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EMILY MICHOT/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

THE GREAT ROOM: Katia Bates in her Fort Lauderdale home; the striking chandeliers and sconces are Murano glass that she found in a Paris antique shop.

Venetian touch

A Fort Lauderdale designer with an eye for the unusual wins a TV competition

BY CHARLYNE VARKONYI SCHAUB
Special to The Miami Herald

Walk into the home of Katia and Tom Bates on Fort Lauderdale's Isle of Capri and suddenly you're in Venice, Italy.

Walls finished in Venetian plaster that resemble polished marble. Antique chandeliers and sconces crafted of Murano glass. A wood ceiling treatment painted with a gold design inspired by the lobby of the Danieli Hotel, a Venetian Gothic landmark.

No wonder designer Katia Bates, a Venetian who redecorated the Versace mansion twice, won the \$10,000 grand prize on TLC's *Four Houses* last month and an opportunity to be featured in a future issue of *Better Homes & Gardens* magazine. The show, which aired July 30, featured four homeowners who competed for the best décor.

The show "was an opportunity to show off my own house," she said. "Often designers get to show what they have done for their clients but not for themselves."

She and her husband Tom, a builder, own Innovative Creations, a firm that combines his construction expertise and her design talent. Their waterfront home, *Contessa Veneziana*, showcases both talents. They have lived there for 20 years and it has grown with their family — son Nicolo, who is starting his first year at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, and 14-year-old Sophia, who attends Pinecrest in Fort Lauderdale. They tore down



EMILY MICHOT/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

GUEST BEDROOM: A looking-glass view into a secluded spot.

•TURN TO DESIGNER. 4H



CRAIG DENNIS

ENTRANCEWAY: The main house, known as *Contessa Veneziana*, features a Mediterranean style with pecky cypress door, wrought iron railings and barrel tile roof.

Venetian-style home is a winner

• DESIGNER, FROM 11

the home on the property, saving only the living room's 1948 vintage marble fireplace and the wall behind it so it wouldn't be damaged when they started construction on their new home. Two years ago, they built an addition and a guest house, upping the total space to 12,500 square feet.

Bates' love of family is evident throughout the house, which features professional photography in black and white and sepia tones of the children shot at various locations.

"Maybe someday I will replace [the children's photos] with paintings, but right now I love seeing my kids everywhere," she said.

It wasn't her children's photos or even the Venetian plaster that impressed her competition on *Four House*. They were Fabian Basabe, a television personality who opened Da Vittorio in Coral Gables; Zuzana Pascual, owner of the Boca Tanning Club/Brickell; and Patricia San Pedro, who bills herself as an author, healer and public speaker.

It was a trio of club room features — a fireplace, a coffee table and a pool table — that caught the eye of the South Florida contestants, who rated each other for originality, style and livability.

The stately marble fireplace mantel, featuring a naked woman whose body is entwined with vines, was inspired by a photo Bates came across more than 12 years ago. She sent the photo to one of her craftsmen along with one of herself and asked him to carve her image in the marble. The heavy mantel took 10 men to deliver.

"I gave it to my husband as a gift," she said. "It is not my original design, but I thought it would be fun to have a fireplace with my hair and face."

The coffee table caught the competition's eye because it is built around a Maserati engine that the couple had left over from a car they owned. After failing to find an unusual coffee table, they hired an industrial engineer to construct the supports and built a beveled glass tabletop around it.

The pool table, with red felt top, decorative marquetry and four bronze gilded lions, was once in the Versace mansion, which she re-decorated twice for telecommunications entrepreneur Peter Loflin. The mansion, once known as Casa Casuarina and now called the Villa by Bartoo G, was put on the market in June for \$25 million.

After Loflin bought the mansion in 2003, Bates purchased the billiard table for his game room, but when the home was turned into a private club there was no room for it. The table sat in a warehouse from 2004 until this February, when her husband convinced Loflin to sell it. Bates said the table won her heart because lions are the symbol of Venice.

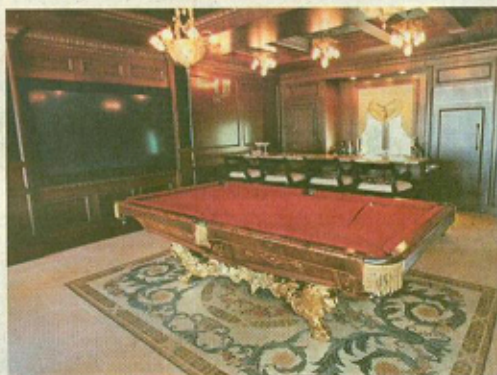
Bates also took one of the ideas for her redesign of the Versace mansion into the master bedroom. Loflin had asked her to put large beds in the three largest bedrooms for tall club members who were basketball and football players. She ordered what she called "super beds," which were as large as 10-by-12 feet, and later ordered an 8-by-8 foot bed for her home.

INFLUENCES

Juan Montoya, a New York designer and architect known for his multi-cultural eclectic style, and Jacques Garcia, a French designer and architect known for his contemporary interiors of Paris hotels and restaurants, are among designers she respects. She also has high regard for the late Andrea Palladio, a Venetian architect whose work was based on



MASTER BEDROOM: This room features an 8-by-8-foot "Super bed" like those Bates ordered for the Versace mansion.



CUSTOM POOL TABLE: This piece was made for the renovation of the Versace mansion and features lion's heads, a symbol of Venice where Katia Bates is from. It sits on a mosaic designed to look like a rug.



BATES



HER FACE: Katia Bates had the elaborate mantel made in her image as a gift to her husband.



LEFTOVER: Table base is a motor from a Maserati the Bateses owned.

symmetry and perspective of ancient Greek and Roman architecture, and the late Addison Mizner, the architect who gave South Florida its distinctive Mediterranean Revival look with barrel tile roofs, pecky cypress ceilings, rough finished stucco and doors that open out onto wrought iron balconies.

Mizner style is reflected in the Bates home. The 10-foot-high front door features a custom pecky cypress facade and so do the undersides of the overhangs. The living room ceiling, which she copied from the Danielli Hotel, also reflects the painting Mizner did on ceiling beams.

Bates has a degree in fashion design from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and a bachelor's degree from Nova Southeastern University in Davie, where she studied business. She learned most of her interior design and building training while working with her father, who restored historic buildings in Venice.

how to use them and how to use her vendors."

Rug designer Vera Za'nour, who has designed custom rugs for Bates, echoes the sentiments.

"Katia has a sophisticated, elegant and chic design style," she said. "As a talented designer, she can communicate what she wants."

And Bates also understands what her clients want, according to Pat and Lynn Murphy whose home in Fort Lauderdale's Harbor Beach she decorated. "She and Tom are probably my favorite people in Fort Lauderdale. They are a great couple and a great family. You can tell her what you want and she can pick up on it and know what you are talking about. If we were ever building another home, I would turn Katia loose and let her do it."

"Katia is a very classy lady," Pat Murphy said. "She and Tom are probably my favorite people in Fort Lauderdale. They are a great couple and a great family. You can tell her what you want and she can pick up on it and know what you are talking about. If we were ever building another home, I would turn Katia loose and let her do it."

CONTRASTING STYLES

Mitchell Rosenbaum, executive producer of *Four Houses*, said the homeowners are selected to provide contrasts in style and personality.

"I have never met someone as committed to the authenticity of their home," he said when asked about Bates' work.

Known for her philanthropy, Bates donated the \$10,000 she won on *Four Houses* to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County. She is one of the sponsors of the 25th annual Showboats International Boys & Girls Clubs Rendezvous Nov. 8-10 at Atlantis, Paradise Island, in the Bahamas.

Matt Organ, executive vice president of Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County, said Bates has been supporting the cause for 12 years.

"She has been very supportive of our mission," he said. "For her to donate her winnings was not something she had to do. She believes in what the Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward County are doing, and her donation says an awful lot about her."

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