

ART IMITATES LIFE

Photographer
Heidi Bassett Blair
lives life and
art in full color



by GINA TOLLESON photographs by HEIDI BASSETT BLAIR

OPPOSITE: A whimsical play on the exterior of the Channel Islands-view home. Custom wrought iron railings by Chapala Iron. PREVIOUS PAGES: A caped little prince runs through the formal gallery of limestone floors and custom-integrated plaster walls adorned with Blair's own lightboxed photographs; Sassy from Blair's "Eye Candy" series crowns the living room of tufted sofas, Missoni and Nancy Corzine pillows, vintage Fortuny fabric accessories, Ibal Designs coffeetable, and a pair of vintage Mies van de Rohe Barcelona chairs floating on a custom Blair-designed silk abrash area rug.

“

ife and art are totally intertwined for me,” states this mom of three curled up on a cream couch in her studio. Blair, whom one would think comes from a sleepy California beach town with her tanned-skin and honey locks, is actually a Toronto-born, former newspaper photojournalist turned fine art photographer who, after years of East Coast living, has found her muse: her own joyful, colorful lifestyle in Santa Barbara and abroad. Blair and her family laid stakes in the lush hillside a few years ago with a focus on living in a non-toxic structure with a fresh take on modern elegance and design. Old World meets a contemporary eye with Blair's flair for a playful, functional yet fantastical haven.

How has Santa Barbara inspired your art and photography?

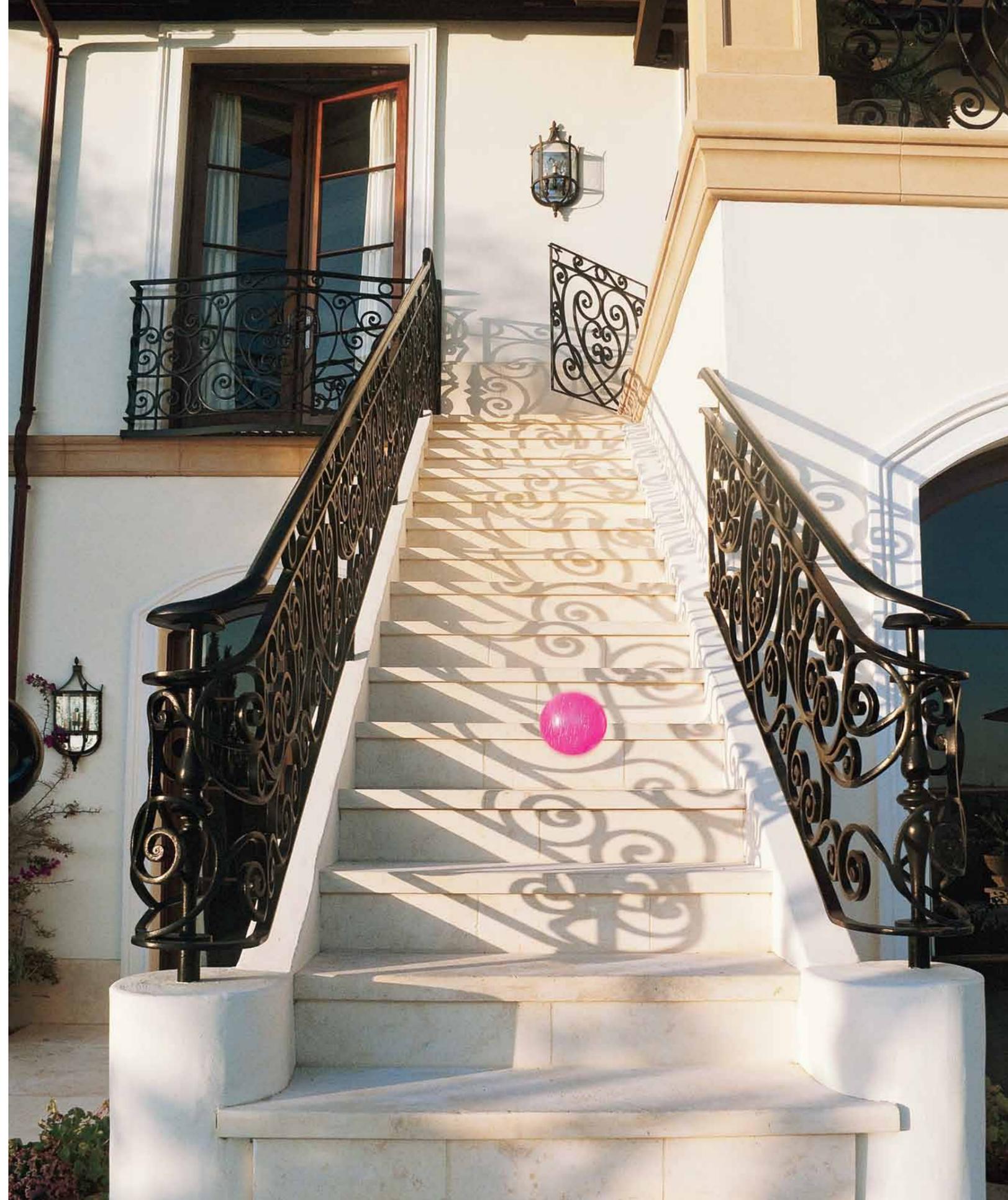
It's found color! It became lighter and more fun. I started looking at it in a tongue-in-cheek kind of way and just letting go. I think growing up on the East Coast in a cold climate, you lead a very inward life. Having good weather all year forces you to be outdoors and look at the outdoor world. So for me to be surrounded by all this color for the first time in my life, off and on throughout the year, really affected me on a visual level, on an artistic level.

And then the technicolor pop of the "Eye Candy" series came to fruition?

"Eye Candy" was the first body of work that I didn't think long and hard about. It just sort of happened out of response from spending time in California and wanting to create something that was really happy and yummy to look at. At that time I had a four-year-old and a one-year-old, and I was surrounded by a lot of pink, candy-like toys. It's like the forbidden fruit. I wasn't allowed candy as a kid, and my kids aren't really allowed candy, so why not just put it on the wall and have eye candy.

When did you segue into "Plastic in Paradise"?

"Plastic in Paradise" came out of a response dealing with all the change in the lake areas up in Canada. About four summers ago, I started to notice how much more plastic there is everywhere. I grew up in a place that seemed relatively organic on every level and then as an adult I started to notice all the floating trampolines, fiberglass boats and bigger cottages and jet skis. I started to get really depressed. And then I thought to myself, 'Ok let's deal with this.' As I was taking pictures to try and ingest it, a bird would fly in and sit on the plastic raft and all of a sudden I started seeing pictures with human presence in





A child's bed nestled in an alcove papered in Flavor Paper's "Sheba" and topped with Blair's Flirt PEZ image, a series of six. Upholstered headboard in Osbourne and Little's "Lorca Roxanne Weaves Ludivine"; Kerry Cassill bedding mixed with Jon Robshaw's Mathura and Kashmir fabrics. OPPOSITE: Custom ebonized cabinetry with Liz's antique hardware, accompanied by Carrera statuary marble slab countertops. A pair of stainless Bertoia barstools flank the kitchen's island. Ebonized hardwood plank floors by Sean Dawson accented with matte hex porcelain tiles by Waterworks.



them. It was just a natural evolution to look at my own life and realize this is kind of funny. This is how I'm going to cope with this. I'm going to turn these negative feelings and look at this change in a positive way and create my own impression out of it with a sense of humor. It's almost like putting a little bit of laughter into my life, or laughing at my life, which I think is important on an everyday level.

Do you remember having a camera in your hand for the first time? When my dad was really ill with cancer, we went on a cruise. He loved taking pictures. He walked into a camera shop in St. Thomas and walked out with a 35mm Pentax, and I started taking pictures from that moment on. I was fifteen. He passed away shortly thereafter and I felt it was almost like "Plastic in Paradise"—a way for me to deal with my grief. It was a veil between me and the world. I could see things the way I wanted to see them and it really helped me. I learned how to be a photographer in the dark room. It gave me time to think about what I was shooting. That's one of the biggest changes I see in photography these days—the pace. It's so fast now, and about massive consumption. Digital photography is like shopping at Costco—all you want. Whereas when you're shooting with film, for me at

least, it's very decisive. It's not just a mass consumption of imagery.

Is there ever a conscious decision between hanging a piece of art or a sentimental picture of your kids?

Life and art are totally intertwined for me. My lightboxes hanging in the hallway are inspired by Versailles. I love the continuity, the translucency, and the light in the Hall of Mirrors. When we built this house, I wanted it to have that feeling of light and reflection when you walk down the hall. Photography is all about writing with light, that's the base root of the word. And so these images are based on the whole premise of what

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photography stands for. Also, architecturally, most of the images are of my family and friends, which are so important to me to also have continuity of translucency and light. I want guests to feel like they're welcome in our home and they're getting a big hug. When you share personal images, you are saying 'I want to share my life with you.' I hope I have achieved that. ■



Customized ceiling by Bolton Specialty Finishes. Custom crystal chandelier, vintage photography collection above an ebony buffet. White lacquered parson's style dining table with modern Bergere-style chairs in white vinyl. OPPOSITE: Blair's "Photo Booth" gallery surrounds an industrial/urban expression of a formal ceiling (main level), to floor (second level), with a cascading crystal beaded waterfall light fixture designed by Blair.





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In Blair's studio, a pair of vintage mini-Bertoia chairs sit opposite a sectional with Jonathan Adler Lattice and Nixon pillows; custom ottoman upholstered in Janus et Cie outdoor leather make painting and doodling a practical activity; Jonathan Adler pottery tea service sits atop a Moroccan style serving tray from William Laman Antiques; woven rattan mat from Upstairs at Pierre Lafond; "Eye Candy" PEZ images in Lucite boxes gather above a vintage Willy Rizzo chest of drawers and children's art.

Thomas J Brennan Architects with Mike Preston; Jay Hanseth Construction; interior design collaboration with Christina Rottman; photographer's representation, Bonnie Benrubi Gallery, New York.