

Setting the stage for a joyful life

By Jan Costello

Melissa Galt collects chairs. There are dozens in this home — some big enough to curl up in, others just the right size to place on shelves, walls and ledges. They are decorated in gold gilt and buoyant acrylics, plumped with fat cushions and wrapped in wicker. One office chair cushion is covered in a collage of receipts, invoices, and rubber bands, all held tightly under wrap with clear plastic.

The chairs issue an invitation — sit, stay, share. They play a role in the life she lives — creating a place for friends to come together and celebrate all aspects of their lives.

“The whole goal of interior design is to act as a stage for the life that is happening,” said Melissa, a professional interior designer, motivational speaker, author and lifestyle coach.

Theater references come naturally to her. She attributes her spirit of seizing life’s opportunities to her mother, Academy Award-winning actress Anne Baxter, whose film posters and pictures line the stairwell and guest bedroom. Galt also was influenced by her godmother, Oscar-winning costume designer Edith Head.

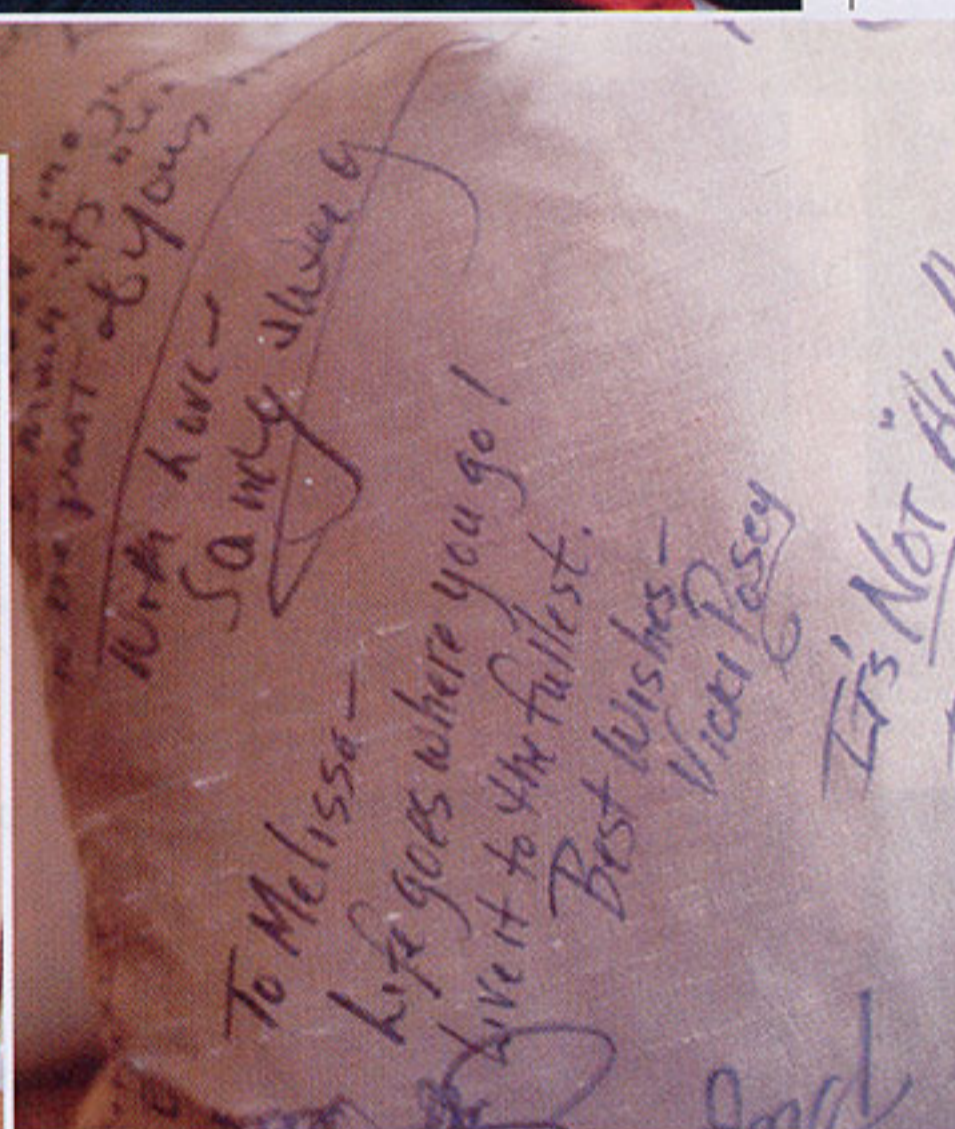
She knew this Brookhaven house was the home for her when she saw a bank of windows against the entire back of the house, opening a view into the garden.

“I prefer an organic approach, a house that belongs in its surroundings,” she says.

This reference also comes naturally. Melissa’s maternal grandfather is acclaimed architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

She took that organic approach

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Interior designer Melissa Galt, top, collects chairs, left, as well as pillows signed by guests who have attended different parties in her Brookhaven home.

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and redid the house inside and out. Her palette echoes the simulated fieldstone used on the exterior. She designed a terraced, perennial garden in the narrow back yard, adorned it with sheep statues (another collection) and playful yard art, and arranged several groupings of chairs and tables.

The kitchen is part of one big room, with a cozy seating area near the fireplace. She removed the white appliances and cabinets in the kitchen and put in light-colored wooden cabinets, granite countertops and stainless-steel appliances.

New shelves next to the fireplace showcase heirlooms, gifts and collections from her travels. She displays her mother’s Oscar (Best Supporting Actress, “The Razor’s Edge,” 1946), antique Chinese bi-discs and two-pound wooden dumbbell set. Prize shelf space also goes to a modern Portuguese sculpture, “The Kiss,” a painted bark basket from Australia and a carved wooden purse from Tibet.

She devotes the front room (what we might call a parlor and she calls a “Moroccan modern room”) to a celebration of diverse cultures. There is a large beaded collar necklace



from Kenya, a tapestry from India, and art from New Zealand, Greece, Bali, China and Spain as well as Southern modern art.

“It’s a layering of colorful elements that represent a global present,” she says.

Melissa’s philosophy is that the home should reflect the life that is lived in it

without upstaging anyone. Her home is artfully arranged with items that bring her joy, and when the chairs are occupied, even better! In fact, a collection of pillows commemorates different parties. The guests sign the pillows with indelible ink, leaving a lasting memory of time shared in her home. **LIA**