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March 2020



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Chandelier Creative agency founder *Richard Christiansen* has manifested his own private paradise in Eagle Rock, with hillside grounds that delight the senses and nurture the soul

# EAST of EDEN

Words by *MELISSA GOLDSTEIN* Photography by *ADRIAN GAUT*

"When I bought it five years ago, I neither had the money to restore it [nor] the permits," says RICHARD CHRISTIANSEN of his escapist hilltop home, FLAMINGO ESTATE, a onetime adult-film studio he renovated with Paris-based STUDIO KO. "But I had a thousand ideas."





days, he tells you. What he is most interested in, really passionate about, is wellness — specifically, wellness sourced directly from his backyard.

Encompassing 7 acres, Flamingo Estate’s Mediterranean, water-tolerant garden is, according to Christiansen, “the biggest and most important room [of the property].” A utopian collaboration between Christiansen and French landscape designer Arnaud Casaus, it abounds with fruits and vegetables (from Japanese plums and figs to zucchini and tomatoes, to olives and macadamia nuts) and herbs (there are hundreds of species of sage alone) and houses a colony of bees and a coop of prodigious egg-laying chickens. A flowering grove of lipstick-red aloe blankets the hillside, and highly prized exotic species like the Australian Moreton Bay fig tree and plumeria (sourced for \$30 on Craigslist and installed with a crane) are scattered about. This being a Christiansen production, there are also unexpected design delights — a pink Faye Toogood Roly Poly armchair perches on the east terrace, ripe for contemplation and surrounded by purple salvia, orange flowering aloe and a collection of rare camellias.

This vast and bountiful landscape is exactly what led to his latest venture: a line of lifestyle and wellness products based entirely on the garden. The Flamingo Estate brand debuted last spring with candles in a trio of evocative scents, including Roma Heirloom Tomato, and honey packed with benefits-rich elements like bee pollen, royal jelly and propolis. This March will see the launch of shampoo, body wash and conditioner, composed of such

**R**ichard Christiansen believes pleasure — however small — is a human right. So a visit to the elegantly lanky 43-year-old founder of Chandelier Creative agency at his restored 1940s Spanish colonial-style Eagle Rock home, dubbed Flamingo Estate, begins with a perfect cup of coffee.

He pours the fresh brew from a French press into a handmade mug by British artist Alex Sickling and adds a dash of goat milk, while you admire his collection of Donabe pots from Japan and his kitchen’s custom terrazzo floor, fashioned after a hotel in Rome he encountered years ago. And for the worldly creative, who is responsible for shaping the image of myriad Fortune 500 brands, there is pleasure — so much thoughtful, specific, beauty-filled, worldly pleasure — in all of these things.

But aesthetic and sensory delight is not the only sort of pleasure on his mind these

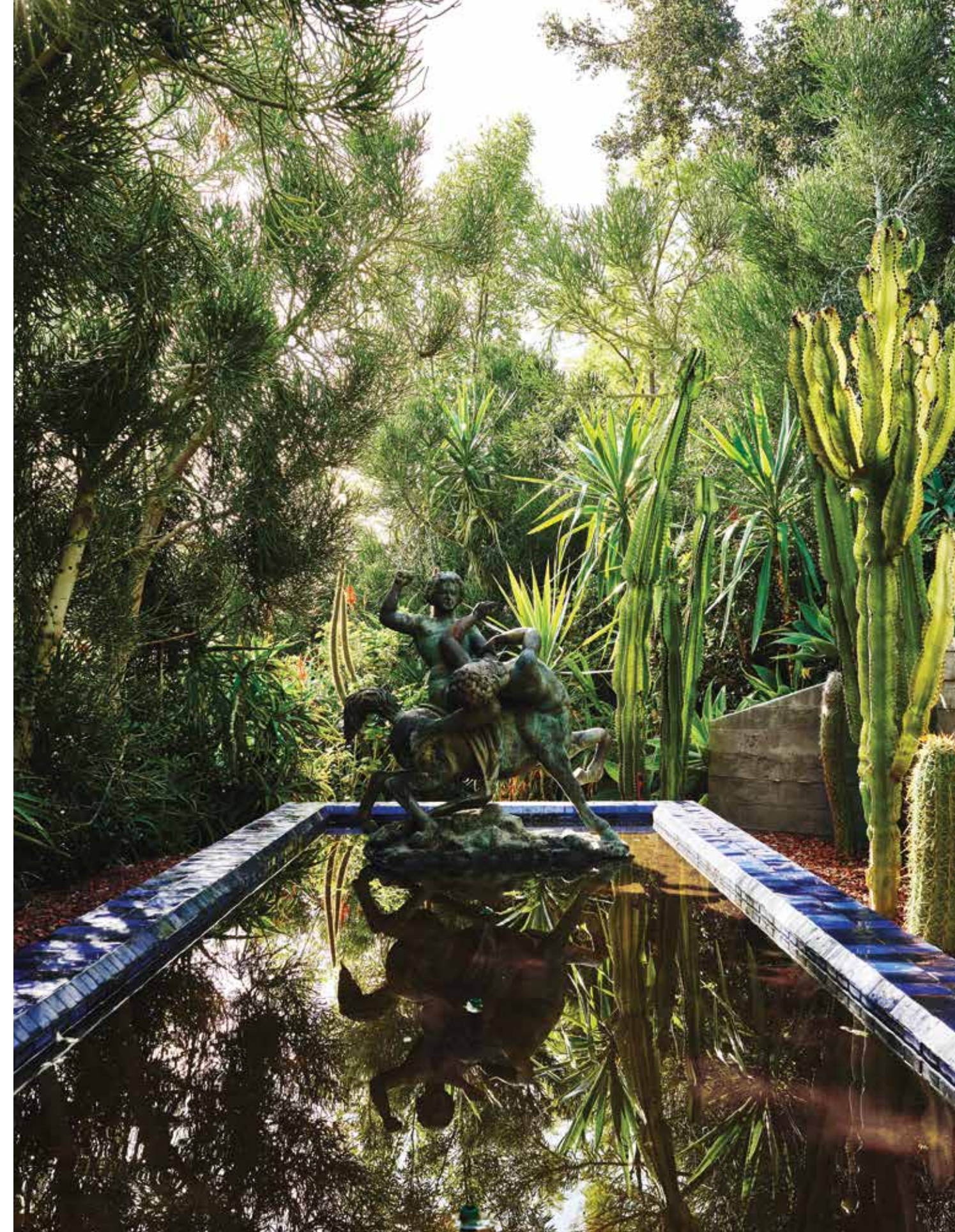
*“The garden pulled me here and saved me from New York”*

RICHARD CHRISTIANSEN



Flowers and succulents frame the home’s main entrance. Opposite, from top: A pair of chairs from Morocco flank the pool, surrounded by banana plants and palms. Flamingo Estate’s resident honeybees lay claim to their own CHANDELIER CREATIVE-branded bee boxes.





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RICHARD CHRISTIANSEN

ingredients as sage, eucalyptus, Saint-John’s-wort, bergamot and tulsi — all grown in the garden, of course. In the coming year, there are plans for everything from a “dream spray” and olive oil to a superfood spread and garden compost and soil. “Chandelier will always be a place to dream up brands and make the impossible happen,” he says. “But this time I am doing it for myself rather than someone else’s shareholders.”

Christiansen’s relationship with gardening is an enduring one. He and his twin brother, Geoffrey (a director in the New York office of Chandelier Creative), grew up on their parents’ avocado and sugarcane farm in rural Australia. It was there, in the Outback, that a desire for glamour and social connection took

root: “We never had people over to the house. I never had a single childhood school friend come over, and so the idea of hosting people was very aspirational,” he says.

But having infiltrated the social whirl of Manhattan over the course of 17 years spent at Time Inc. and, later, his own agency (his globe-trotting resume also includes such highlights as a stint in Italy as creative director at Benetton’s groundbreaking *Colors* magazine in his 20s), he found himself deprived of an outdoor space of his own. And so, the lure of a garden — and with it, the promise of a better quality of life — drove him to Los Angeles. “The garden pulled me here and saved me from New York, and it saved me again from a very dark period,” he confides.

Since moving to Los Angeles from New York in 2017, Christiansen has established himself as a kind of modern-day Gatsby, beckoning an international crew of multidisciplinary creatives to his fantastical Studio KO-created residence (a home he moved into with designer Andrew Mulne, whom he credits as being critical to the vision) for celebrations with exclusive guest lists, dependably handsome barmen, palm readers and cigarettes rolled with tobacco grown on the premises.

At these gatherings, bathed in the rosy reflected glow of the residence (a shade echoed in the property’s name), high on a hilltop overlooking the city’s twinkling lights, nothing is off limits — not the

From top left: The home’s poured concrete entry staircase. “In New York, I’d worked every weekend, and I came here — like everyone else — because I wanted to have a life,” Christiansen says.

“I intentionally set out to build a home for myself and a daily existence for myself. I want to be surrounded by books and culture and art, and I want to be surrounded by a garden full of bees and birds,” Christiansen says. “I’m happy that I manifested that.” In the cactus garden, an antique French statue purchased at auction overlooks the reflecting pool clad in Moroccan tiles.





master bedroom, with its baker's dozen David Hockney drawings; not the office, where a coffee table created from a piece of a tree struck by lightning on the grounds of Versailles resides; certainly not the bar, with its midcentury bamboo and brass stools; and not even the "bathing cathedral," a stand-alone cast-concrete structure with dazzling blue-spectrum stained-glass casement windows and a tub pointed toward the sunrise.

"I'm a staunch believer that every occasion is a special occasion," says Christiansen, whose clients have included Old Navy, Virgin Voyages, Cartier, Adidas and Target. "And if

you've been to a party [at Flamingo Estate], you know that everyone is drinking out of a crystal glass."

His blend of gracious magic also extends to a nearby Highland Park bookstore-slash-"creative incubator and community space," Owl Bureau, where a recent event for artist Henry Taylor apparently lured the likes of Ai Wei Wei ("I'm not 100 percent sure it was him, but I'm pretty sure," says Christiansen with a laugh) and Brad Pitt (definitely him).

Despite the outward successes, the revelry hit a roadblock in early 2019. "I went through a difficult time — professionally and

personally," he shares. "I started to think: When things fall apart for people, you go back to nature. And so I did — I spent a lot of time in the garden, just thinking about growth and regrowth."

He further reflects: "Nature gives us everything we need to feel good. And what I've learned in the last nine months is that there is a huge gulf between 'not bad for you' and 'good for you.' Between 'not causing harm' and 'giving you pleasure.' A lot of brands are not bad for you, but to take a product and actually say it can boost your mental clarity or happiness is a whole

other thing." (Plans for a mood-enhancing supplement are in the works.)

Christiansen is adamant that every single ingredient be pure and completely natural. "I wanted to use knowledge from the garden to connect again with excitement, ecstasy and euphoria. To feel happy and fulfilled," he says. Ever the branding guru, he adds: "It's not real if it doesn't have a logo."

For a man who frequently cites Walt Disney as a hero, thanks to the mogul's legacy of "world-building," the motivation for the collection stems from a desire to, quite literally, bottle the 360-degree experience of



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Christiansen's own fantasy land and export it beyond his property's 75-step brick staircase. "We're looking to wrap our arms around everyone with green thumbs and middle fingers. There is so much crap on the market. ... I'm not playing small, I want to make a difference to me and the industry," he says. But it is also part of a personal journey. "How do I do something new? How do I re-create myself? I'm trying really hard to do that." •

*Flamingo Estate Organics candles are available at C Magazine's new concept store, Studio C; shopstudio-c.com.*