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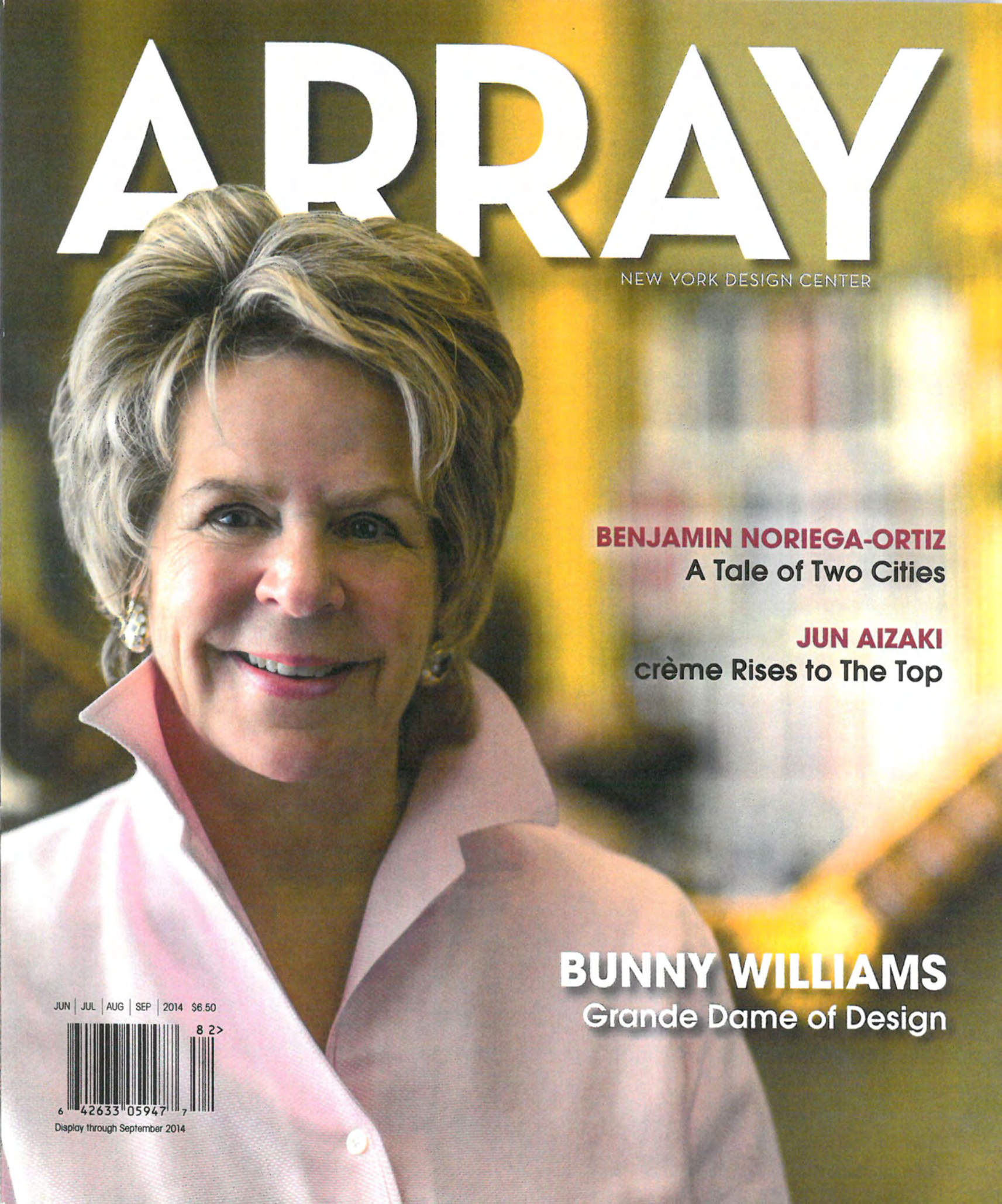
NEW YORK DESIGN CENTER



BENJAMIN NORIEGA-ORTIZ
A Tale of Two Cities

JUN AIZAKI
crème Rises to The Top

BUNNY WILLIAMS
Grande Dame of Design

JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | 2014 $6.50

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Display through September 2014

By Cathy Whitlock

The Grande Dame of Design

She's been described as the grande dame of design, "a decorating doyenne with a bohemian streak," and one of the most important designers of our times. But professionally and personally, she is simply known as Bunny.

Bunny Williams is recognized for her penchant for classical architecture, a passion for gardening, and her love of the decorative arts, as well as the ability to create simply elegant and comfortable houses. Working for legendary decorators Sister Parish and Albert Hadley at Parish-Hadley Inc. (her first assignment was to remake Brooke Astor's curtains), she learned a lot from the Paley and Whitney clients of the world on how to live. As detailed in her 2007 book *Bunny Williams' Point of View* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang), she writes, "You always learn from people with great taste...who really know how to live, and living well takes effort. Their houses were inspirational and magical, I was lucky to be exposed to their great style."

Twenty-two years later, she opened her own interior design firm, Bunny Williams Incorporated, in 1988, creating comfy classical rooms with a universal panache. "I'm really interested in creating homes," the Virginia-bred designer notes. "My approach to decorating extends beyond my ability to design a floor plan, purchase antiques, and hire expert upholsterers, carpenters, and painters to execute my vision. What I design are backdrops for living."

Williams further muses, "The exciting thing about design today is you don't get roped into doing the same thing over and over." And nowhere is this more evident than in her recent city and country projects that are polar opposites of each other—"One is a very traditional house in Greenwich with antiques and rugs and the other a very contemporary penthouse in a traditional building."

"ALL MY DESIGN PROJECTS START WITH HOW THE CLIENT IS GOING TO LIVE. HOW DO WE MAKE THE SHOE FIT? I FIRST TALK WITH THE CLIENTS ABOUT HOW THEY LIVE AND WHAT THEY NEED," she says. For the project in Greenwich, the client wanted a more formal house. "With children off at college, they also wanted a comfortable place for them to come home to." Placement of furniture is a forte of Williams as the living room is designed to seat 8-10 comfortably. "There is nothing worse than people having to stand and have no place to sit!" Striving for balance and livability, she designed two furniture groups, one by the window and the other by the fireplace. Symmetry is the order of the day as she accents a pair of blue and white vases on the mantle and decorative gilt sconces flank the fireplace wall.

The living room's sunny interior began with the selection of a rug, building the color palette from there. "I like to keep the palette light with subtle colors," says Williams. By contrast, the rug offsets the darkness of the adjacent wood-paneled library as the designer picked up the ivory in the rug for the curtain color. Her trademark talent for mixing fabrics—in this case chintz, paisley, and a variety of coordinates—is evident in the upholstered furnishings and pillows.

A sleek glass and steel spiral staircase form a magnificent focal point in the design of a

Facing page: World-renowned interior designer and garden expert Bunny Williams.

Left: A sleek glass and steel spiral staircase becomes a major focal point in a Manhattan penthouse.

Middle Top: Williams has a penchant for classical interiors and symmetry as seen in the living room of a Greenwich residence.

Middle Bottom: Chocolate brown walls and beams make a cozy backdrop in a Greenwich study.

Right: A black and red bookcase does double duty as a fold out bed in a Manhattan dining room.

Top: One-of-a-kind garden treasures can be found at Treillage, the shop owned by Williams and her husband, antiques dealer John Rosselli.

Bottom left: A selection of decorative pillows at Treillage.

Bottom Right: Williams and Rosselli shop the world for an interesting variety of garden and interior furnishings.

Manhattan penthouse. "I had done the original apartment twelve years ago and the clients bought the penthouse about a year and a half ago (which was incorporated as a loft). The challenge was where to put the staircase, so I decided to place it in the corner of the living room. I wanted it to be like a piece of sculpture—like a Brancusi," Williams details. "The penthouse has one stone floor and it's one big room—the clients wanted a place to watch television and throw large dinner parties so I kept the space flexible."

While the apartment has five bedrooms, another challenge presented itself as the client wanted an additional sleeping spot. Williams custom designed a black-and-red lacquer bookcase in the dining room, complete with a concealed bed and remote control. "The client needed occasional space for the guest room and overflow. I had seen this mechanism for a remote control and mattress in a showroom in Florida and decided to make it custom."

Williams' custom work extends to product and furniture lines with Century, indoor/outdoor rugs for Dash & Albert, pillows and throws for Pine Cone Hill, and a rug collection with Doris Leslie Blau. Her goal of filling a home with "unique pieces that give a room personality" became the foundation for the Bunny Williams Home collection—think small drink tables, accent lamps, hurricanes, and beautiful yet functional seating. **"Product design really fascinates me but creating items to produce hasn't been easy," she admits. "Its hard to be a little thing in a big furniture world."**

A regular on the antique show and show house lecture circuits, her high style and appreciation of gracious southern living and books have garnered quite a following. *An Affair With a House* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2005), the designer's chronicle of how she turned her 18th-century Greek revival house into a weekend retreat, became a best-seller. The books *Bunny Williams' Point of View* and *Bunny Williams' Scrapbook for Living* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2010) soon followed, both detailing practical ideas on making a house a home.

Downtime finds Williams digging in the dirt and designing her Connecticut garden (which she masters with the same style and sophistication found in her interiors) and the gardens of La Colina, the house she and her husband, antiques dealer John Rosselli, share in the Dominican Republic. Her passion for gardening was so strong that it became the subject of her first book *On Garden Style* (Simon and Schuster, 1998). **Her love of all things garden is further nurtured with Treillage, the shop and working laboratory Williams and Rosselli run on the Upper East Side, filled with antique and contemporary garden treasures from their worldwide travels.**

With product lines, books and interiors spanning the globe, what could possibly be next? "I would love to do a hotel if only someone would only ask! I am always going into hotel rooms and noticing how bad the lighting is," she notes. In a high-powered, award-winning career that shows no signs of stopping, Williams assures us she will always be working. **"I will never retire, I will just do something different. I love what I do and will always do something!"**