

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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## THE ALLURE OF SUMMER



BLISSFUL BEACH  
GETAWAYS

A MAGICAL  
ITALIAN VILLA

THE STUNNING  
RESTORATION OF A  
HAMPTONS ICON

**PLUS**  
SEDUCTIVE SWIMMING POOLS

# MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Interior designer Mario Buatta devises extraordinary entertaining spaces for preeminent hosts Hilary and Wilbur Ross at their estates in the Hamptons and Palm Beach

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PALM BEACH PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT FRANCES PRODUCED BY HOWARD CHRISTIAN

*f*or many businessmen, the prospect of attending a black-tie soiree after a demanding day at the office is dreadful. Wilbur L. Ross Jr. has no such qualms. Married to Hilary Geary Ross, a popular fixture on the Manhattan–Southampton–Palm Beach social axis and a columnist for *Quest* magazine, the philanthropic investor and art aficionado gladly heads home to play host at the glamorous residences he and his wife have tailored for stylish, often large-scale entertaining.

Much of the credit for the colorful rooms that serve as the couple's backdrop goes to New York interior designer Mario Buatta, a mainstay in the Rosses' respective lives since the 1970s. Over the decades he has furnished homes for each of them and their previous spouses. After the two wed, in 2004, he worked his flowered-chintz magic on the pair's first Manhattan home together, an opulent aerie at the Sherry-Netherland hotel—but the dining room could only accommodate 30. "While it was beautifully decorated, it was fairly limited for entertaining," says Wilbur, who puts as much energy into holding major fundraisers for favorite charities, among them the Central Park Conservancy and the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, as he does collecting contemporary Chinese art and the paintings of René Magritte. (He owns more than 20 works by the Belgian surrealist.) To remedy the situation, in 2008 the Rosses moved a few blocks away, to a penthouse with a grand barrel-vaulted living room, once a ballroom, where bigger parties could be staged. Buatta, of course, followed.

"Mario's done four projects for us in nine years," Wilbur notes, including their primary residence in Palm Beach, Florida, and their Southampton, New York, summer house. The latter, an early-1900s Colonial Revival, was decorated in 1976 by Buatta for Hilary and her first husband, the late stockbroker John W. Geary II. After she married Wilbur, the home was spruced up to suit their convivial lifestyle.

Buatta had landscape architect Charles Stick augment the Southampton dining room, which can seat 40, by ripping out an adjacent brick terrace and replacing it with a flagstone-paved loggia that accommodates up to 80 additional guests. When not being used for festive meals, this "wonderfully flexible" space, as Hilary describes it, also functions as an outdoor sitting room, where dark-green wicker chairs and sofas upholstered with blue-and-white paisley are arranged in clusters to encourage conversation.

More dramatic was the decision to relocate the swimming pool, moving it away from the house and placing it parallel with the tennis court. In the space between those two outdoor amenities, architect Charles Muse along with Stick constructed an eye-catching folly with the appearance of a Chinese pavilion. Decorated by Buatta, the structure works as a deluxe changing room, a fanciful lounge for family and friends, and an air-conditioned refuge for buffet lunches. Whimsical murals depicting topiaries line the main room, and atop the pagoda's green-patinated copper roof, golden bells chime in the breeze.

The Rosses' place in Palm Beach, a 1939 Georgian Revival manor named Windsong, is a masterpiece by high-society architect John L. Volk that overlooks the Intracoastal Waterway. Though the 12,000-square-foot home is hardly cramped, the couple decided to purchase an adjoining lot and build a party pavilion that could also be used as a guesthouse. For this project, Buatta collaborated with Thomas M. Kirchhoff, an architect in nearby Jupiter who is known for classically inspired seaside estates. During a brainstorming session, the decorator came up with the idea of creating a ballroom with a graceful elliptical shape. →

**Opposite:** A hand-painted wallpaper by Haleh Atabeigi and a Stark carpet bring a garden atmosphere into the dining room of Hilary Geary Ross and Wilbur Ross's Southampton, New York, residence, which was decorated by Mario Buatta. The table is by Wood & Hogan, the green earthenware is vintage Dodie Thayer, and the chairs are cushioned with a Giati Designs fabric. For details see Sources.



“If you’re going to have a ballroom, square is boring,” says Buatta, whose distinguished career is surveyed in *Mario Buatta: Fifty Years of American Interior Decoration* (Rizzoli), written with Emily Evans Eerdmans and to be released in October.

The 3,500-square-foot pavilion, called Windsong Too, includes a kitchen and two guest suites that are so inviting, Wilbur jokes, “we could turn it into a bed-and-breakfast.” While devising plans for the structure’s 41-foot-long ballroom—which has a domed skylight, fireplaces at each end, and an inlaid marble floor—Kirchhoff drew inspiration from the grand salon at Vaux-le-Vicomte, the 17th-century château near Paris that architect Louis Le Vau conceived for Louis XIV’s finance minister. But Buatta added a subtle tropical twist—plaster palm-tree sconces copied from a 1930s Baguès gilt-wood original. Underscoring the island feel is the building’s exterior cladding of coral stone quarried in the Dominican Republic, a choice the architect says was influenced by the Caribbean houses crafted by set designer Oliver Messel in the ‘60s and ‘70s.

Though the ballroom seats 80 people at two long dining tables, “you can fit dozens more, using smaller round tables,” observes Hilary, whose book *Palm Beach Palm Beach*, a cultural salute that she has produced with star photographer Harry Benson, will be published in 2014. →





**From top:** A loggia at the Rosses' Southampton property is outfitted with Bielecky Brothers wicker furniture; the ceramic garden seats, used as tables, are from John Rosselli Antiques. Michael Taylor Designs chaise longues are placed by the pool; the beach-ball pillows were custom designed by Buatta. **Opposite, clockwise from top left:** Hilary Geary Ross, on a porch overlooking the lawn. The Colonial Revival house was built in the early 1900s. Landscape designer Charles Stick created a topiary promenade leading to the poolhouse, which is the work of Stick and architect Charles Muse; the sheep sculptures are by François-Xavier Lalanne.







A Brunswick & Fils floral fabric brightens the Southampton living room, where a vintage Karl Springer console is flanked by a pair of matching settees.





**Above:** Buatta created a painted floor for a sitting room at the Rosses' Southampton house and glazed the paneling pistachio-green; the wicker chairs are by Bielecky Brothers, the child's armchair is covered in a Cowtan & Tout check, and the octagonal inlaid table is from John Rosselli Antiques. **Right:** The playroom's ceiling and walls are by Atabeigi; the hanging lantern is by John Rosselli & Assoc., and the pillow-back ottoman in the foreground is upholstered in a fabric from Lee Jofa.



**Below:** The master suite in Southampton stars a custom-made bed accented with linens by Pratesi and a coverlet by D. Porthault. The floral curtain-and-upholstery fabric is by Brunschwig & Fils, a Manuel Canovas striped print lines the walls, and the carpet is by Stark.



In addition to hosting traditional seated dinners, the ballroom also makes an ideal staging ground for fantastical revels. For one such fête, the Rosses turned the space into a discotheque dubbed Club R, complete with a lissome acrobat on a trapeze pouring Champagne into guests' glasses. The performance, Hilary points out, was "more Cirque du Soleil than Folies Bergère." When she and her husband threw a dinner last year in honor of the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, they transformed the room into an evocation of the legendary Manhattan nightclub El Morocco. (That party was one I attended myself. The Rosses, longtime friends, have hired me

on numerous occasions to whip up a surprise satirical song for distinguished guests—my sideline profession—and I have stayed multiple times at Windsong Too.)

For visitors lucky enough to spend the night at the Rosses' place in Palm Beach, rising from a four-poster and wandering into the ballroom as it sparkles with morning sunshine is sublimely luxurious. The effect is equally dazzling at dusk, when tall mirrored doors built into one of the ballroom's walls reflect the shimmering light that glints off the Intracoastal. "It feels like you're floating on the water," Buatta says, adding dryly, "depending on how many drinks you've had." □



Architect Thomas M. Kirchoff designed the pavilion at the Rosses' Palm Beach, Florida, residence; the gardens are by Nievera Williams Design.

**Opposite, clockwise from top:** In the ballroom, Oscar de la Renta Home armchairs by Century Furniture join custom-made sofas modeled after a Jean-Michel Frank design. Sheltered by an awning made from a Jerry Pair stripe, a poolside dining area features hibiscus standards and chairs cushioned in a Giati Designs fabric. A barrel-vaulted hall leads to the ballroom.









In a guest room at the Palm Beach pavilion, a Gracie wallpaper provides a chinoiserie note. The chandelier is by Vaughan, the John Rosselli & Assoc. bed is dressed in D. Porthault linens, the mirrored bedside cabinets are by Nancy Corzine, and the pagoda lamp is from C. Bell. Beneath a mirror from R. Louis Boffering Decorative & Fine Art stands a chest of drawers by Brunshwig & Fils topped with Christopher Spitzmiller lamps. On the custom-made chaise longue is a throw from Treillage; the carpeting is by Stark.