

Fall 2005

# athome

IN FAIRFIELD COUNTY

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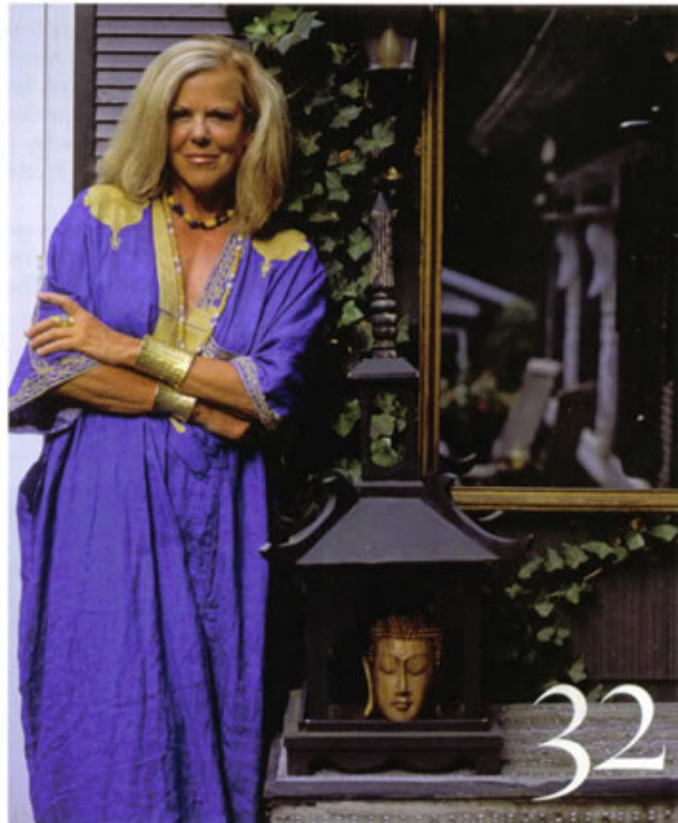
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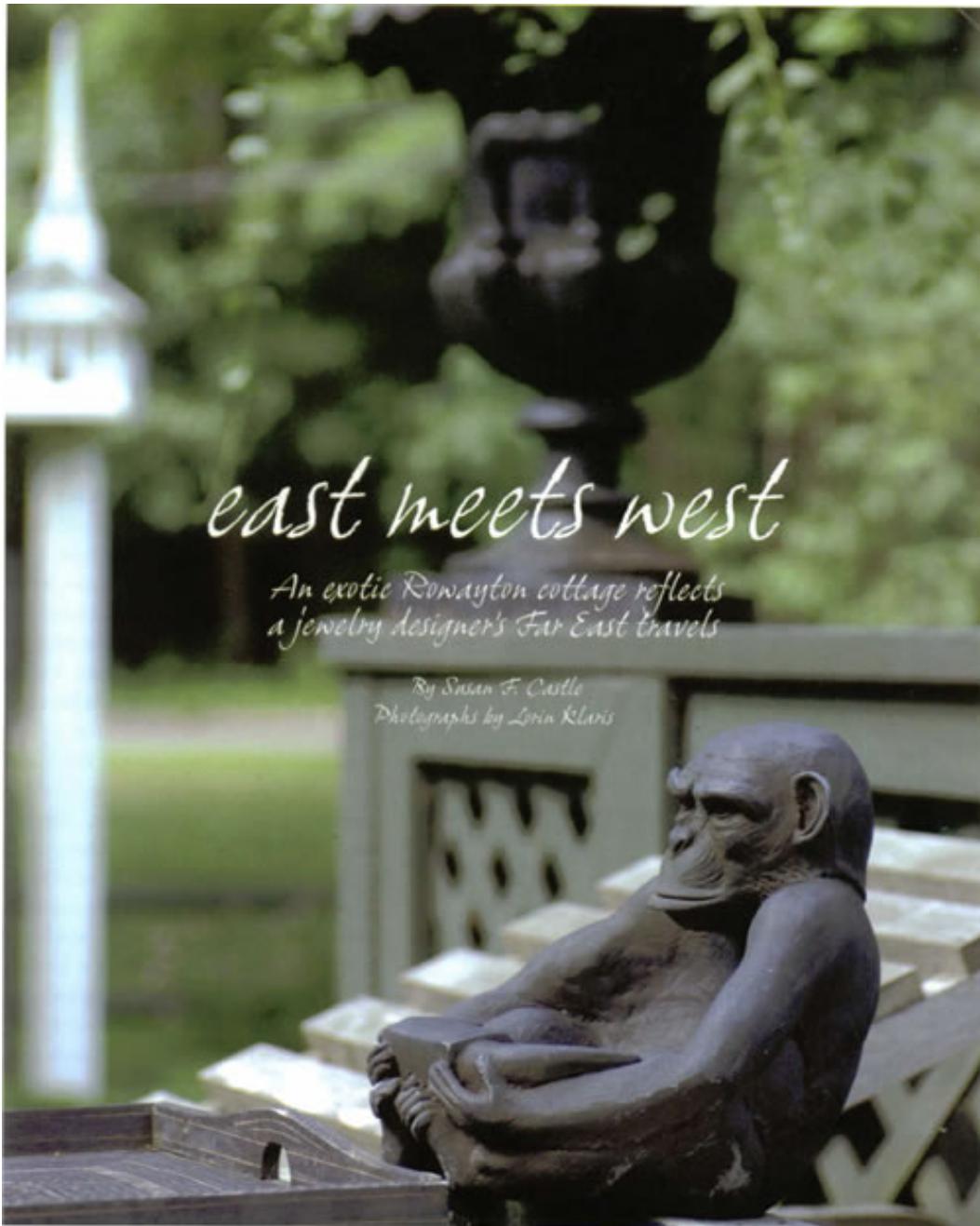
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Cover photo by Durston Saylor



## *east meets west*

*An exotic Rowayton cottage reflects  
a jewelry designer's Far East travels*

*By Susan F. Castle  
Photographs by Lorin Klavis*

*It's* not every day that visitors are welcomed by a hostess dressed in an azure blue Moroccan djellaba, but guests to Valerie Peyton Horn's Rowayton cottage know to expect surprises. A former graphic designer, tennis pro and jazz singer, Valerie's latest incarnation — jewelry designer — takes her around the globe in search of semi precious gems and exotic raw materials for her thriving business. It is on these quests that she also satiates another passion: interior design.

A tenth-generation direct descendant of legendary

Pocahontas and John Rolfe, Valerie was reborn as a jewelry designer in the 1990s after friends kept asking if she would make for *them* the one-of-a-kind pieces that she created for herself. Working from a tiny studio nestled behind her house, Valerie creates one-of-a-kind necklaces, earrings and brooches from a

THIS PAGE: A Cambodian monkey and a Congregational church birdhouse (in the background) make amusing garden mates.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Wanderlust and a jewelry design business specializing in exotic materials, have transformed a Rowayton cottage into a living diary for Valerie Peyton Horn.

kaleidoscope of finds from far-off lands. "I never know what I am going to make until I spread everything out — beads, wire, gold mesh, feathers, you name it — on the floor in front of me," she says. "Then I start putting them together to create something new and unusual."

Not surprisingly, Valerie has used much the same approach in decorating her home. In fact, she calls her home her "living diary": strolling through its rooms is to travel through a life richly lived. Everywhere you look there is some tantalizing objet to discover. The skin of a cheetah (which Valerie bought from a big game hunter who had just returned from South Africa) stretches across the floor of the entryway, its walls covered in pale bamboo. To the left, a small table, set with a chessboard, is watched over by the curly-wigged por-

*"I never know what I am going to make until I spread everything out — beads, wire, gold mesh, feathers, you name it — on the floor in front of me. Then I start putting them together to create something new and unusual."*



trait of her fourth great-grandfather. A few steps further is the dining alcove, with walls of quilted gold silk, a turreted ceiling painted in gold leaf and a luxurious, multi-pillowed banquette. At night, lit softly from a molding above, this intimate alcove puts Valerie's guests at such ease, they talk long past midnight.

Valerie's kitchen, in the center of the house, serves as the portal to the master bedroom, powder room and living room. Not wishing to see the glare of appliances as she passes through this heart of the house, Valerie covered everything — walls, ceiling, light fixtures and even the dishwasher, stove and refrigerator — in a rose and crème toile fabric. "Most people think that using different colors on walls and ceilings creates the illusion of more space," she says. "But it's just the opposite. Using toile everywhere not only makes the small space appear larger, but it camouflages anything that would scream: 'kitchen.'" Considering that the rooms that open off the kitchen speak everything from Zulu to Turkish, relegating the French-inspired toile to the kitchen seems a fine joke. As Valerie says, "Who better to have manning your kitchen than the French?"

In the Empire-style office, with its black and dark green glazed walls, Horn again hid the appliances: the computer, fax and printer cleverly slide out of sight thanks to a pair of red-lacquered doors. In the sitting room, Valerie juxtaposed a leopard print carpet with sea grass walls. Only in the bedroom did she abandon prints and textures for a serene palette of silvers and whites: an ornate French chandelier

THIS PAGE (FROM TOP): Keepsakes from Valerie's jewelry collection: ormolu embellished stampings from Paris which have been converted into brooches and pins; Horn's L'Atelier, which sits behind her house, serves as both a work and show place.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A pair of mismatched chairs are flanked by souvenirs from the Far East.





THIS PAGE: The entryhall, bathed in bamboo wallpaper, does double duty as a reception hall with a guitar and cittern on show and a cheetah hide, bought from an African game hunter.

OPPOSITE PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Chased in silver repoussé and embellished with cabochon stones by Balinese artisans, an abalone shell from Turkey shines on a side table; a pair of teak chairs sit on Valerie's deck; in the master bedroom, a serene palette of silvers, whites and multiple, mirrored reflections creates a tranquil ambience; an umbrella bought in Chiang Mai, in the former Golden Triangle, offers shade; a carved mask from Bali makes an unusual bookend; a head of a Buddha sits among ferns; a portrait of two Haitian women; the stream that runs along Valerie's backyard is strewn with exotic artifacts. (CENTER): The jade "donut," which dangles over books piled high, will one day be reincarnated as a belt or necklace.

*"Valerie returns from her trips with bags laden with treasure, like a pirate." — A friend*

shines from above, framed mirrors hang over mirrored walls to create multiple reflections and a bronze Burmese Buddha sits smiling by her bed.

There are not only her unusual choices and creative use of furniture, fabrics and floor coverings, but rare finds, that contribute to the quixotic quality of Valerie's home. Standing in one corner of her living room is a pair of rice-filled rain sticks that she bought in Bali, and in another, gunpowder holders she found in a souk in Istanbul. On a low coffee table made of a hand-carved, Corinthian column, plump ostrich eggs sit in a bowl — trophies of a 1989 sojourn to Southwest Africa in search of tourmaline and diop-tase, long before they were deemed semiprecious.

Gleaming from a side table is a huge abalone shell, also from Turkey, which Valerie had chased in silver repoussé and embellished with a variety of coral and azure-colored cabochon stones in Bali. However, what may be the most dominant ornament in the living room is a the larger-than-life portrait of two, long-necked Haitian women, adorned in jewelry, who seem to be staring out the window towards Valerie's studio, "L'Atelier," which sits at the edge of her gravel drive.

The eclecticism that defines Valerie's home may be best defined in her "world necklace," which literally links artifacts from countries all around the world. To garner these artifacts, she travels four months of the year, most often to the Far East, to gather such unique materials as lightweight metallic thread, antique French ormolu (bronze furniture mounts used during the Louis XIV-Louis XVI periods), colored resin, Indian beads, feathers and faux pearls. As one of her closest friends says, "Valerie returns from her trips with bags laden with treasure, like a pirate."

In contrast to her house and studio, Valerie's garden is a study in minimalism. Rather than a profusion of color, she has simply used green — Japanese maples, masses of broad-leafed hosta, feathery astilbe and a fern-and-bamboo border. These cool greens, punctuated only by a few white impatiens and a fat Buddha who sits amongst the ferns, create the illusion of oasis rather than suburban yard, which is just what Valerie yearns for when she returns home in between travels. □





