

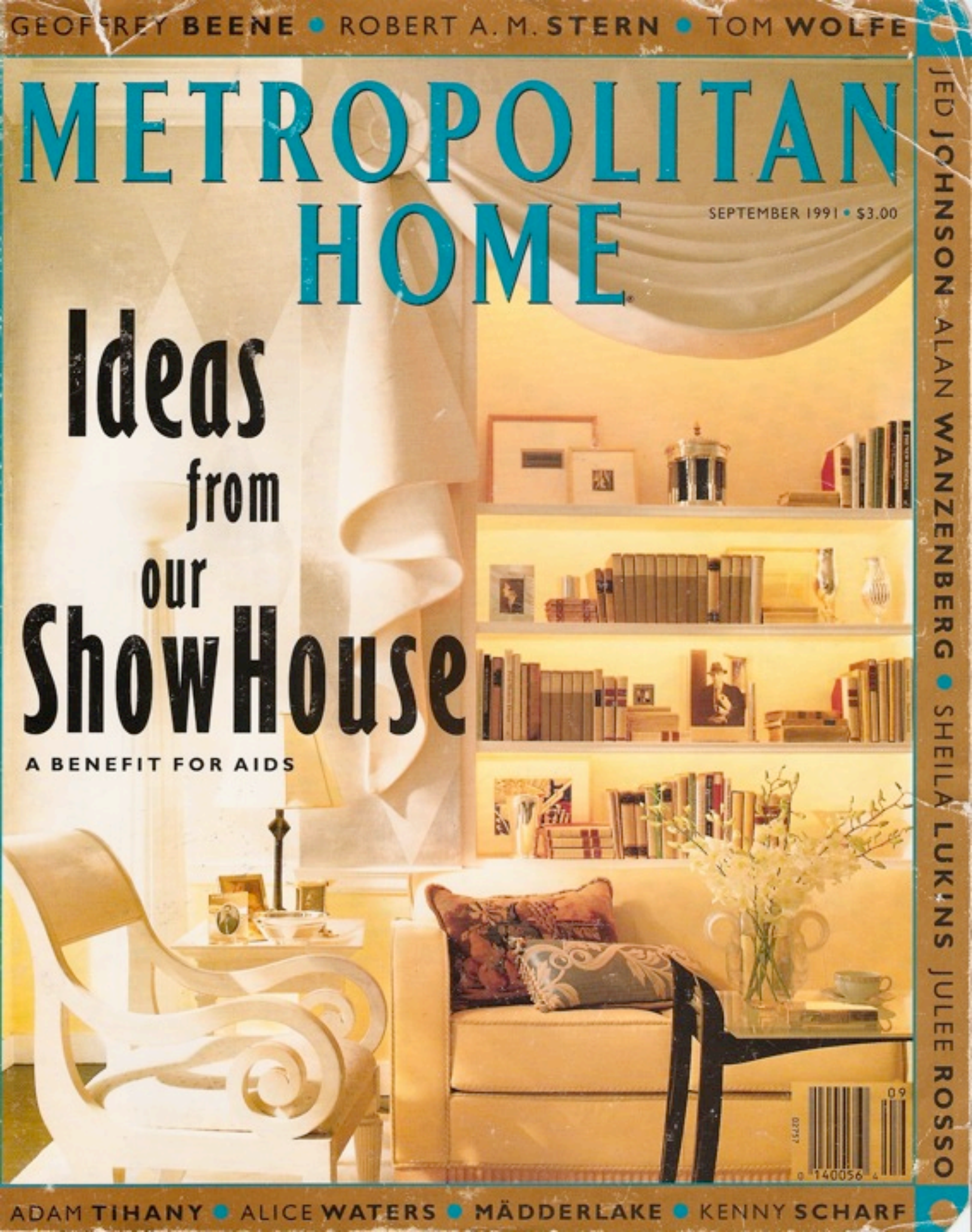
GEORGE BEENE • ROBERT A.M. STERN • TOM WOLFE

METROPOLITAN HOME

SEPTEMBER 1991 • \$3.00

Ideas from our Show House

A BENEFIT FOR AIDS



JED JOHNSON • ALAN WANZENBERG • SHEILA LUKINS • JULEE ROSSO



ADAM TIHANY • ALICE WATERS • MÄDDERLAKE • KENNY SCHARF

"THIS ROOM was our chance to experiment," says Johnson (center), flanked by Cummings, Wanzenberg.



JED Johnson ALAN Wanzenberg

In this spare study, two pioneers create a new material world



FOR A contemplative feel, original windows (left) were veiled with sheer cotton for a tailored look that still has softness (right).

BIG LINES anchor this room (right). But small curves keep lapping at its shores: Rippling circles were hand-drawn to give the carpet a natural, never-machined feel. The designers chose American elm for paneling, then wire-brushed the wood to enhance its grain—an arts and crafts notion made contemporary.



FOR SOME designers the Show-House was a give and take. They gave their time. And they took creative chances. With no client but themselves to satisfy, designer Jed Johnson and architect Alan Wanzenberg could act on ideas that had been waiting for the right opportunity to become reality. In much of their earlier work, the pair had been inspired by the arts and crafts movement. Here they put aside the arts and crafts style, which has played a smaller role in some of their recent projects, but preserved its reverence for materials as well as its methods. "There was a team spirit in arts and crafts," says Wanzenberg, "a collaborative effort." In this room, working with six craftspeople, they found an occasion to profoundly consolidate their gifts—and push them further than ever before.

"We didn't want anything too decorative," says Johnson. "We wanted to explore the boundaries between architecture and decoration." The





commanding lines of this space are deceptive. To create them without tearing out the moldings, sills and deep doorways of the original house, the designers built a room-within-a-room, covering the earlier features with plasterboard on which they could apply the bold planes of their design.

Then came some audacious experiments with surface and materials. In an apartment they designed last year for the actor Richard Gere, who is a Buddhist, Johnson and Wanzenberg had created a Japanese-inspired room in which bits of straw were rubbed into the plaster of the walls. This time, in

pursuit of a smoother, more uniform effect, they opted for wire mesh stapled into the walls and partially covered with plaster. Adds project architect Susan Cummings, "We didn't want perfect. We wanted the mesh to disappear in some places so that it looks spontaneous, like a piece of art."

IT WAS TYPICAL of the thinking in this room, where many influences converge. Johnson and Wanzenberg deliberately chose what they liked best from several different styles—French Thirties Moderne, Japanese sensibilities, and arts and crafts—and found there was much that

linked them: their deep engagement with materials, a sparseness shared by Japanese style and classic modernism, and the fascination that all three have with the way that rich surfaces can invigorate plain forms.

The cut-crystal sconces were a risk taken for a great return. Inspired by the dramatic lines of the great Japanese printmaker Hokusai, glasswork artist Patrick Clark created them by slicing South American crystal thin enough to emit a warm amber glow. He called them Spring and Autumn, symbols of life under the shadow of AIDS—and reminders that beauty can be fragile.

"The '90s are about restraint and paring things to their essence," says Alan



RICHNESS is conveyed in subtly detailed surfaces. To give the room a random texture with a subdued glint, brass mesh (right), was fixed to plasterboard with rust-proof staples. Wet green plaster was then hand-rubbed (above) to allow the mesh to emerge. The metal played its high note against the basso profundo of elm paneling.



THIS IS a room of dots—and dash. A shimmering spine of bolts defines the curve of a perfect chair by Jacques-Ernie Ruhlmann, c. 1925, that once belonged to Andy Warhol, who was a client of Jed's. Sinuous detail along the base draws the dot motif into ripples that play across the larger currents of the Allied Fibers carpet, made from a Johnson/Wanzenberg design. A James Brown painting plays the dot game again on an open field, where a lean angular figure calls to a likely companion across the room—Alexandre Noll's 1945 carved wood sculpture. Crystal sconces punctuate this seamless scene with an unrestrained burst of primordial beauty and power.

THANKS

Chanel; Allied Fibers; Benjamin Moore; Janovic Plaza. SEE RESOURCES, LAST PAGE





DURING the coldest days of February the ShowHouse crew completed the uncanny—and unheated—bathroom. Because the existing bathroom of the ShowHouse proved unsuited to their purposes, Johnson and Wanzenberg walled it up, then proceeded to create one more to their liking in a deep and narrow but light-filled space that adjoined their room. Their goal was an atmosphere that would be congenial to the tastes of both men and women, and that would play variations on the ideas and materials they had used throughout their project.

The sniffing crew could see their breath as they installed the hanging mirror (made of terra-cotta ceramic with a mottled glaze, it doesn't disrupt the flow of space), or tried to keep from shivering while brushing in the rippling gold-and-white pattern of the painted floor. But when the air cleared they could see that the bone-chilling effort had been worth it: The room was finally the gentle harbor they hoped it would be, "where tranquility creates a place of retreat," says Wanzenberg.

Photographs by Antoine Boetz

These restorative rooms "gave us a new faith in our creative abilities," says Jed



THE BATHROOM started as a walk-in closet (left). It became a flow-through space with an island sink and a free-hanging mirror (above). The elm screen at rear links it to the wood of the adjoining room.

SO DOES the marine setting, a stained-glass scene of undersea life (right) that was inspired by Japanese prints, giving it some of the same Asiatic flavor as the design thinking in the study.

