

DESIGN FOR THE WELL-LIVED LIFE

# HOUSE & GARDEN

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## HIGH OCTANE

INTERIOR DECORATOR MARKHAM ROBERTS CREATES A RICH  
BLEND OF ECLECTIC STYLES AND COMFORTS IN THE MANHATTAN  
HOME OF AUTHOR AND PHILANTHROPIST CHARLOTTE FORD

WRITTEN BY LYDIA DENWORTH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY FERNANDO BENGOCHEA

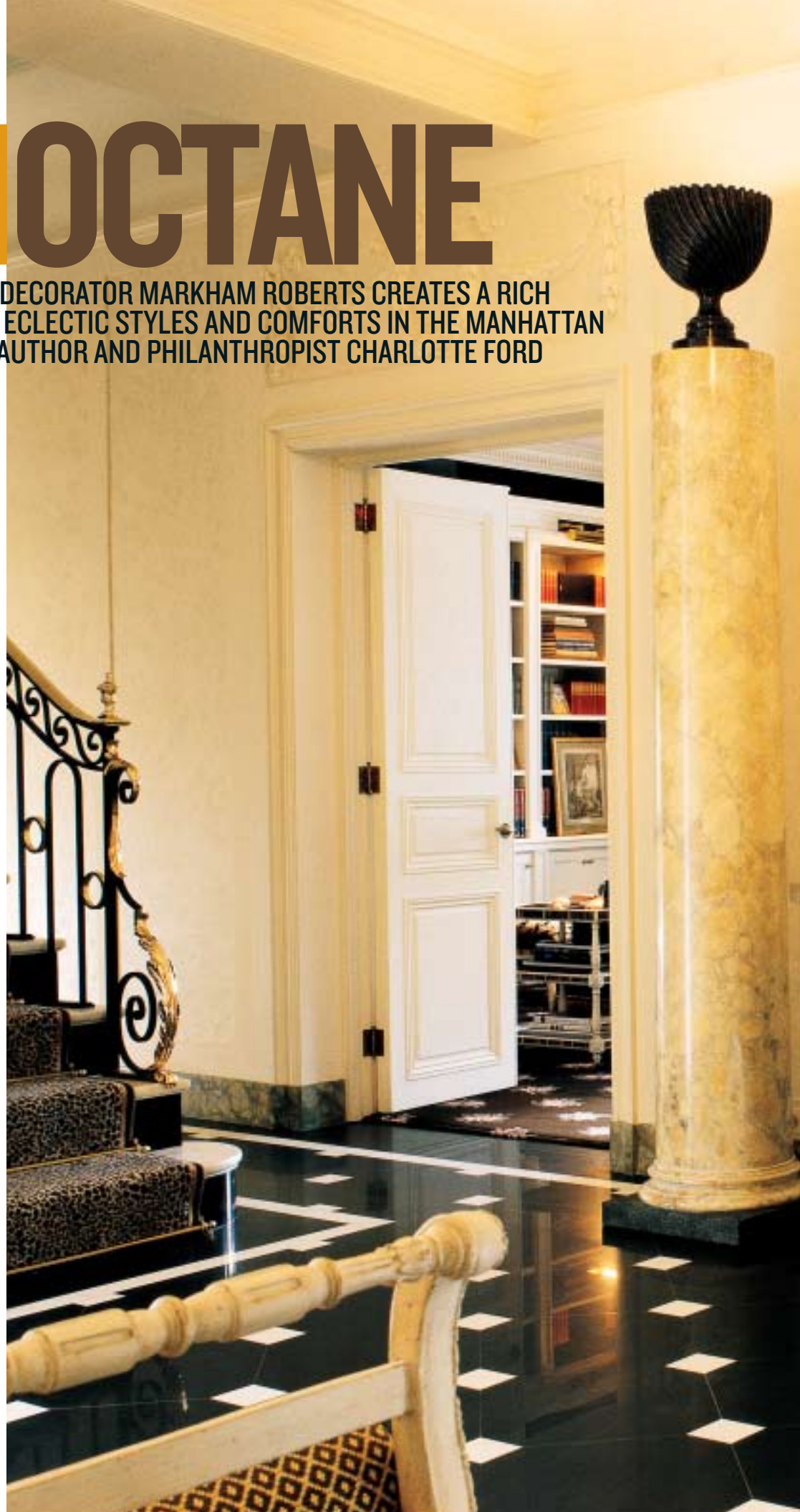
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Things that make you say “Ooh!” Markham Roberts says he designed the entry hall of Charlotte Ford’s triplex—which centers on a ca. 1740 English gilded console from Clinton Howell Antiques, NYC, and 18th-century Chinese vases from John Rosselli International—to knock the socks off visitors.



Roberts turned Ford's rarely used living room into a sumptuous lair. Custom chairs and sofas are upholstered in Espresso Byzantine velvet from J. Robert Scott and in Brunschwig & Fils's Les Papillons Exotiques. The ottoman is covered in Brunschwig's Tiger velvet. Travers's Duchesse silk curtains frame the views.

**C**HARLOTTE FORD has lived in her gracious Manhattan penthouse for 35 years. Spoiled by the light that pours in from the south and the magnificent views of the East River, she can't imagine moving. But that doesn't mean she hasn't wanted change. The triplex originally belonged to her first husband, shipping tycoon Stavros Niarchos. "It was all FFF—fine French furniture," says Ford. "It was almost unlivable." A "totally modern" redesign a few years later was "never that comfortable." Next came grand mirrored walls and a pink living room—still not terribly inviting. Finally, three years ago, Ford looked at her well-proportioned living room, with its bank of windows, and said, "I've got this room; I want to use it." She laughs and adds, "I don't know why it took me so long to catch on."

At the recommendation of a close friend, she turned to Mark Hampton protégé Markham Roberts, who had recently struck out on his own. Taking his cues from Ford's dress and personality, Roberts envisioned strong classic rooms (the project had expanded to include the dining room, the front hall, and beyond) that would be stylish and comfortable. "I loved it right off the bat," says Ford. "We didn't change a thing he did." Certainly, the apartment's





new look—even minus the mirrors—seems the truest reflection yet of its owner.

The oldest daughter of Henry Ford II, Ford had a privileged upbringing in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, but she isn't lacking in practicality or earthy good sense. In her just published third book, *Twenty-first Century Etiquette*, after chapters on cell phones and the Internet, a brief note on gym manners reminds exercisers to wipe down equipment, and asks, "Do you want to sit in someone's sweat?" Ford also owns a gift catalog business, OmniPresents, and devotes a good deal of time to charities, particularly New York Presbyterian Hospital.

Roberts's design accommodates all these business and social activities, as well as four grandchildren who frequently visit from Michigan. (Ford's daughter Elena is director of E-marketing for the Ford Motor Company.) In the living room, Roberts installed bookcases and a large television to anchor the room and warm it up. "I thought she'd want to hang out in there," he says. Given Ford's preference for strong color, he chose sophisticated, deep hues of green and brown—teal silk on the walls, dark chocolate carpet on the floors, paisleys and floral patterns in the upholstery. A white mantel and bookcases—designed by Roberts and Beringer Architects—keep the room light. A neoclassical card table at the center window serves as a desk, a



The living room, opposite page, is anchored by bookshelves and a mantelpiece Roberts codesigned. The convex Regency mirror is from Clinton Howell Antiques; the 19th-century horn box is from Lee Calicchio, Ltd., NYC. ■ An English japanned cabinet, ca. 1690, above, from Gerald Bland, NYC, commands one side of Ford's dining room. ■ Ford, below, poses at a leather-topped mahogany game table.



The whole dining room glistens—from the lacquered walls to the gleaming antique Georgian silver. The French wallpaper screen, made ca. 1820 by Dufour et LeRoy, is from Gerald Bland. The 19th-century sconces are from Denton Antiques, London. Roberts covered 18th-century Italian painted-wood side chairs in silk burlap and leather. Sources, see back of book.

meeting spot, or a dining table when Ford wants to have a casual meal by the television. She was serious about comfort. “I sat in all the chairs before we bought them,” she says. Only one, covered in green silk, is off-limits to the grandchildren.

**T**HE DINING ROOM, often used for hospital fund-raisers, features rich, dark brown lacquered walls with white trim. “Everything looks beautiful against it,” says Roberts. The details are mostly Asian. Two Buddhas that had lived in the living room and the front hall found a new home here. Ford had one lacquer cabinet; Roberts added a late-seventeenth-century black japanned cabinet on a gold base. To tone down its formality, he stowed a basket of firewood underneath.

The front hall is the grandest space in the house, with an ornate marble table in the style of William Kent, and detailed decorative painting on walls and columns. “You want to be dazzled when you walk in,” says Roberts. But at the top of the original 1930s staircase is a landing that evokes Ford’s private personality: a large round table draped in brown velvet is covered with silver-framed photographs of family and friends, and a Francis Elkins chair covered in Clarence House silk holds an “ex-husband voodoo doll.” Now, that’s mixing formality with fun. ❧

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