

OCTOBER 2010

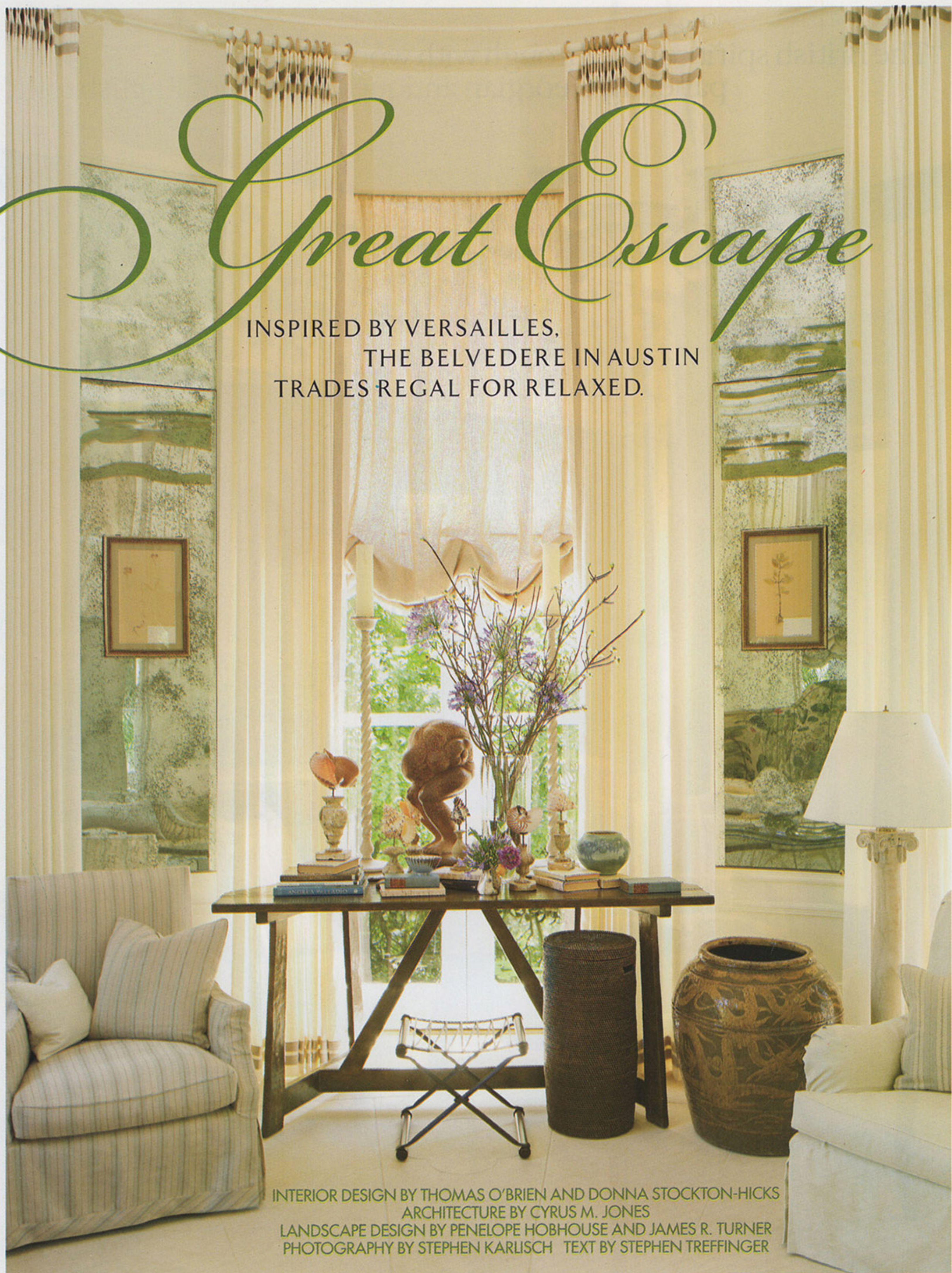
VERANDA



**Caroline Kopp ran
this project as a
senior designer at
Aero Studios**

Great Escape

INSPIRED BY VERSAILLES.
THE BELVEDERE IN AUSTIN
TRADES REGAL FOR RELAXED.



INTERIOR DESIGN BY THOMAS O'BRIEN AND DONNA STOCKTON-HICKS
ARCHITECTURE BY CYRUS M. JONES
LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY PENELOPE HOBHOUSE AND JAMES R. TURNER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN KARLISCH TEXT BY STEPHEN TREFFINGER



The folly is surrounded by water on three sides. OPPOSITE: Console table, Formations. Antique candlesticks, David Stypmann. Taboret, John Boone. Basket, Aero. Antique alabaster lamp. THIS PAGE: Lanterns, Aero.



ON SUNDAY MORNINGS, DONNA STOCKTON-HICKS AND HER HUSBAND, STEVE HICKS, GRAB THEIR NEWSPAPERS AND COFFEE AND WALK FROM THEIR AUSTIN HOUSE DOWN THE STONE STEPS TO THEIR POND. THERE, like a mirage floating above the shimmering koi, is the treasure of the garden—a folly of limestone. “A lot of people in Texas go to their ranch, but we go to our Belvedere,” Donna says with a giggle.

The octagonal structure is royally inspired—it’s a full-scale interpretation of the Belvédère, completed in 1781 by Richard Mique in the gardens of Versailles during the reign of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. (The original briefly appears in Sofia Coppola’s biopic when the

queen, played by Kirsten Dunst, glides past it in a rowboat.) In Austin, it has been interpreted by Cyrus M. Jones, who traveled to France to document it. “I adjusted the stonework, the moldings and door surrounds in particular to reflect the style of the 1929 Mediterranean Revival architecture of the main house,” says Jones. The folly was built for a previous owner in the early 1990s.


Inside, the delightfully refined yet comfortable space represents the tastes of New York



A screen in patterned linen gives focus to a round room. OPPOSITE: Table, Jan Barboglio. Vase, David Stypmann. THIS PAGE: Custom tub chairs, De Angelis, in Nobilis velvet. Custom sofa and chair, both Jonas, in Rogers & Goffigon linen. Coffee table, Aero. Chandelier, Dennis & Leen. Screen in Lee Jofa linen. Rug, O’Brien for Safavieh.



“EVEN THOUGH THESE ARE TRULY ELEGANT INGREDIENTS...THIS IS STILL A KIND OF GARDEN TREEHOUSE.”



Simple linen for the curtains and the balloon shades keeps them from being overly formal. OPPOSITE: Trolley, Soane. Antique Swedish column cabinet, Evergreen Antiques. THIS PAGE: Window treatments in Rogers & Goffigon fabrics. Tray, Aero. Console table, Formations.



The wooden boat was a gift from owner Steve Hicks to his wife, Donna, making the Belvedere even more picturesque. Urns by Penelope Hobhouse. OPPOSITE: Stone steps and rivulet by Jean-Louis Raynaud.



designer Thomas O'Brien and Donna, a designer and co-owner of the Stockton Hicks Laffey showroom in Austin. She and O'Brien, who owns Aero Studios and the Aero store in SoHo, met at the High Point furniture market. He was introducing his Hickory Chair collection, and her showroom represents the firm.

The owners wanted to use the Belvedere for gatherings of family and friends. "It was really formal when I first saw it, especially since it's round inside," says O'Brien. "It needed to have a lightness and be more modern."

A circular room with windows all around can be a decorating nightmare. But O'Brien designed a low folding screen—covered in his "absolute favorite fabric of all time," Lee Jofa's Nympheus—to anchor a primary seating area. "I attached the fabric wrong side out to give it a more faded look." He and Donna filtered strong sunshine with balloon shades inspired by those at Venice's Piazza San Marco but in a casual linen. Antiqued mirrored panels around

the perimeter and a mostly pale palette gently brighten the space. In winter, slipcovers come off, revealing cozy velvet upholstery.

Outside, the occasional peacock can be seen strutting past. The pond and gardens around the Belvedere are the work of various landscape designers, including Penelope Hobhouse of England and James R. Turner of Louisiana. Stone steps and a rivulet flowing down to the pond were added by the French designer Jean-Louis Raynaud.

Adorning the pond is a water lily named Thomas O'Brien, which the designer presented to Donna. "A friend gave it to me, but I don't have a pond!" says O'Brien. He'll get plenty of chances to see it while they continue their work on the main house and an orangerie.

Meanwhile, the Belvedere offers serenity. "Even though these are truly elegant ingredients—it's from Versailles, it's in a pond, it's filled with fine collected furniture," he says, "this is still a kind of garden treehouse." □