

Viva il Paradiso

Mary McDonald embarks on a gentle reawakening of an **architectural triumph in Palm Beach**, marrying muted tones with 1920s Mediterranean mastery.

In the living room, creamy mohair velvet on sofas and white linen on armchairs (both Cowtan & Tout) mingle easily with the original pickled oak boiserie and acanthus-trimmed ceiling plasterwork.

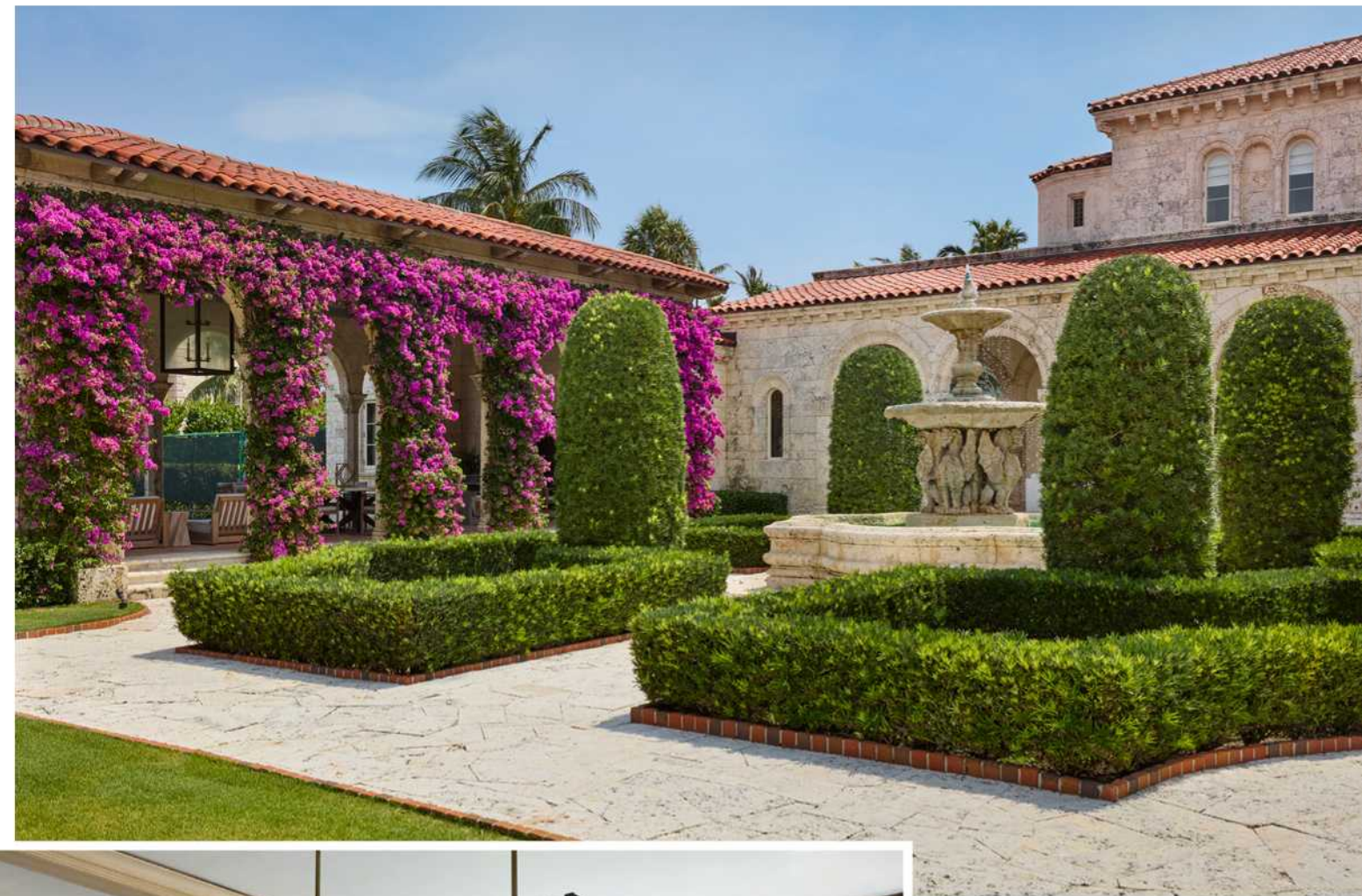
INTERIOR DESIGN AND STYLING BY MARY McDONALD • ARCHITECTURE BY DANIEL KAHAN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARMEL BRANTLEY • WRITTEN BY FRANCES SCHULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The soaring entry vestibule, where ornate 1920s ironwork mixes with sculptural stone console tables (Artifacts International). • Purple bougainvillea electrifies the central courtyard and stone fountain. • The backsplash and countertop's wispy veining (Calacatta lasa gold marble) and custom cube flooring design bring movement to the kitchen. Stools, Holly Hunt. • Architect Maurice Fatio completed the Tuscan-style home in 1929.

design and intricate roofline assemble around a central courtyard that creates a sense of refuge. Thus sheltered from outside distractions, General George C. Marshall, an occasional houseguest, is said to have conceived a large portion of his eponymous plan here. Matters of state notwithstanding, plans conceived at Casa della Porta more likely involved amusing diversions and dinner parties, as the monumental public rooms attest. Medieval-era oak doors, ornate coffered ceilings, and pickled oak and pecky cypress paneling are contained amid barrows of quarried keystone, terra-cotta, and marble.

Such gorgeous surfaces, by turns organic, nuanced, and variable, form the quiet but richly textured backdrop against which McDonald decorated. Having called her in part because of her experience with important historic properties, Casa della Porta's new owners were low-key, no glitz, and avoidant of "typical Palm Beach" bright colors and splashy prints. Nothing against that—it just wasn't them. They respected the house's venerable heritage and acknowledged its otherwise unmistakable "Palm Beach-ness," but their decor preferences were purely contemporary and in a neutral palette. The trick for McDonald was to marry them all harmoniously. The tension of juxtaposition both challenged and excited her. Formerly one of TV's *Million Dollar*



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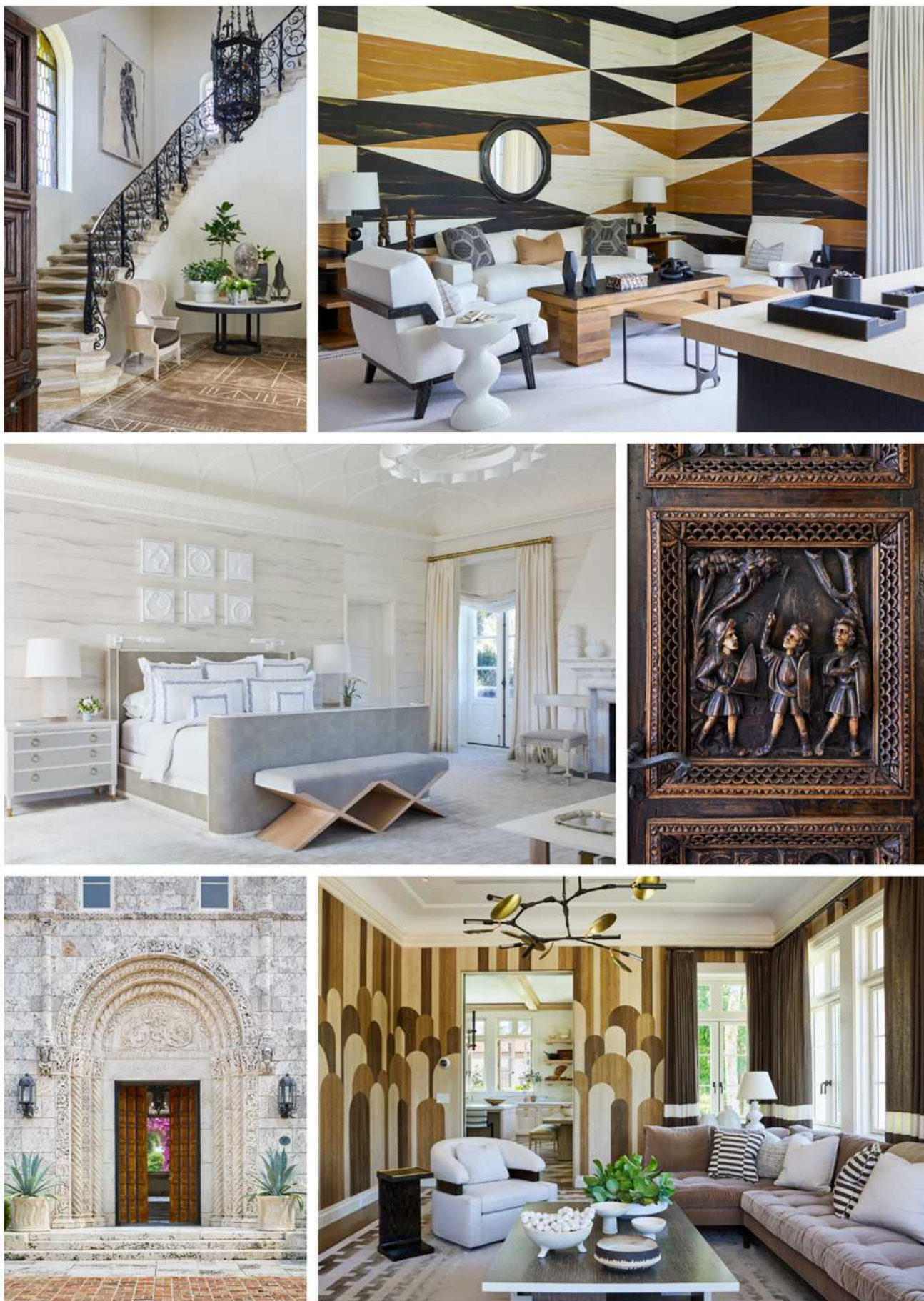
LIKE A PARENT REFUSING TO NAME A FAVORITE child, some artists refuse to choose a favorite work. Architect Maurice Fatio was not so squeamish. He called his Casa della Porta del Paradiso "the greatest house I have ever done." Bravado aside, Casa della Porta is a treasure in the trove of grand Palm Beach houses and one whose latest iteration in the hands of designer Mary McDonald and architect Daniel Kahan does it justice. Granted, McDonald says, "the house was amazing with nothing in it."

In the annals of America's 1920s society architects, Fatio was a star whose clients included Huttons, Rockefellers, Schiffs, and Vanderbilts. While fellow architect Addison Mizner focused on Spanish villa styles, Swiss-born Fatio hearkened his European roots and Mediterranean influences, often with the pronounced Tuscan flavor and monasterial elements so artfully expressed in Casa della Porta. Thanks to generations of conscientious stewards and preservationists, the house was landmarked in 1990, and Fatio's star continues to glow, as does the aesthetic and historic legacy it illuminates.

Completed in 1929 for William McAneeny, president of the erstwhile Hudson Motor Car Company, Casa della Porta included such gaspingly modern features as push-button retractable plate glass windows and a system of funnels through which music from the living room's pipe organ could be channeled.

Fatio brought in Italian master artisans to carve the extraordinary front doorway's receding archivolt and other adornments throughout the house. Its asymmetrical





Deco's Decadent Neutrals

ABOVE: The garden-view breakfast room is draped in soft pink Belgian linen (Colefax and Fowler). Rug, Mary McDonald, Inc. for Patterson Flynn. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Original paneled oak double doors open to a grand stone and iron staircase softened by a custom kilim runner. Artwork, Michele Oka Doner. • A Gio Ponti-inspired wallcovering (Fromental) replicates the asymmetrical marble slabs of Villa Planchart in Caracas, Venezuela. • Late medieval period hand-carved woodwork in a door imported by Fatio. • A custom branching disc chandelier by Lindsey Adelman floats above a Jean de Merry coffee table in the family room. Smoked Oak-finish side table, Julian Chichester. • The front entrance with receding keystone archivolt. • A shagreen inlay bed with bone trim pairs with a geometric bench by Natasha Baradaran.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Simple yet elegant white seating (Formations) allows the loggia's dramatic vaulting and arches to star. Fabric, Perennials. Lanterns, Paul Ferrante. • Circular forms in the dining room celebrate the home's abundant Deco curves. Chandelier, McLain Wiesand. • Podocarpus hedges rise as living walls around the pool. Teak chaises, David Sutherland. Fabric, Giati Elements. • Arabescato marble slabbing and custom cast-bronze chandeliers (Jean Karajian) modernize the primary bath. Nickel-plated tub, Catchpole & Rye



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Decorators, she also saw it as a chance to play against type. Admitting she is typically a “more-is-more kind of girl,” she argues that closer inspection of her work makes the case that she embraces “all kinds of interiors.” Besides, she adds, “it’s fun to do something people think isn’t you.”

McDonald retained original fixtures and features where possible. Where replacements were warranted, Kahan not only designed a new dining room mantel and a new plaster ceiling in the primary bedroom but also served as a key sounding board as McDonald designed lighting and other features. “Does it look like something that would have been there in the 1920s?” she wanted to know.

Pivotal decisions involved the kitchen and primary bedroom and bath, where previous but now-dated renovations called for a fresh start. “My goal,” McDonald says, “was to make it look as if it would have been brand-new in the 1920s.” She succeeded nowhere more impressively than in the bath, with its extravagant marble tiling and all-glass shower surround that expands the space visually. In furnishings McDonald sought sculptural pieces to sustain visual interest in the absence of color and print, grounding them with boldly scaled patterned floors in carpets or the existing graphics of stone, marble, and terra-cotta. With muted tones and streamlined silhouettes, the furniture echoes its Art Deco counterpart, a look as fresh today as it was nearly a century ago. Comfortable too, which is a rare luxury within such commanding architecture.

As Fatio did, would McDonald say it’s the greatest house she’s ever done? “It is one of them for sure!” she says. “And every time I would visit, I wished I lived there.” ◆

