

<https://www.dmagazine.com/publications/d-magazine/1998/november/likely-stories-architectural-digest-calling/>



## Likely Stories “Architectural Digest calling.”

**The three words Dallas socialites will never hear still have them trembling in anticipation. But the phone never rings.**

BY KIMBERLY GOAD PUBLISHED IN [D MAGAZINE NOVEMBER 1998](#)

SO YOU THINK BUILDING THAT dream house on the corner of Armstrong and Preston will do it.

Fool.

Even the mildly ambitious know there's more to making it in Dallas social circles-and we mean *really* making it-than simple geography. It requires that combination of celebrity (or proximity to celebrity) and the kind of questionable taste that is fueled by big money. Even then, you won't know you've made it-*really* made it-until your home is featured in *Architectural Digest*.

“A lot of people think because they spend a great deal of money on the house or because they have a name that is recognized that they can automatically warrant the interest of *Digest*.” says Paxton Gremillion, the back half of the Dallas antiques dealers known collectively as Loyd-Paxton. They've been featured in “*Digest*,” as it's known among those who aspire to its pages, more than anyone else in Dallas. “Many designers in this city will never be published in *Digest* because it isn't great work.” Gremillion says. “And that's what they're looking for. They're looking for artistic brilliance.” If he does say so himself.

Now that the ostentatious wealth is being spent *inside* the home, one's station in Dallas, naturally, is measured not by the accoutrements of wealth but by the showcasing of those accoutrements- in *Digest*. Not *Southern Accents*. Not *Veranda*. Not even *House & Garden*.

You might as well be living in one of those overbuilt tract houses in Willow Bend for all the good those magazines will do you. In terms of social positioning, only *Architectural Digest* will do.

Forget, for a moment, that the magazine has become the bible of bad taste. Forget that

it featured Sylvester Stallone's Miami home-which has, yes, a ballroom crowned by a huge mural on the ceiling-on its cover.

Forget that it featured Cher's Miami Beach home, recreated for what the magazine calls a "very ethnic history look-between a temple and a church." ("Even the master bath is churchlike, sheathed in cross-cut travertine with a mahogany frame around the arched shower door.")

Forget, too, that it featured the English home of the musician Sting, who bought the 16th-century manor house not for the architecture or the history, but for the 350-year-old copper beech in the garden. ("A fugitive look comes to his eyes and he's off, guitar in hand, to the shade of that tree ... in search of a little solitude where he can 'read or meditate or think or maybe not even do that,' always working out the music that is on his mind." A few paragraphs later, we learn that his next album will be released soon.)

The above magazines use local scouts to ferret out photo-worthy Dallas homes for its pages-Peggy Sewell for *Southern Accents*, David Feld for *House & Garden*, Mary Jane Ryburn for *Veranda*. Not *Architectural Digest*.

In a gesture of "Don't call us, we'll call you." the *Digest* has no one scouting the possibilities in Dallas. Which means, in short, that Dallas is loaded with social aspirants living under the delusion that their home will one day be featured in the pages of *Architectural Digest*. As they wait for the call that-let's face it-will *never* come, they pass up the opportunity for the kind of secondary status that comes with coverage in *Accents*, *House & Garden*, and *Veranda*. *Architectural Digest* won't even consider a home that's already been published.

"The perception may be that they are the *ne plus ultra* of shelter magazines, but *Garden* and others are of equal importance," says Feld, a scout for *Architectural Digest* until he became the Dallas-based editor-at-large for *House & Garden*. "In the past, *Digest* had a reputation for sitting on stories for years. I wrote a piece on Laura Carpenter, and she made *Digest* sign a document that the story would be published within 12 months because they sat on a previous story for five years."

The *Digest*-worthy are, usually, an obvious lot. They use the seasons as verbs ("I summer in Santa Fe and winter in Aspen."). They name-drop using first names only ("I was at Al's last night," "I saw you at Al's," "We had dinner at Al's." The assumption, of course, is that we're supposed to know that "Al" is Al Biernat, the Palm's former maitre d' who has opened his own restaurant on Oak Lawn in the space that used to be Joey's- himself an object of the first-name name-drop.).

We learned about the *Digest* grip on the Dallas social psyche more than two years ago, after philanthropist Nancy Hamon moved into the penthouse at The Mansion Residences. Hamon hired hairstylist/interior designer Perry Henderson to help her

essentially transport the guts of her Bluffview house to the top of the Mansion high-rise. She agreed to let *D* photograph the place for a “Home & Design” feature. We had already interviewed Henderson, scheduled the interview with Hamon, and set up the photo shoot when Henderson reconsidered. He and his high-profile client, it seems, were (suddenly) in negotiations with *Architectural Digest*.

Like anyone, Henderson-whose P.R. agent, Margie August, has always been more successful at generating press on Henderson’s salon than she has on his interior design business-could have used the exposure, A spread in one of the big design magazines-*Digest*, especially-can translate into hundreds of thousands of dollars for an architect or interior designer. Henderson, waiting for the call that, of course, *never* came, has yet to get the Hamon apartment published. “We weren’t that interested.” he says now, almost dismissively.

But everyone knows that to admit your *Architectural Digest* longings is to speak openly of your social aspirations.

Indeed, the savvy ones-Deedie and Rusty Rose. Nancy and Norman Brinker- take the anonymous route. They allow *Digest* to feature their homes so long as their names are never mentioned. The Rose piece (March 1994) played up the big-name architect on the project (Antoine Predock). while coyly referring to Deedie Rose as “the client.”

The Brinker story (October 1997) identified the two as “an American couple” and their Georgian-style house as a “Texas residence.” Nancy Brinker’s quotes were attributed to “the wife.”

Tom Workman is the architect building his dream house on the northwest corner of Preston and Armstrong. The widespread consensus in the neighborhood is that he is single-handedly lowering Highland Park property values with each phase of construction on what has become known as “the Mushroom House.”

Workman, who crowned the house with a copper roof, appears to have drawn inspiration from *Hansel and Gretel*.

When *D* called about featuring the home, Workman politely declined. “Frankly,” said the soft-spoken Workman, who also owns the home. “I’m hoping for *Architectural Digest*.”

Despite the fact that he has openly admitted his *Digest* longings-a big blunder in these circles-his chances for publication are, actually, pretty good. He lives across the street from *Digest*-caliber celebrities (Jerry and Gene Jones). He studied with famous-ish architect Bruce Goff. And many think the Mushroom House is just ugly enough for the pages of *Digest*.

In the almost HO years since the magazine published its first issue, *Architectural Digest* has featured only a smattering of Dallas homes.

Lloyd Taylor and Paxton Gremillion's ostentatious, gilt-ridden apartment (above their Maple Avenue gallery) appeared on the September cover of *Digest*— the *eighth* time the pair's design had appeared in the magazine. But Gremillion grew indignant over suggestions that they had somehow bought their way into the magazine (for die eighth time).

Sure, they've advertised in the *Digest*. Of course, they're friends with editor Paige Rense. But *honey*, as Gremillion likes to say, that has nothing to do with the magazine's willingness to publish anything the pair touches.

"Everyone thinks it's some magic little formula," says Gremillion, who offers this story by way of explanation: "A very successful designer in this city made an appointment to see me. She came with her P.R. agent, who said, 'We want to know the names and phone numbers of how you get into *Architectural Digest*? I went into the other room, got a copy of the magazine, and opened it to the masthead. I said, 'Here they are. There are no secret ways to do any of it. Call the *Digest* office and ask them yourself.'"

Gremillion pauses. He is debating whether to reveal the identity of the interior designer he clearly views with great scorn. He decides against it.

"This was an interior designer who liaises *clients, clients, clients* with lavish budgets-but no talent.

"Honey, the only reason I'm in *Digest* is because I'm an artist and I'm damned talented."

If he does say so himself.

Wonder where Gremillion summers.