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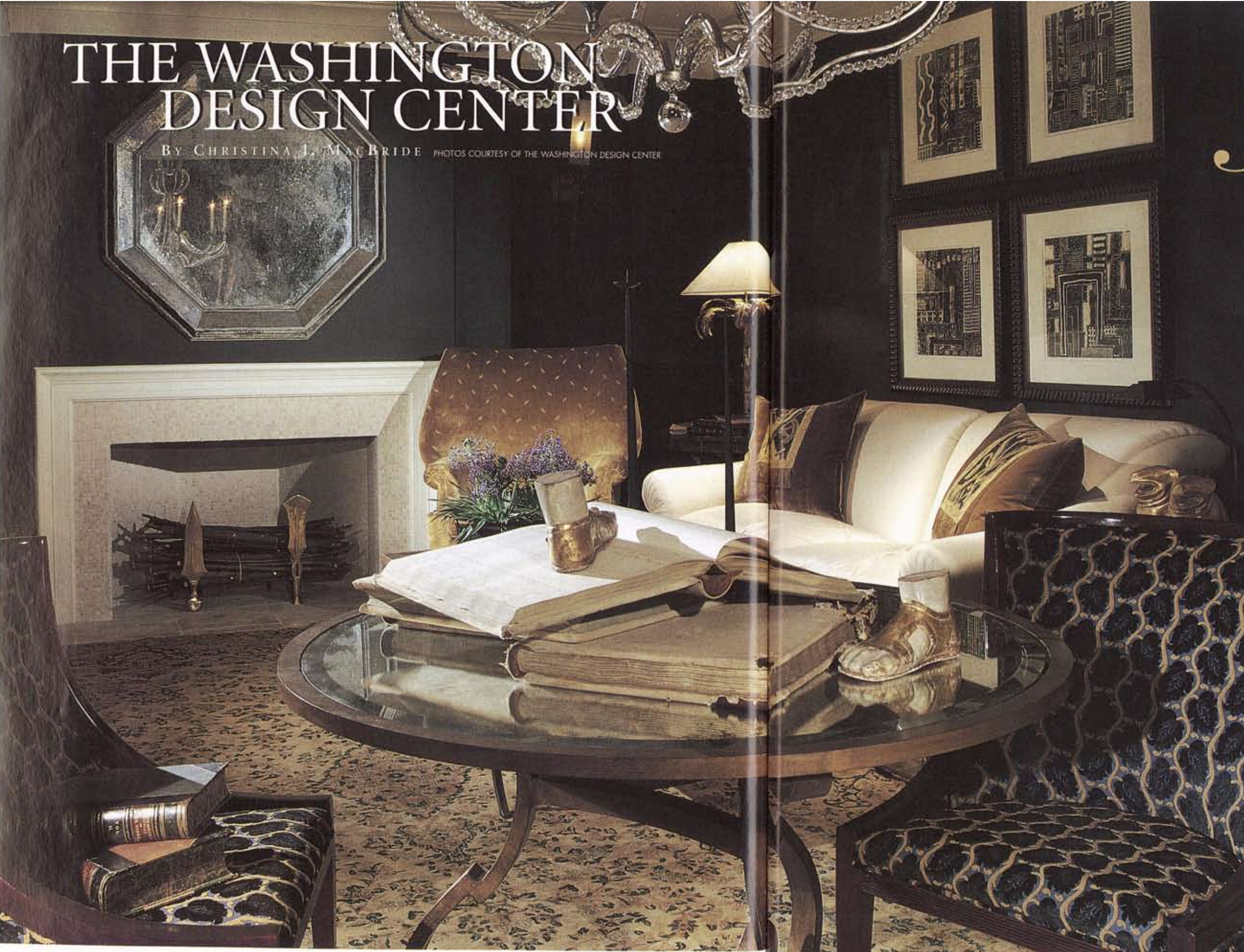
FABULOUS FINDS

Creating Great Collections

INSIDE AUCTIONS • GRILLS

THE WASHINGTON DESIGN CENTER

BY CHRISTINA J. MACBRIDE PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE WASHINGTON DESIGN CENTER



Throughout the opulent '80s and much of the '90s, only designers and their well-heeled clients made the short pilgrimage to Washington's mecca of home furnishings—an immense structure at 3rd and D Streets Southwest known as The Washington Design Center. Back then, if you wandered in without a designer you were politely turned away with an explanation that admission was “to the trade” only — not anymore.

Today, this red brick temple of interior design not only welcomes the public, but caters to them. This is good news for those who have searched the retail scene in vain looking for the chintz and chinossierie seen in glossy design magazines. That's because it is all here under one roof.

To understand what the Design Center is, it is important to first understand what it is not. It is not a shopping mall, it does not have stores and it does not sell retail to the public. Rather, the Design Center is an historic warehouse filled with showrooms which wholesale “to the trade” whom, in turn, retail the product to their clients. The “trade” is an industry term

LEFT: Living Room by Dennis and Maura Powell, Dominion Design Associates

PHOTO CREDIT: ©GORDON BEALL

referring to interior designers, architects and decorators.

The Design Center's new mantra of welcoming the public has evolved from mere access to offering inspiring exhibits and tangible resources. Visitors are given a special pass to wear and a Buyer's Guide which serves as a road map to the eight floors and 65 showrooms that lie beyond the lobby. The Center is enormous and comfortable shoes are highly recommended (you can tell a designer from a layperson by his or her choice of footwear).

A good way to begin is by simply window shopping along the glass corridors where you'll find familiar names like Schumacher, Brunschwig & Fils, Stark Carpets, Donghia and Scalamandré. If there is not a "trade only" sign prominently displayed in front of the showroom, you are free to wander in and browse among the beautiful fabrics and furnishings. Should you have questions about a product in the showroom, take your cues from showroom personnel. If they appear busy assisting designers, you can always come back later. If not, feel free to ask away, but remember that while it may look like a retail store, it is not.

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THE WASHINGTON DESIGN CENTER

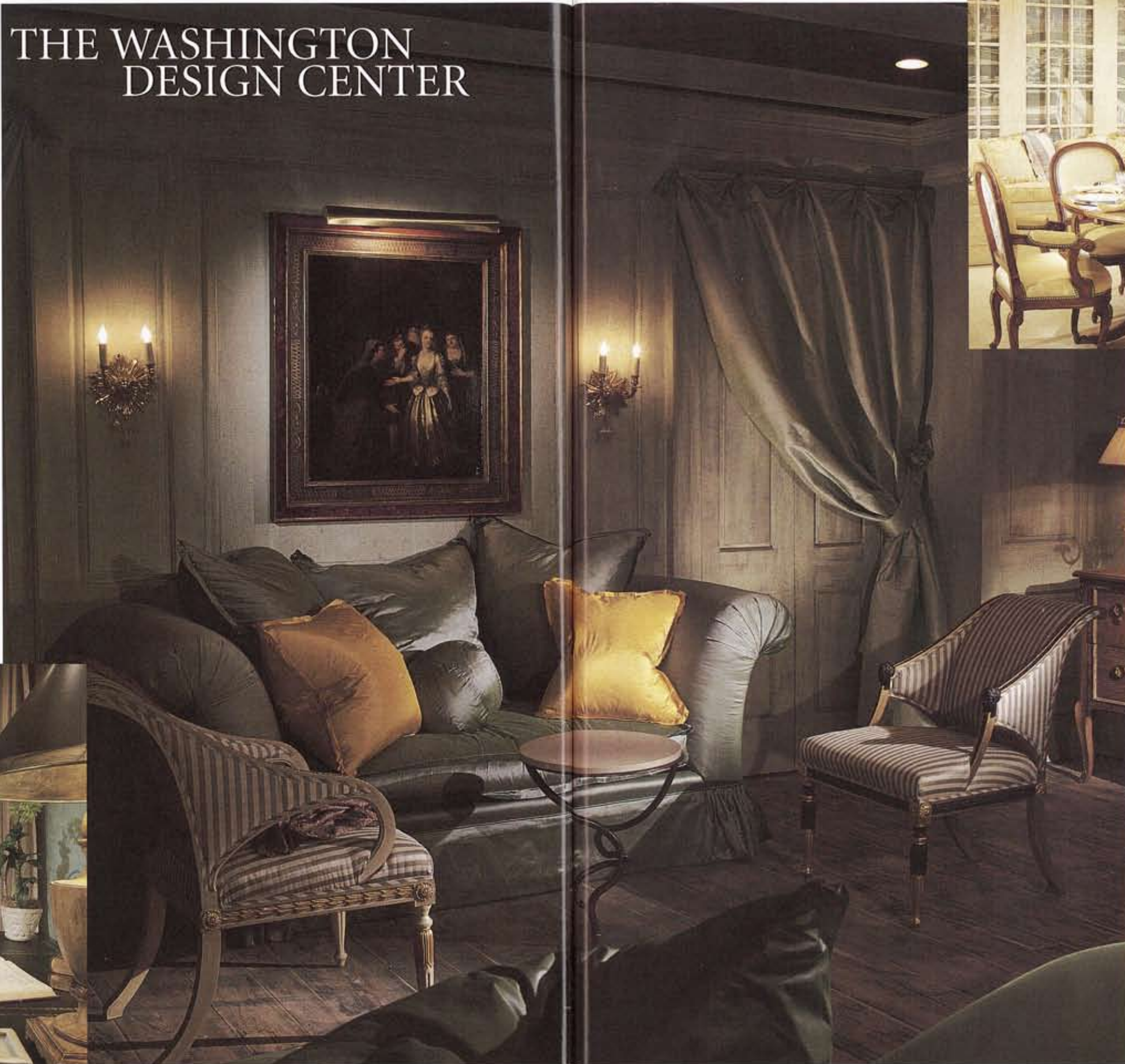


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LOWER LEFT: Library by Josepha B. Faley, ASID, Chatsworth Design, Inc.

CENTER: Sitting Room by Whitney Stewart, Allied Member ASID, Whitney Stewart Interior Design

TOP RIGHT: Dining Room by Carol Lascaris, ASID, Lascaris Design Group, Inc.

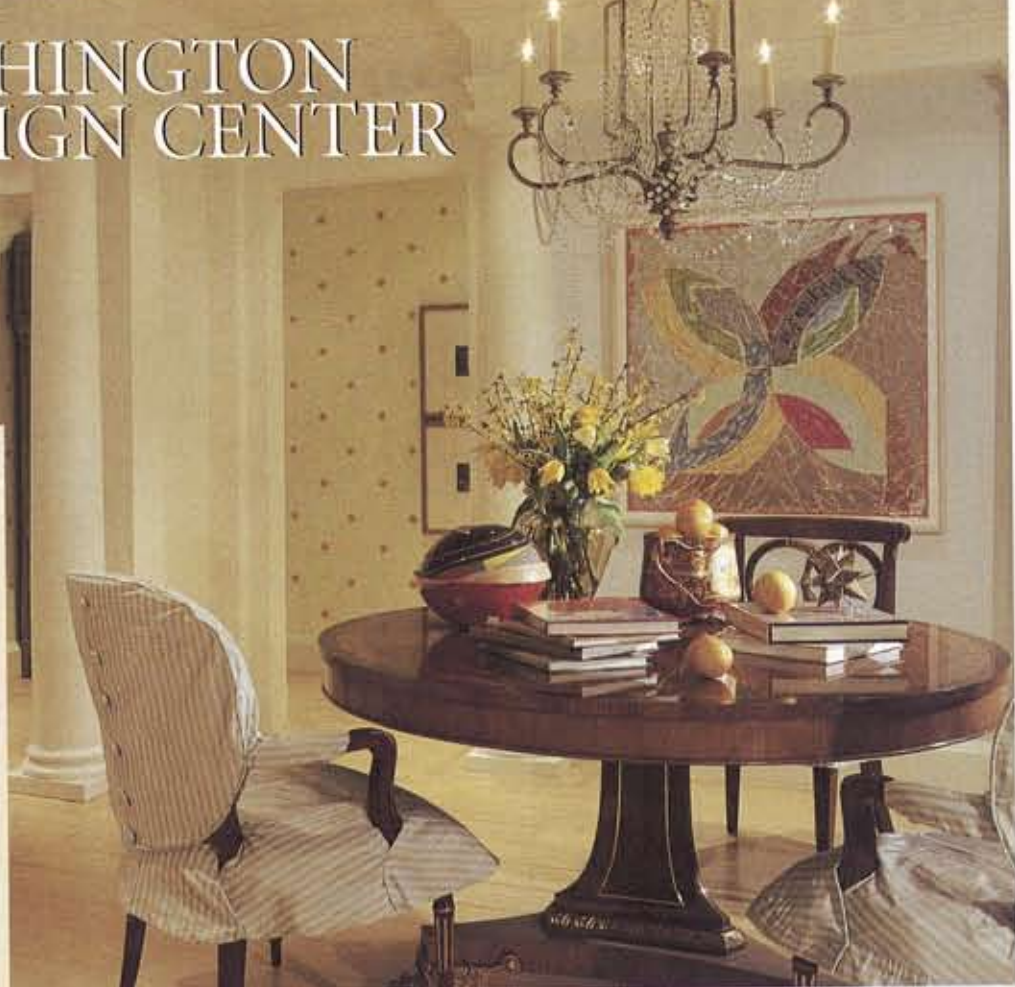
BOTTOM RIGHT: Home Office/Study by Ron Becker, ASID, IFDA, Becker Interiors, Inc.

PHOTO CREDIT: ©GORDON BEALL

THE WASHINGTON DESIGN CENTER

DIAL-A-DESIGNER

If you are browsing at the Design Center, Dial-a-Designer will get you help from an on-call designer. The front desk will page a designer who is on the premises, and a free half-hour consultation is provided during which the designer can help you enter a restricted showroom, make a purchase or answer questions. The service is available during regular Design Center hours, weekdays from 9 to 5.



TOP: Foyer by Mary Drysdale, Drysdale, Inc.
BOTTOM: Media Room by Rob Brown, Todd Davis and Rachel Erwin, Brown+Davis Interior, Inc.

PHOTO CREDIT: ©GORDON BEALL



That's because as a general rule, purchases from showrooms still must be made through a design professional who knows how to customize an order to precise and sometimes complicated specifications. (The showrooms simply display samples and do not keep any inventory on hand.) In addition, these special

orders cannot be returned to the manufacturer, so they must be handled carefully by experienced professionals with the guidance of showroom personnel. In other words, don't expect any checkout lines here, because most of the things you see need to be custom-ordered.

The one place in the building where you can purchase directly from a show-

room without going through a designer is the Kitchen Bath & Building Products Center on the concourse level. The Center, which debuted in 1999, includes 10 upscale showrooms where you can shop the finest custom cabinetry, appliances and fixtures available today. In addition to regular Design Center hours, 9 am to 5 pm weekdays, this floor is also open 10 am to 3 pm on Saturdays. For more information, see www.kitchenbathcenter.com.

Visitors should beware that a trip to the Design Center can cause a serious case of "redecorating-itis." Consider hiring a designer who will help you navigate the overwhelming sea of choices. Working with a professional will not only give you access to a world of new products, but also save you time, money and headaches by preventing costly mistakes.

The Design Center provides two ways to find professionals. On the concourse level, the Designer Index shows photographs of the work of 75 designers, plus a description of their philosophy and fees. The Design Center's Spring and Fall

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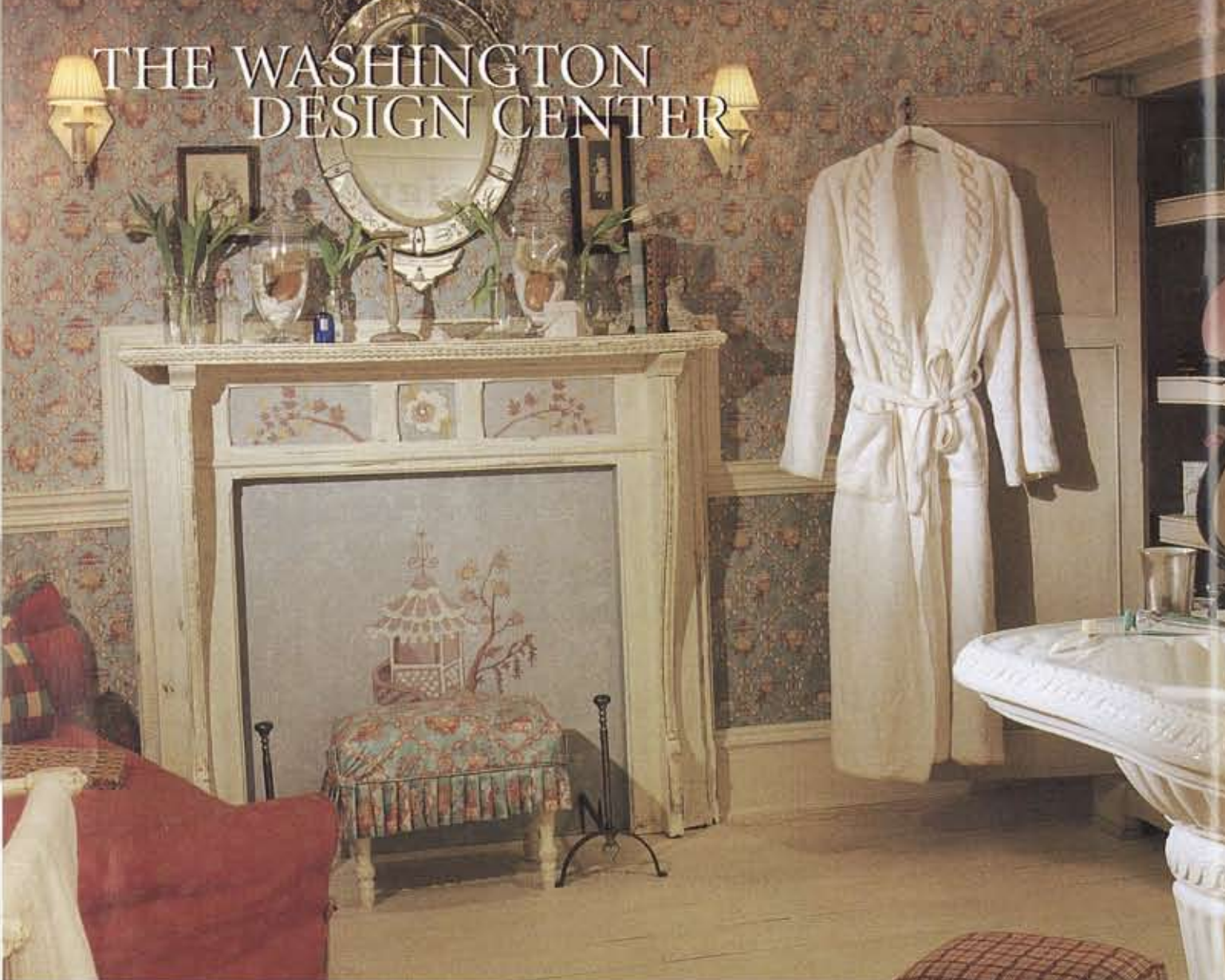


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THE WASHINGTON DESIGN CENTER



Design Houses are another way to identify designers whose work you admire. The current house, International Influences, runs through June 30, 2000, on the center's concourse level and features the work of 10 design firms. The Design House is open to the public 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays. Admission is free and well worth the trip to see some of the area's premiere designers. ♣

Chris MacBride is a freelance writer and principal of Jackson MacBride Public Relations. She served as public relations manager for The Washington Design Center from 1997-1999.

Top: Dressing Room by Sarah Wessel, Sarah Wessel Designs
 LEFT: Bedroom by Patrick Sutton, AIA, Patrick Sutton Associates PHOTO CREDIT: ©GORDON BEALL



SOME PEOPLE DREAM OF THE PERFECT HOME,
 OTHERS HAVE IT NARROWED DOWN TO
 ONE PARTICULAR ROOM.



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