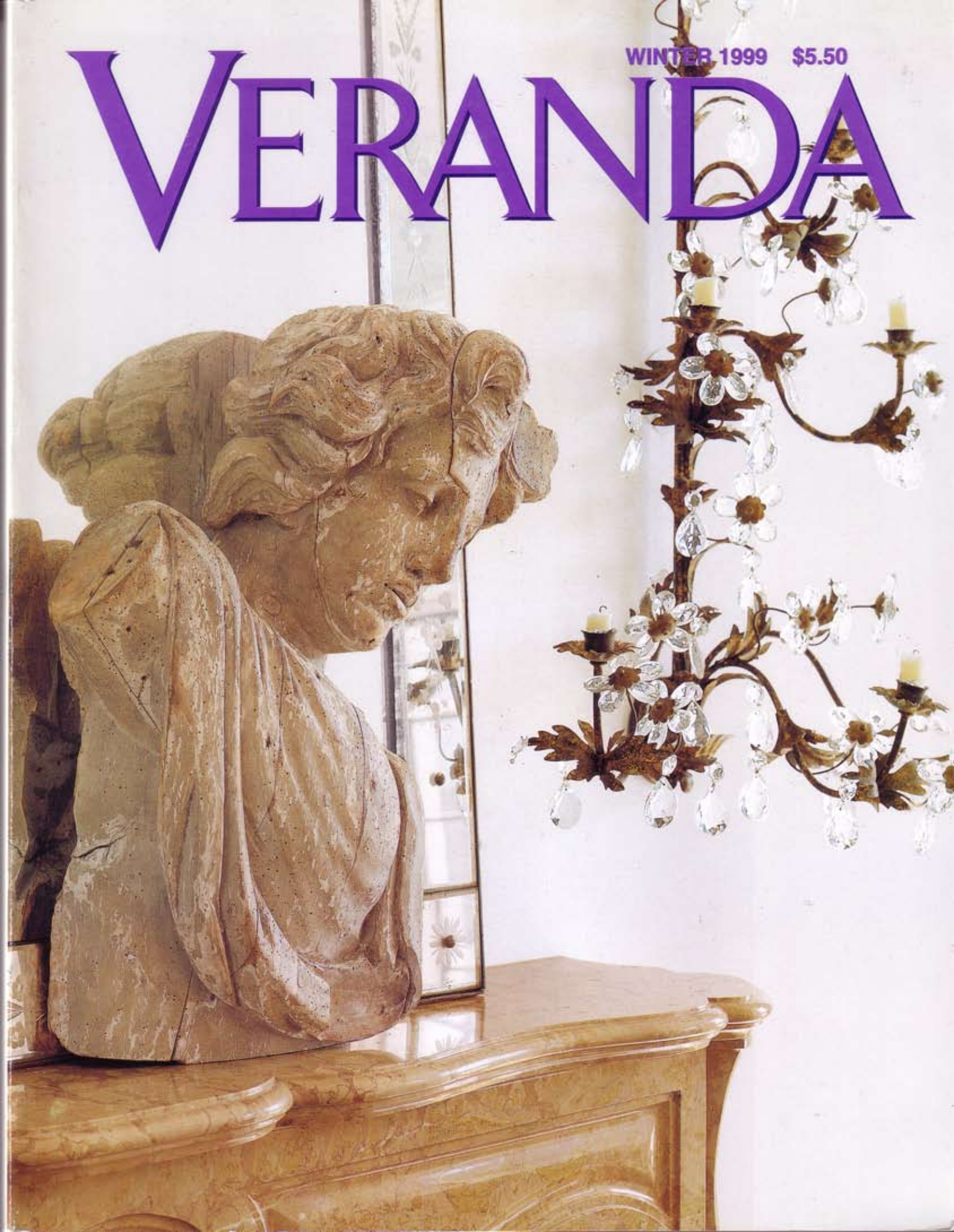


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VERANDA





LIGHT TOUCH

AN UNCLOUDED VISION

INTERIOR DESIGN BY BABS WATKINS
 ARCHITECTURAL RENOVATION BY PATTON W. BROOKS
 LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY SARAH W. LAKE, M.L.A.
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ABOVE: The color of a Houston residence was chosen to complement its limestone accents. OPPOSITE: Minimal furnishings allow ornate railing and chandelier to shine. Lily poses near an architectural fragment from New York. FOLLOWING PAGES AND COVER: Antique bust from France reflected in Venetian mirror flanked by 1940s Parisian crystal and wrought-iron sconces. Louis XVI-style settee faces chairs slip-covered in Scalamantré velvet. Corner screen is 18th-century French.

The jeweled tiara sitting on a side chair in the living room is not a prop. Neither is the small chandelier orb resting on a tea table. They were not placed by a magazine editor for a photo shoot. They are a part of the homeowner's life.

"They are my jewelry," she says. When she and her husband relocated to the River Oaks area of Houston, Texas, she brought more jewels: sparkling chandeliers that had hung in their Manhattan apartment. To help her find additional gems for their new house, she contacted interior designer Babs Watkins.

A partner in the Houston firm Watkins-Schatte-Culver-Gardner, an antiques and accessories shop, Watkins had an immediate rapport with her new client. "I've been blessed with a special sensi-







PRECEDING PAGES:
A French lady of the
19th century sat in a
coiffeur chair while hav-
ing her hair styled. The
delicate coloring of the
fabric so enchanted the
homeowner she decided
not to have the chair re-
covered. Italian 18th-
century silver leaf altar
candle stand juxtaposed
with English bowl. All
floral arrangements
by Julie Baker.

RIGHT:
Sunlight is welcomed
through uncurtained
windows throughout
the house. Antique linen
cloth softens metal din-
ing table. Murano glass
chandelier adds grace.

FOLLOWING PAGES:
Italian tole bed makes
the need for artwork
redundant. Delicacy of
Napoleon III lacquer
and gilt chairs contrasts
with larger pieces.









tivity that lets me know a person's individuality almost on first sight. Good design is about pleasing a client, so you have to 'read' the personality—and be compatible with it. She has a creative energy that made this a stimulating project."

Most decorating plans begin in the public spaces, but this one started in a daughter's bedroom. She requested clouds on the wall and ceiling. "We didn't want it childish," says her mother. "We wanted a room she could grow with, so we had 'Constable clouds' painted. We liked the colors so much, we used them throughout the house."

Without the sun shining on them, clouds would be smokey gray masses blocking the light, not the romantic, fluffy cushions of a painted English landscape. And without light, jewels would not dazzle. With their relocation, the homeowners moved toward the light.

"For twenty years we lived in rather dark New York apartments," says the wife, who was originally from Louisiana. "When we moved to Texas, we wanted a house, and the most important requirement for us was the quality of light. We love the windows in this house. They're the kind my husband grew up with in San Antonio. Some people suggested we get rid of them, get newer windows, but fortunately our contractor was able to restore them to working order."

Good craftsmanship was essential to the owners. "All the workers and landscapers took interest in doing their best, being their most creative for us," says the wife.

"The owner created an atmosphere that makes it easy for you to be creative," says landscaper Sarah Lake.

"You hear horror stories about ren-

PRECEDING PAGES: Minimalism is continued in the great room where limestone floors are deliberately left bare. Linen from Decorators Walk. LEFT: Beneath a 1940s Parisian wrought-iron and crystal chandelier, Louis XVI side chairs surround metal-legged table. Trumeau rests on Louis XVI chest. Silver tureen is English. OPPOSITE: Torchère is Italian. Jay Iarussi painted the modulated walls throughout the house.





ovations," says the owner, "but ours was an enjoyable process."

And then there was Jay Iarussi, the artist who painted the clouds. "He's like Eldon, the painter on *Murphy Brown*," says Watkins. "He becomes part of the family, interested in the people. But more important, his color sense is exquisite."

Color was integral to the design scheme. "There's a continuity of color—quiet grays and pewter, which work well with the metallic effect created by Jay on the stair rail," Watkins continues. From there we chose lighter shell colors—pale warm tones. In the great room the layering effect of color makes it appear natural and believable, especially with the garden view. But even these blues and greens are warm and intimate, because of sunlight streaming through the uncurtained windows."

The muted tones make it possible to bring furnishings from one room to another in smooth transition, especially when entertaining or giving a dance for their teenage daughters. Besides, the owner enjoys rearranging pieces. "Even in our traditionally furnished Fifth Avenue apartment I liked the playfulness of moving things about."

The scale of the furniture plays an integral part. "The homeowner's first purchases were small in scale," explains Watkins, "and I thought we'd need some large pieces because the rooms are so big. But we didn't."

"The rooms *are* large," admits the owner, "and I didn't want them to intimidate." Small scale pieces, such as a French salon set, make the space more welcoming.

Because the rooms are sparsely furnished, each item becomes important. There is little art hanging on the artfully painted walls. Chandeliers and jeweled tiaras are allowed to reflect their glory. They become art.

"Pieces 'float' in the rooms," says Watkins, "Especially since she didn't want any clutter. It's quite peaceful."

"I love visiting people's homes with lots of collections," explains the owner, "but I couldn't live like that."

She'd rather be on cloud nine. □

PRECEDING PAGES:
French worktable with white marble top is ideal island in a busy kitchen. Louis Philippe chest supports antique mirror.

RIGHT:
Beaux Arts chandelier presides over breakfast area. "One of the reasons we have several dining tables," says the homeowner, "is because we follow the sun. We eat wherever the light mirrors our mood."

Glass doors replaced center window of alcove when terrace was added. Shams of antique linen on wicker seating.

