

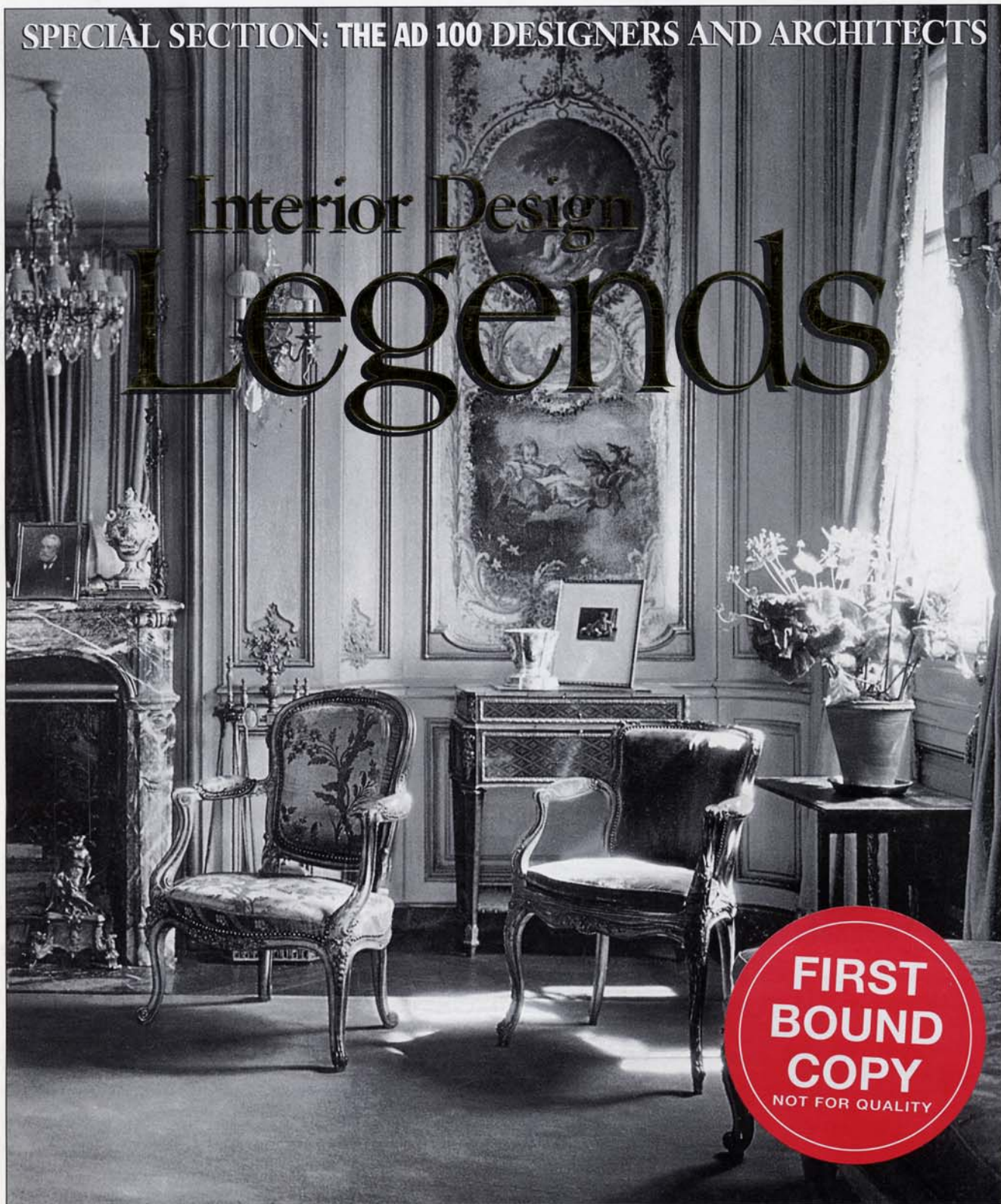
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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SPECIAL SECTION: THE AD 100 DESIGNERS AND ARCHITECTS

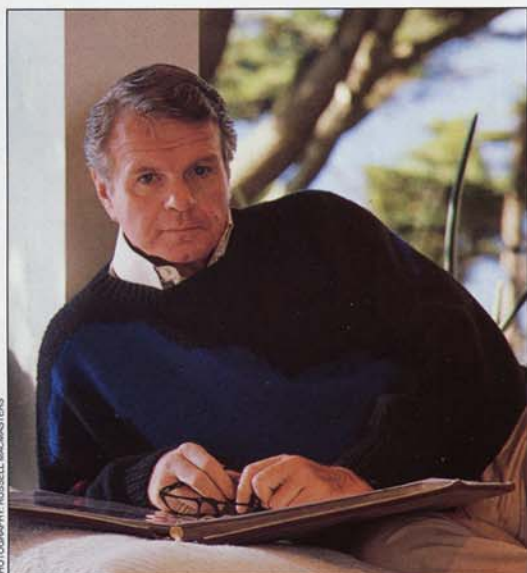
Interior Design Legends



**FIRST
BOUND
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JAMIE ARDILES-ARCE



PHOTOGRAPHY: RUSSELL MACMASTERS

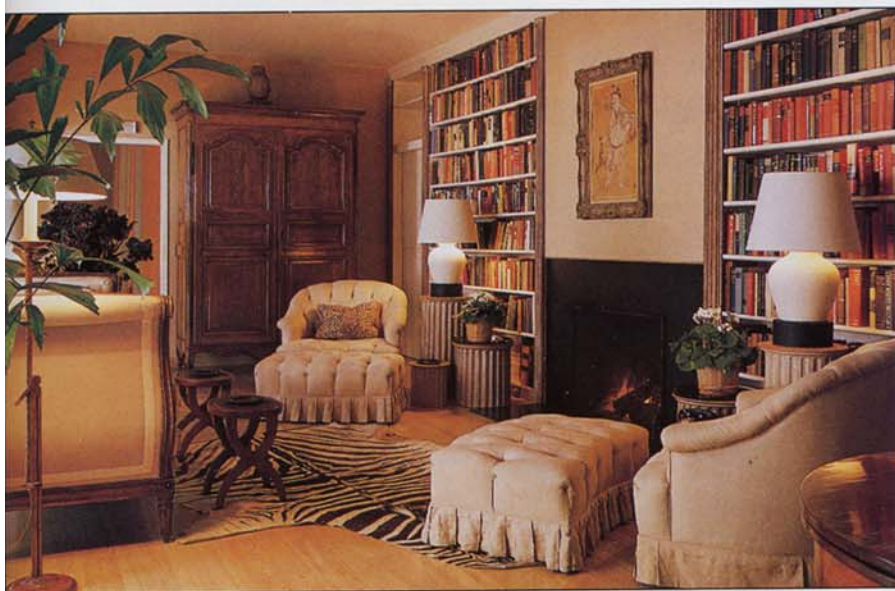
Michael Taylor

HIS BRILLIANT USE OF SCALE
AND LIGHT ANNOUNCED THE
CALIFORNIA LOOK

By Suzanne Trocmé

ABOVE: For the light-filled living room of a Manhattan penthouse—completed in the early 1980s—Michael Taylor (1927–1986) combined several of his signature elements, including oversize upholstered pieces, travertine tables, bare floors and antique chairs.

OPPOSITE: The library of a Modesto, California, house that Taylor created in the mid-1950s. “It was remarkable,” the designer commented on visiting the house after some 30 years. “In fact, everything had stood up very well.”
LEFT: Michael Taylor in 1984.



The James Dean of decorators" is how Diana Vreeland described West Coast designer Michael Taylor, who rather adroitly challenged the beliefs of his contemporaries. "Postmodernism has brought back the ostentatious rooms that were what I rebelled against originally. Now rooms are filled with fake columns and broken pediments, with no regard for function, comfort or good taste," he said in 1985, adding that, after thirty-odd years in the business, he was "still a rebel."

Consistently denouncing the cluttered and pretentious, he had a simple ethos: "When you take things out, you must increase the size of what's left." This spawned the widely emulated California Look, which in the latter part of



his career was characterized by oversize furniture and signature elements, including Yosemite slate and fossilized stone; plump geometric cushions; logs; wicker; and lots of mirrors, all against a muted backdrop of white on white or beige on beige. Taylor fans recognize his work to be pure and simple but by no means plain, a combination of rusticity and glamour.

Michael Taylor was born in Modesto, California, in 1927 and found early inspiration at a neighbor's house, where he first saw the work of Elsie de Wolfe. Syrie Maugham, the British decorator who helped create the all-white look popular in the 1920s, provided another



ABOVE: The living room of a Los Angeles house that Taylor designed in 1980 incorporated river rocks and trees. "Whenever possible I introduce growing things into my rooms," he wrote. "Plants have a way of preventing a room from appearing overdecorated."

LEFT: Copies of furniture from the Syrie Maugham collection were displayed in Taylor's San Francisco shop in the early 1960s. "I was really not responsible for a 'new look' so much as I was bringing back the 'white look' which Syrie Maugham had created in... the twenties."

Taylor's bedroom in his Sea Cliff, California, residence in 1977 featured a Spanish bed and a slate floor. "It is contrast that brings it excitingly alive," he said. BELOW: His mid-1980s design for the boulder-accented living area of a Malibu house built by John Lautner.



source: "At that time white in all shades was frequently used almost to the exclusion of other colors in certain fashionable houses, but in the intervening three decades, with the rapid and almost frenzied prewar and postwar succession of fads, gimmicks, trends, and trick schemes, white was almost forgotten," Taylor wrote in his autobiographical essay "A New Look at Decorating" in the 1960s. A third influence was American decorator Frances Elkins (Taylor acquired a substantial portion of Elkins's estate, including pieces originally from Syrie Maugham).

In 1951, after studying at San Francisco—
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