stuart. "But I still try to find inspiration and imagery to guide the process. And, of course, it always starts with the client: How is the house going to work for them?"

Williger had created the framework for a house that spoke the language of this style so fluently that a neighbor, glimpsing it through an open gate, was puzzled as to why he'd never noticed it before. "While it's based on a tradition," explains Williger, "it's not trying to be some kind of historical recreation but instead adapted for a contemporary lifestyle." That meant slightly more ample proportions, a kitchen built for entertaining and large windows that flood the home with light. Stuart felt confident she could transform it from a house into a home. "I always say she doesn't decorate, she furnishes," says Williger of Stuart's work. "While these houses are meant to be

In the living room, a pair of vintage hand-carved four-inch-thick walnut doors that Stuart discovered at T.L. Gurley Antiques—"a funky, fabulous shop in Pasadena"—and refinished serve to divide the breakfast area in the kitchen from the living room area.





**THIS PAGE, LEFT:** The dining room's antique Bakhtiari area rug from Jamal's Rugs sits below a 17th-century walnut and brass sideboard. **RIGHT:** The 18th-century altarpiece over the fireplace, purchased by the client, shines upon a pair of circa-1800 carved walnut armchairs from France that

Stuart found at Garden Court Antiques.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** In the kitchen, bespoke cabinetry, which Stuart and Williger created in concert, evokes the spirit of a classic Spanish Revival home, as do the hand-hewn Douglas fir beams.







**THIS PAGE, LEFT:** In the octagonal entryway, an iron and glass star pendant from Reborn Antiques illuminates another pattern of Coorltalia custom terra-cotta tiles.

**BELOW:** A black iron bell jar from Reborn Antiques hangs over a freestanding spa tub from Victoria + Albert in the master bathroom.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Coorltalia custom terra-cotta tiles, found throughout, are topped by an antique Azerbaijani Shirvan area rug from Jamal's Rugs in the master bedroom. The artwork here and throughout the home was sourced by Cathy Baum & Associates.



beautiful, they're not meant to be staged. They're meant for people to live in and to be comfortable."

"The client wanted to do it right," Stuart recalls. She clarifies: "That doesn't mean an unlimited budget, it doesn't mean you are free to do as you please, it means that he wanted the benefit of my experience and my taste and what I'm going to bring to the party."

In the living room, pieces from her own collection, like the Brett sofa, mingle with rare antiques, mid-century finds and accessories from Spain, France and Portugal, as well as custom designs including a rug by Mitchell Denberg, a coffee table from Formations and a Coorltalia terra-cotta floor (it runs throughout the house in various patterns) designed by Stuart in collaboration with Williger.

In the bedroom, her Nimes Half-Poster bed plays host to an antique Azerbaijani rug and a 17th-century Spanish baroque table.

Chairs from Hollywood at Home and dark countertops converse with bespoke cabinetry and wrought-iron pendants in the expansive kitchen. "You're not so aware of every single element but it all works together to make you feel at peace," says Stuart. "Not everything has provenance and not everything is the best and there are touches of whimsy and things that don't take themselves too seriously." It's a formula derived from years of experience. "I learned the hard way and made a lot of mistakes," she says. Her greatest regret is that she didn't have a mentor: "If you have someone out in front, it's a hell of a lot easier." Instead, she has her books and her ever-present curiosity. "You have to get out of your desk chair. You have to get off the computer. You have to go out and find those marvelous things that create the soulfulness of the house." Words of wisdom.

