

AT HOME IN L.A. WITH JADA PINKETT SMITH

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Jada's haven

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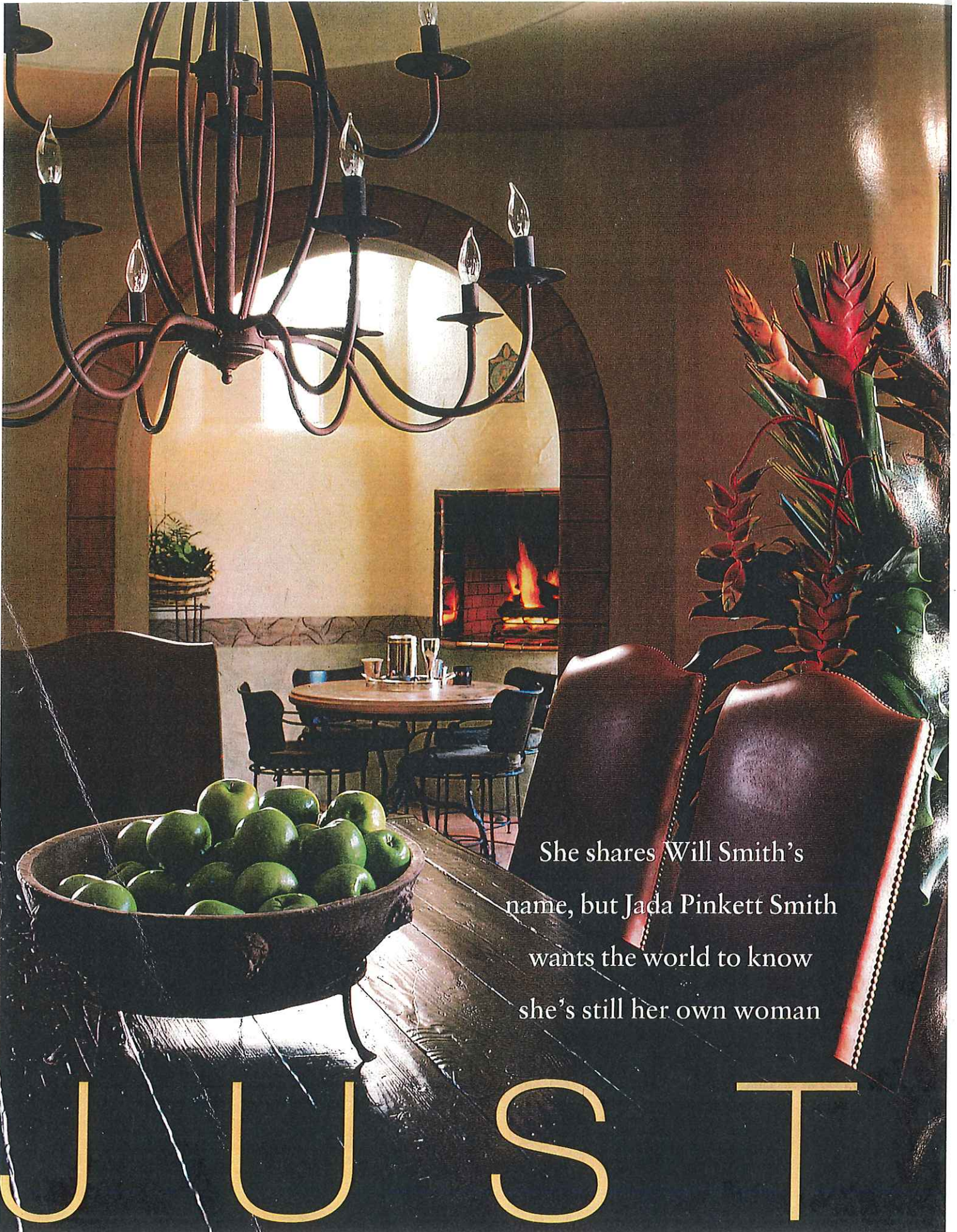
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She shares Will Smith's name, but Jada Pinkett Smith wants the world to know she's still her own woman

J U U S T

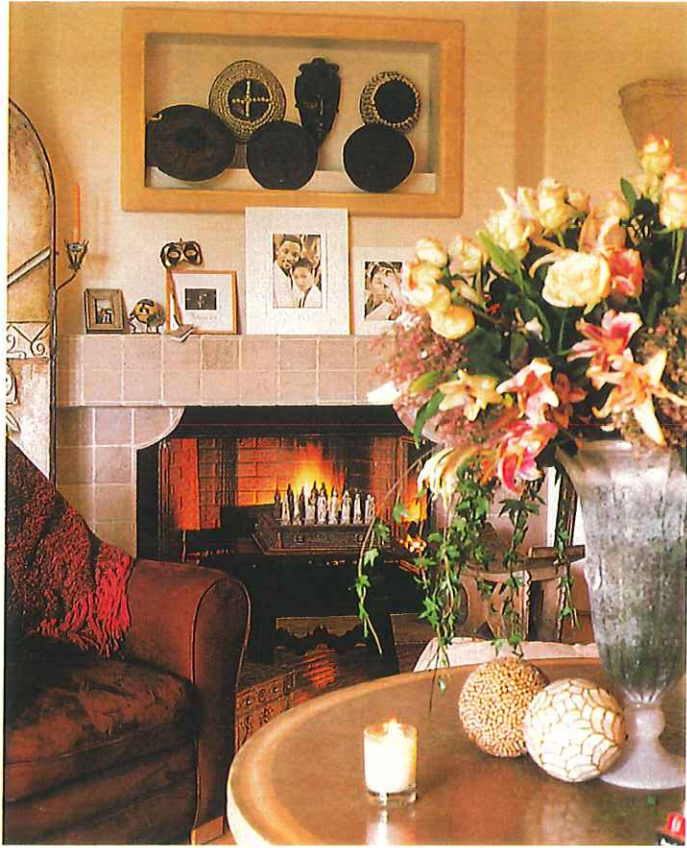


Pinkett Smith adores orchids; many of the 15 varieties she's acquired are in the atrium. The master bedroom (opposite, top) has a 17-foot ceiling and rag-painted walls. Among the house's antiques and artifacts is a 19th-century Chinese Buddha (opposite, bottom).

A photograph of a living room with a warm, orange-toned wall. In the center, a large, tall potted plant with many thin, upright stems sits in a large, textured pot. To the right, a red armchair is positioned next to a decorative screen made of two tall, arched panels with intricate carvings. In the foreground, a round, dark wood coffee table holds a large vase of yellow and white flowers, a book titled 'AFRICAN WARRIORS', and other small objects. A large, light-colored cushion with a dark pattern is on the floor in front of the chair. In the background, a window with white curtains and a doorway leading to another room are visible.

"Will's a chess freak," says Pinkett Smith. He plays in front of the limestone fireplace, which is crowned by a group of African baskets (opposite, top). The couple park their sneakers next to a Mexican urn near the master bedroom (opposite, bottom).

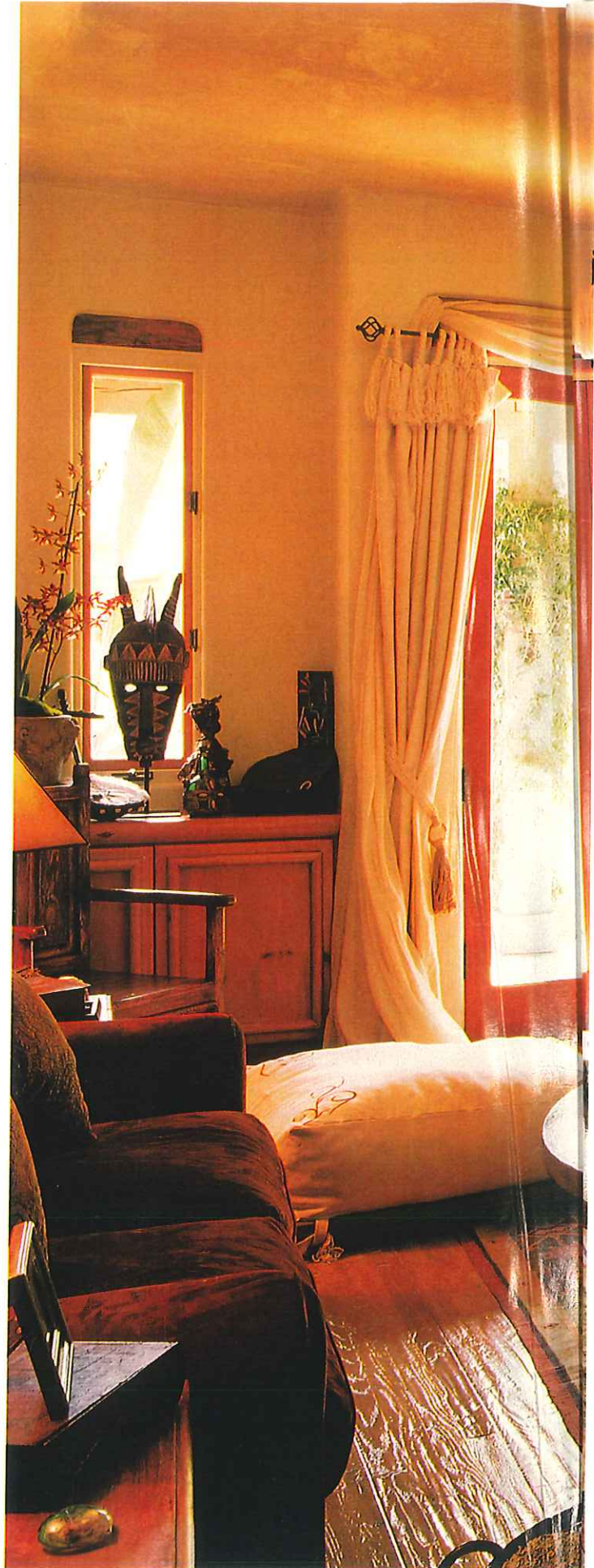
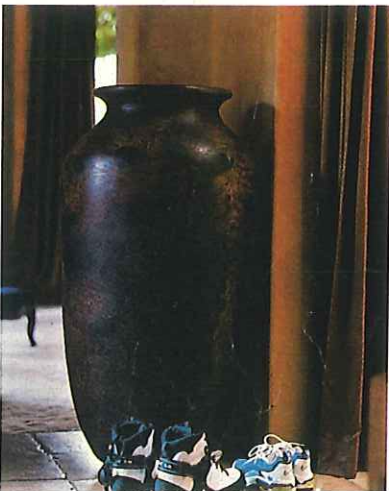
"I'M FEARLESS. YOU CAN ALWAYS TAKE A PIECE OF FURNITURE BACK. THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM FOR CHANGE."



Jada Pinkett Smith is laughing about the small storm she stirred up at the Golden Globe Awards in January, when, newly wed to actor Will Smith and two months pregnant, she walked onstage in a shimmering Badgley Mischka gown and was introduced to the global audience as ... Jada Smith. Startled friends and relatives feared she'd forsaken her family name. Fans who had admired her portrayal of independent women in movies like *The Nutty Professor* and *Set It Off* worried that she was shucking her proud identity. But Jada knew exactly what she was doing. "I did it for Will," she says. "It was my cute little introduction to our married life. He didn't know I was doing it. He didn't go to the awards, so he saw it on TV. He loved it; he was very flattered. But on-screen, I'll be Jada Pinkett Smith. No hyphen—to me, a hyphen suggests we can detach anytime we want. But this is glue. Jada Pinkett Smith. Period." Besides, she points out,

"I think 'Smith' adds a little spice."

If there's anything the 26-year-old actress is missing, it isn't spice. What she lacks in height—she's barely 5 feet tall—she makes up for in sheer force of personality. "I was a star before I was a star," she says. "When I was growing up, Baltimore was mine—I owned it. Everybody knew me. I was always putting on

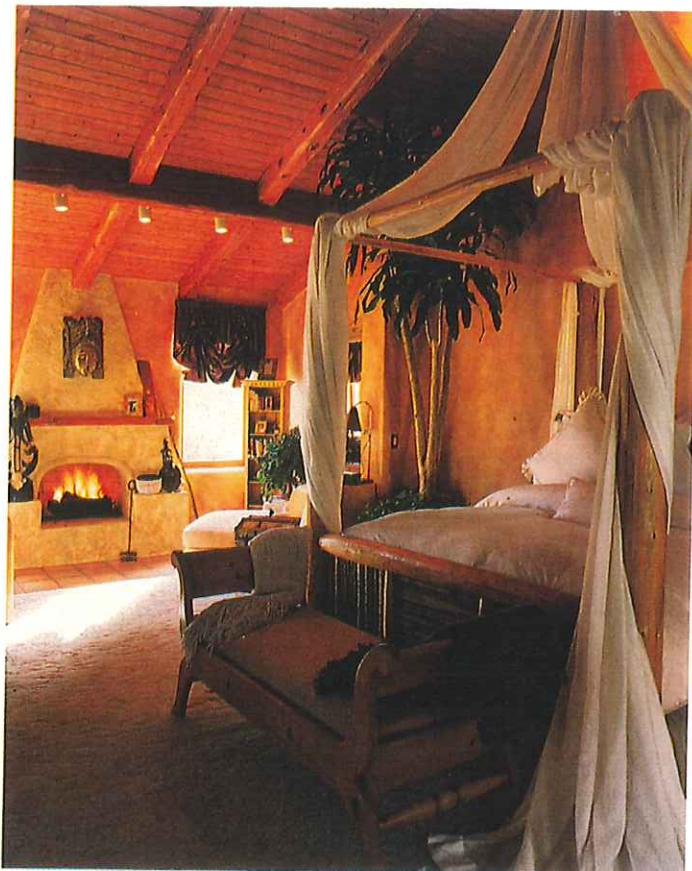


productions. I was everywhere—parties, skating rinks, any crowd, any club. From punk rockers to homeboys, I was in every circle.”

The same seems to have held true once she reached Los Angeles. She landed TV roles after only three months in the city, including a regular role on NBC’s *A Different World*, followed by film roles in *Menace II Society*, *Jason’s Lyric* and *Scream 2*. This month she stars with Tommy Davidson in a romantic comedy, *Woo*; later in the year she’s co-starring with Vince Vaughn in *Force Majeure*. Also in the works is a project she wrote with Will called *Love for Hire*. “We’re always creating,” she says. “We’re together 24/7, so that’s not a problem.”

With her close-cropped hair and caramel skin, Pinkett Smith is the image of 1990s beauty. And the ease with which she takes charge of her surroundings—whether at a public event or in her living room—adds to her commanding presence. “I like having things in my house that make people ask, ‘Where the hell did you get this?’” she says, pointing out frescoes executed on burlap that hang in the living room and hand-painted canvas floor cushions. “I love buying unique conversation pieces. I’ve always been like that. I had to have the outfit people were talking about, the hairstyle that was different. I had to be the first, the trendsetter.”

Pinkett Smith traces her flair to her Baltimore childhood, where she and her mother lived with her grandmother after her parents’ divorce. Her grandmother’s home “was like a museum,” she recalls. “My grandmother traveled the world. I have statues from Africa and Russian candlesticks that were hers. My grandfather was a



doctor; she was a social worker. They weren’t rich, but they were the crème de la crème of the black middle class.”

That inherent sense of style stood her in good stead when the time came to move into Smith’s 4,900-square-foot hacienda, set on four and a half rolling acres outside L.A. Smith, the white-hot star of last year’s *Men in Black* and *Independence Day* (1996), bought the house three years ago, on the rebound from a divorce. He had

met Jada in 1990 when she auditioned for—but didn’t get—a role on his hit sitcom, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*; years later, they met again through mutual friends. After the divorce, Jada helped him sort out his life, but by then he’d already purchased the house. With its wooden beams, cathedral ceilings, arched doorways and adobe-style fireplaces, the bachelor pad was snazzy but sterile. “I thought I was in a hospital,” says the actress of her first visit. “All these white walls, with a loud Southwestern-patterned couch and no artwork. It was a shell. I felt swallowed, it was so massive and empty.”

The two worked out a compromise between taste and space. “He didn’t like my place; I didn’t like his,” she says. She owned a suburban L.A. town house and a horse ranch outside Baltimore full of 19th-century character. For the petite actress to accommodate the 6-foot-2-inch Smith in the Baltimore house, she had to buy a larger bed and build an entire addition with higher ceilings. “I felt like an ant in it,” she jokes. But for their L.A. base, they decided the simplest thing was to redecorate his place. “We said, ‘Well, let’s make this place warm and cozy, but it’ll still have a lot of space.’”

Will (“he’s so easygoing”) deferred decisions about the décor to Jada, who worked with Thomas Schoos, an interior designer with a shop on Melrose Avenue. “Jada likes unusual things because she can identify with them,” Schoos says. “But she doesn’t like things you can’t touch. She wants to use the house, to really function in it.”

“I’m not a froufrou kind of girl,” she explains. “I’m not into

