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HOUSE & HOME

Perfect Taste And a Client List To Prove It

By JULIE V. IOVINE

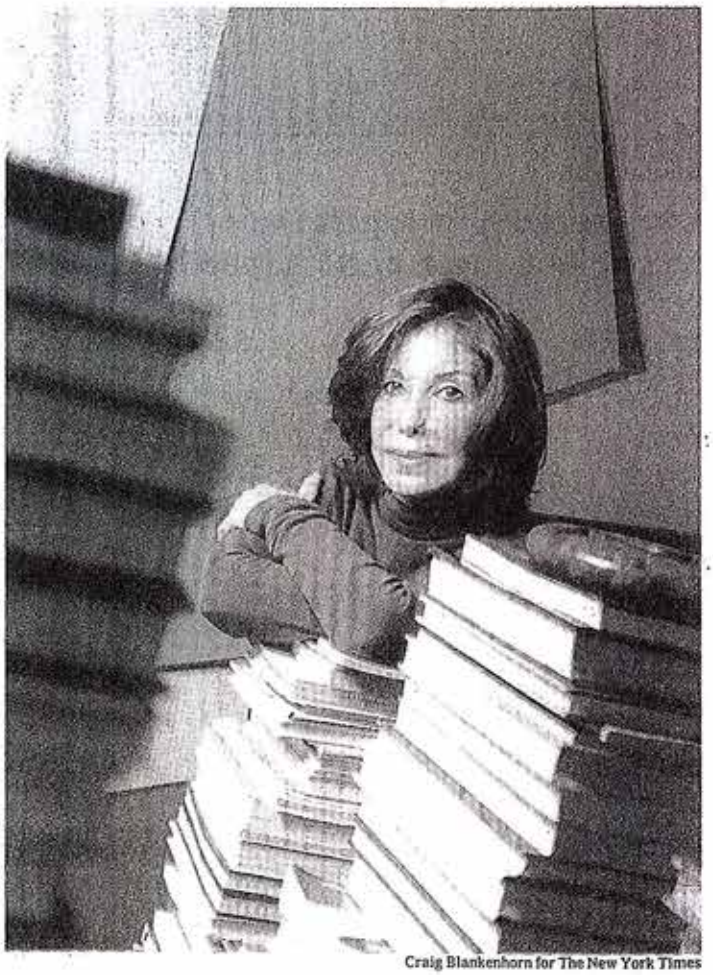
LAST Friday, in a living room lined with art monographs and Frank Stella collages, Rose Tarlow, the elusive doyenne of decorating, posed for a rare photograph. Princess Jah of India read gossip columns on a nearby sofa, and Richard Meier, the architect, ate mashed hard-boiled eggs in the kitchen of his Upper East Side duplex.

Mr. Meier, who is Ms. Tarlow's former boyfriend, emerged to discuss the merits of a 17th-century slab of pale beige limestone sent for her inspection. She had selected it as flooring for a client's house in Greenwich, Conn., and she wanted to make sure it had been properly waxed.

"It's ugly," Mr. Meier said and headed up the stairs. Ms. Tarlow stuck her tongue out at his receding figure. "No, it's perfect," she said.

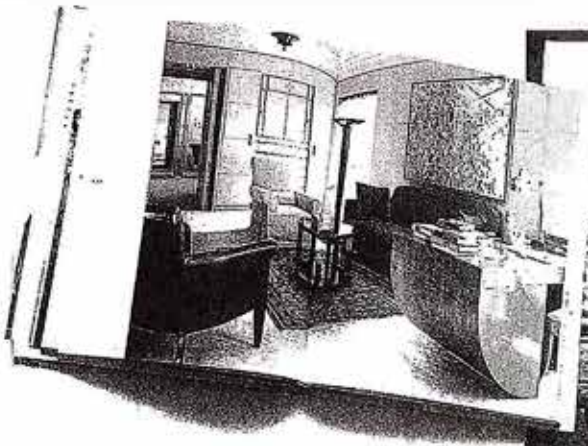
Both charmingly prosaic and ridiculously rarefied, the scene could have come straight from Ms. Tarlow's new book, "The Private House" (Clarkson Potter), which she had jetted in from Los Angeles (on Eli Broad's private plane) to publicize. The 266-page soft-focus memoir, party guide and design essay offers glimpses into the lives and (unidentified) homes of David Geffen, Eli and Edye Broad, Barbara Walters and Bill Blass, to name a few of Ms. Tarlow's boldface clients and friends. But the main subject is her professed passion: creating rooms of haunting luxury packed with enough rarities and idiosyncratic touches to

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Craig Blankenhorn for The New York Times

STYLE BIBLE In "The Private House," Rose Tarlow shares (some of) her life as the A-list's mandarin of taste.





Perfect Taste: Client List Proves It

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stage a Zeffirelli opera set.

For someone who, by her own account, has decorated no more than five homes in the past 15 years, Ms. Tarlow's reputation as "one of the most talented interior designers today," as a showroom manager at the Decoration & Design building called her, has mounted to dizzying heights. That was never more evident than at a book party last Tuesday. It was given at the Four Seasons Grill Room by society's bicoastal royalty, including Jane and Michael Eisner and Terry and Jane Semel, and was attended by a crowd that would have made Truman Capote swoon. Among those loading up the cocktail napkins



Photographs by Patrick McMullan

BOLDFACE FRIENDS From left, Michael Eisner, Barbara Walters, Henry Kissinger.

at a long night of rubbing shoulders were Henry Kissinger, Tina Brown, Charlie Rose, Martha Stewart, and Carlton Hobbs, a London antiquarian who flew in for the occasion. He called her book a bible for people "of the most advanced taste."

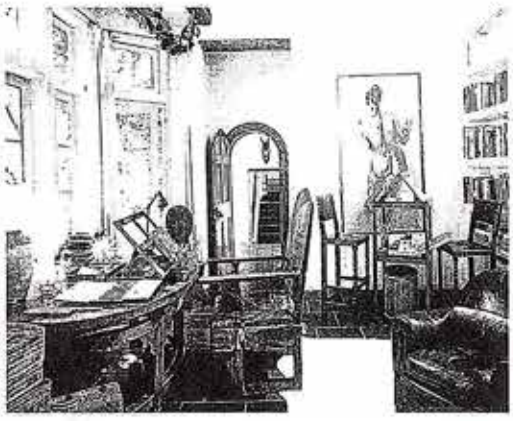
"It wasn't a glittery crowd," said John Barrett, the hair salonist. "It was pure power."

From restless housewife to antiques dealer to founder of Melrose House, a multimillion-dollar business in furniture reproductions (she calls them "essences of a period"), Ms. Tarlow insists that her ambition as a child was "to be like Emily Dickinson, a writer and a recluse."

"This is not a style book; I didn't even want it to have photographs," continued Ms. Tarlow, who is famously contrarian. (Seven years ago, she turned down an offer to meet with Bill and Melinda Gates about decorating their 40,000-square-foot Seattle home.) "I just wanted to write a book, and design is what I know. I have no interest at all in telling people what to do."

That said, she wastes no time in spelling out exactly how she likes things to be. She applauds how, in a friend's home in Provence, a shirred curtain hides kitchen appliances less than 100 years old, but she clearly deplores multicolored flower bouquets at parties.

Craig Blankenhorn for The New York Times; manuplink, Noam Kaufman/The New York Times





Clarisse Peter (above and left)

SENSIBILITY UNVEILED Rose Tarlow, above, poses in Richard Meier's Manhattan duplex; inset top left, a spread from her new book, "The Private House," showing her study for David Geffen; left, Ms. Tarlow's own studio; below, her country kitchen in Bel Air.