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ALEXANDRA CHAMPALIMAUD



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per se

Designer **Alexandra Champalimaud** has no limits when it comes to flurries of adverbs, adjectives and enthusiastic qualifiers: her husband, banker Bruce Schnitzer, is an 'phenomenally, fabulously, wonderfully crazy'; summers in Litchfield county where she has not one but two country houses, can be 'abysmally hot' and her earlier life in Portugal where she was raised was, 'beautiful, warm, heavenly'. In England, where she was schooled, her way of talking would be described as plummy and rather posh but she sees herself as European rather than British. Although her life might seem charmed right now, she was unself pitying about having to flee her 'heavenly' Portuguese life after the revolution in 1974, losing her marriage and starting again as a single mother in freezing Montreal.

Did you stumble into designing hotels when you started out? It seems a good match for you.

No it was a choice—a deliberate choice. I was living in Montreal at the time, still terribly young.

Well you had your children there—you had them when you very young.

I was a single mother ... that's it ... I feel like I know you. You know everything about me already! I was in Canada because there had been a revolution in my country [Portugal] and so I had to leave with my first husband. It was very traumatic. Eventually [my husband] just couldn't deal with it and I couldn't very well either but I stuck at it.

NEW YORK SOCIAL DIARY

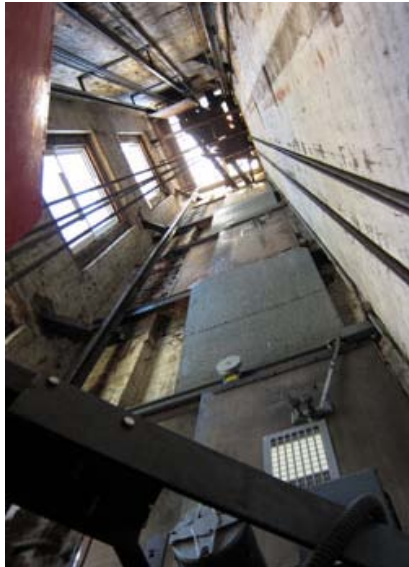
ALSO IN DECORATOR SERIES

DECORATOR SERIES:

- 10.22.10: Alexandra Champalimaud
- 10.15.10: Dick Ridge and Rod Denault
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- 9.17.10: Milly de Cabrol



At the front entrance, a cartoon by an artist who once lived in Alexandra's building.



Up the elevator shaft en route to Alexandra's loft.



A Chinese alter tables is topped with a pair of 19th century Indo-Portuguese candlesticks,

- 8.20.10: Carol Prisant
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A photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson hangs near the apartment intercom.



A South American woodcut hangs near the main entryway of Alexandra's loft.

What did you find particularly difficult about it?

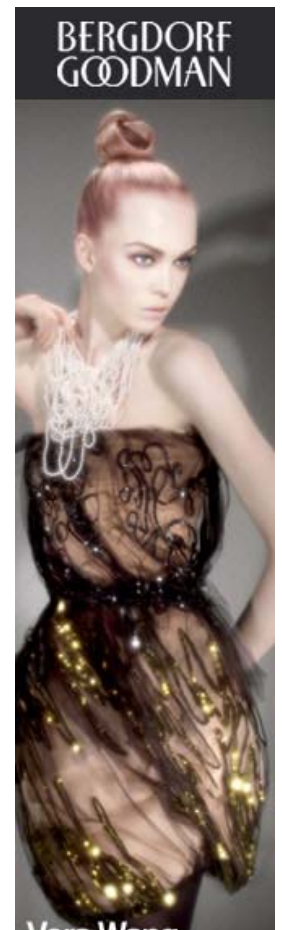
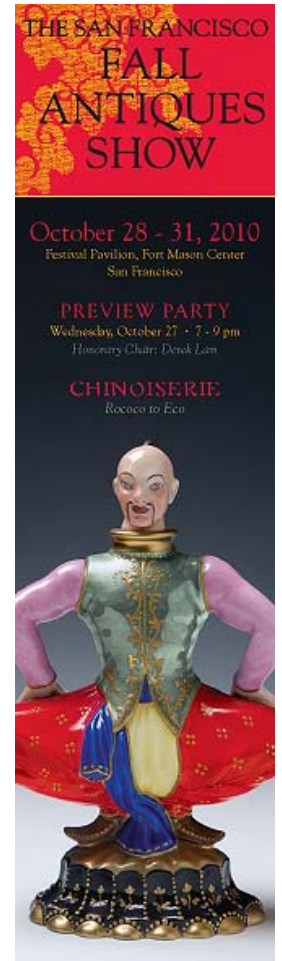
Well, you're a chunk of years younger than I am but everyone traveled a little less than they do today. Going from Portugal and a rather beautiful, warm, heavenly, comfortable life ... and you go to forty degrees below zero. And you are definitely poor because everything has been nationalized, so you start taking buses. I got frostbite on my nose. You put your child into a day care center, which I had never done in my life ... but this isn't a sad story. It's just that's what makes it hard ... if you want to survive you've got to just learn it.

Your name is French—was your family originally French?

No, it's a very old Portuguese name. Apparently I look French and I act French and I do all of this.

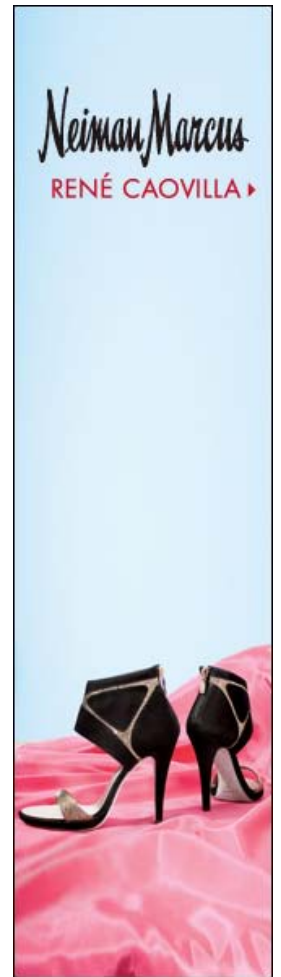
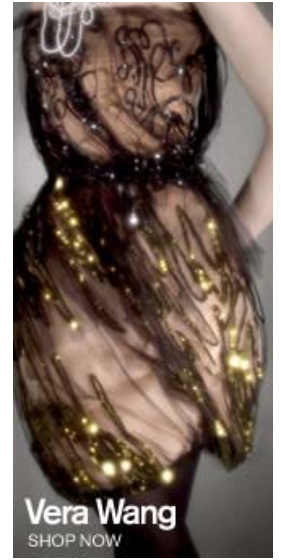
What's 'acting French'?

I don't know ... European sort of stuff. I'm not grumpy I don't think.





Views across the open living area of the loft.



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Oscar at rest in between a pair of Portuguese chairs Exposed wooden ceiling beams give a slightly rustic feeling to the otherwise calm, elegant space.





Oscar, posing for Jeff.



A colorful, 19th century Chinese skirt hangs above contemporary iron shelving filled with arts objects and books.

Looking across a pot filled with colorful plants towards a carved wooden angel from Portugal.



A group of 19th century English botanical prints hang above the flat screen TV.

So when you design for hospitality, what sorts of things come into play? It's different from residential.

Hopefully there's a knowledge base that I've had sort of from inception, but you also learn it. And then some talent. It's life experience. Every nuance adds to a sense of people feeling great in the space.

What have you learned about people by designing hotel rooms for them?

I know what makes people happy. Here's one: if you have ironed sheets, getting into bed is the most extraordinary feeling, of getting into a lovely, clean, fresh, ironed. There isn't a human being in the universe who doesn't like this. It's the same thing with good food. Deliver good food with a smile.

So they're quite small things, really.

Always.



Chinoiserie linen covers an English Edwardian chair.

In a corner sitting area a photograph of the interior of a theater by Doug Hall hangs opposite a work by Chinese artist Zhou Jun purchased by Alexandra in Beijing.



A late 18th century Flemish head of Christ stands atop a carved wooden chest.



Colorful fresh flowers are arranged atop a glass coffee table by Mies van der Rohe.

Alexandra's eclectic approach sometimes includes more formal choices such as this silk damask covered chair.



A stunning Chinese Art Deco rug creates a grand entrance to the loft living area.



An African mask standing atop a stainless drum table was a present from son, Lopo.



The large open space of the loft is perfect for casual entertaining.



On the north wall an oil on canvas by Antonio Trezbinski hangs between a pair of 18th century Chinese carved panels.



To create a sense of coziness, Alexandra divided the open living space into four distinct seating areas.



A desk found in Hudson divides the dining area from the main seating area.



Resting atop an oversized easel, is an 19th century Italian oil of the Madonna.



An Egyptian stone head from Peter Tilou and a black and white ceramic vessel by Rotine Delisle stands atop the glass and acrylic coffee table.



An oversized dining room purchased in New Preston works well for large sit-down dinners.



A Portuguese version of a china cabinet stands against the far wall.



Low black lacquer shelves also serve as an open bar.

What else needs to be in a hotel room to make me feel good?

To me, light ... soft, indirect light and natural light. Well, again natural light is divine but can you always have it? So, gentle light, but light. And a sense of air ... space.

How do you get that?

Moving out furniture and taking overstuffed curtains off windows.

Most hotel rooms in the US don't have windows that even open.

Some of them mostly allow a small window to open about four inches. It has everything to do with whether you can stick a baby's head through ... a lot of our regulations are all to do with safety. I've just been in Kenya at a beautiful place called Hippo Point and when I checked the staircase, I was giggling to myself.



A suspended fabric canopy designed by Alexandra dominates the cozy master bedroom.



Looking through the bed towards the dressing table.

A satin-covered painted French chair stands by a 1940's mirrored dressing table.



Alexandra designed the Portuguese bed linens for her hotel projects.



A landscape drawing hangs above a portrait of Alexandra's mother by artist Pedro Leitao. Reflections of the bedroom.



A classical Italian landscapes hangs above an early 19th century Portuguese chest.

A handsome Bavarian chest of drawers purchased at The Black Swan in Ct. provides extra storage space.



A photo of Alexandra's two sons, Lopo and Anthony stands near a vase of fresh flowers.



A place to hang.

An early 19th century Portuguese Ivory crucifix hangs above a printed linen covered chair.

Yes, I want to go back to Africa—I grew up in Africa and I read that you once spent a year in a derelict farmhouse in Mozambique.

How interesting that you picked up on that. I was married when I was nineteen, to a beautiful Portuguese man, an aristocrat. But like everybody else in Portugal, he had to do military service overseas. And as you know they had a terrorist war and then that went on to become a civil war. He was mostly at the front. But after he had been there six months there was a telegram saying: Come, I think there is a place that is safe here. It was in Pemba, which is now very chic, which is quite funny.

What did you think of the house?

Oh I was so excited I couldn't see straight. Because prior to that I had been living in dungy, grungy motel with a bunch of soldiers and we all shared a bathroom, and that I can tell you was positively revolting. But I did this because I wanted to be with my husband. [The house] had these beautiful polished red floors and white walls. I taught English in my spare time. But by twenty-six I was divorced.



Looking into Lopo's room.



In son Lopo's room, a Portuguese map hanging on the wall above his northern European day bed, was a gift from his father. A painted English Arts and Crafts commode is used for extra storage.

That was your first life, I guess.

Yes. It was hard but I had had training. English boarding schools are not a piece of cake.

Where are you happiest?

That's a damn good question! Can you turn off that ... no only kidding. I think I'm happiest right now in Connecticut, believe it or not. I've created an amazing spot—we have. I'm very happy. And [my second husband] is an unbelievable man—fun, interesting, loves my children and his daughters seem to like me even though they're New Yorkers and I'm this

European who just showed up and their life changed.



- *Sian Ballen & Lesley Hauge*
- *Photographs by Jeff Hirsch*

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