



THE OPRAH
MAGAZINE

LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE

O SEX SURVEY

**MOMS,
LISTEN UP**

Your daughters have
something to
tell you...

**Need
a Lift?**

How to boost
your spirits—even
in these crazy
times

**So chic,
so cheap!**

The cutest summer
sunglasses, tees,
and shoes

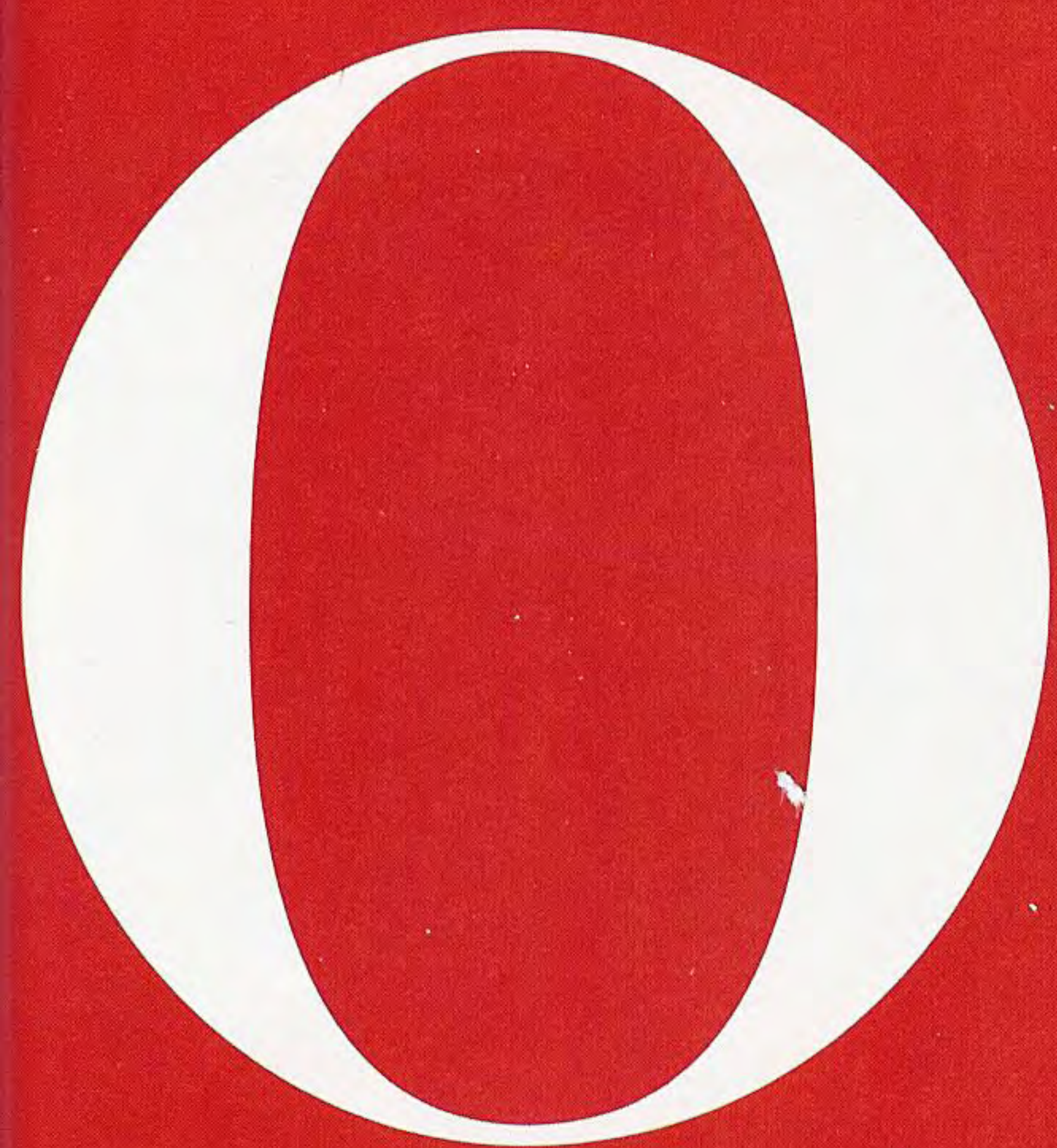
The Cure
for Cellulite
Seriously

The latest high-tech
treatment gets res

MAY 2009 \$4.50



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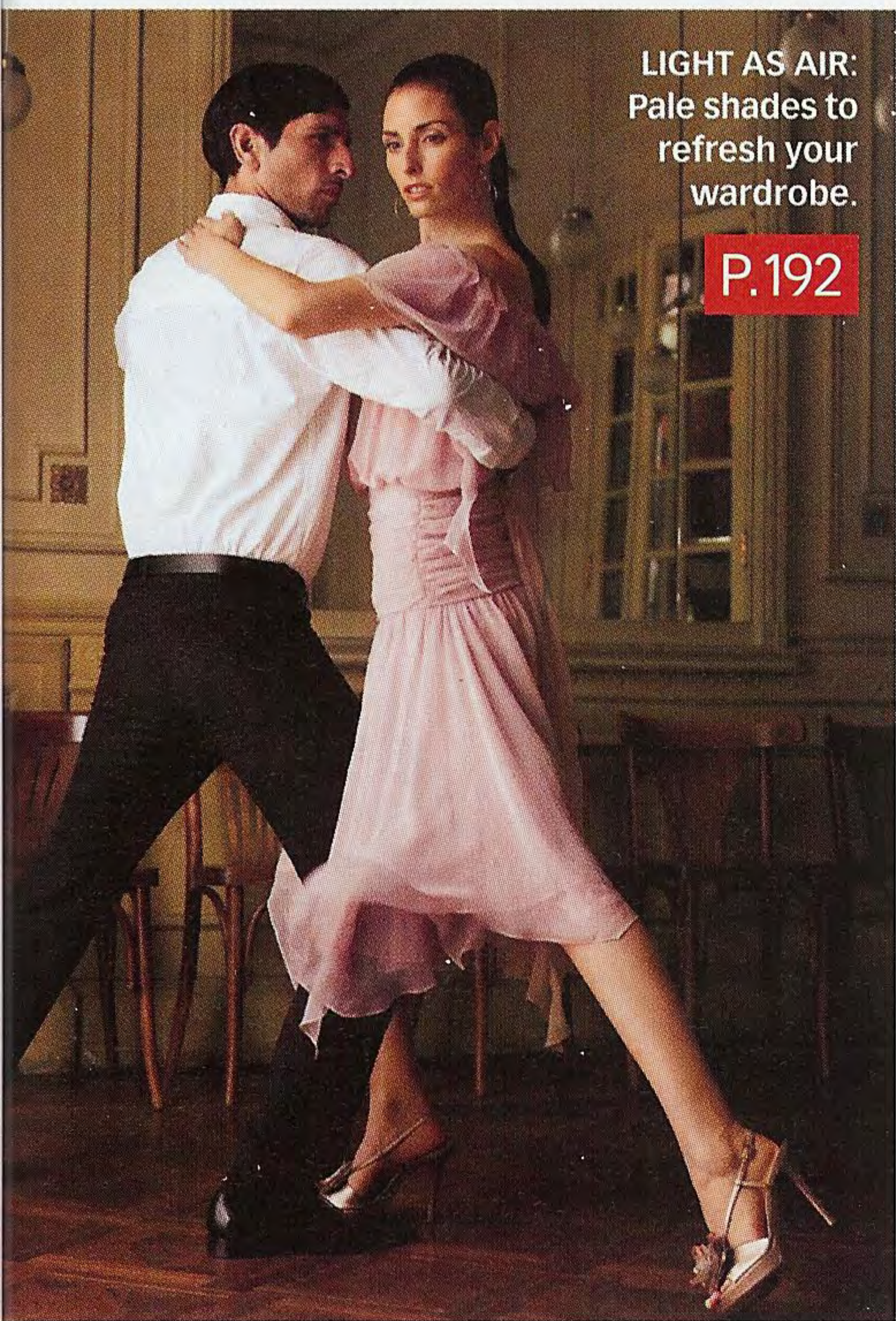


THE OPRAH MAGAZINE



BRIGHT TIME:
Lively picks
for a sunny
season.

P.82



LIGHT AS AIR:
Pale shades to
refresh your
wardrobe.

P.192



CHEF'S CHOICE:
Cindy Pawlcyn
cooks at home
in Napa.

P.172

May 2009

Contents

SPECIAL

Mothers and Daughters Talk About Sex

180 It's a pivotal conversation for moms and daughters, and we can help you navigate the emotional minefield. **PLUS:** **LIZ BRODY** offers a revealing look at how 2,000 girls and mothers are handling the topic of sex...**AMY BLOOM** explains exactly what you need to know before your own frank discussion...**AIMEE LEE BALL** interviews sex and intimacy expert **LAURA BERMAN, PhD**, about masturbation, sexting, and more...**DAPHNE MERKIN** listens in on a room full of (very) opinionated teenagers...**ROSEMARY MAHONEY** reflects on sex, guilt, and the Catholic Church...**ABIGAIL THOMAS** recalls the joys of making out...and **LORENE CARY** recounts why she told her daughters to just say no.

Features

- 166 COVER STORY: *Need a Lift?***
Delight, joy, awe. Especially during anxious times, feeling uplifted is critical to our well-being—in ways that might surprise you. **JESSICA WINTER** goes in search of a spirit boost.
- 172 HOME: *Recipe for Living***
Napa chef Cindy Pawlcyn's California retreat is just like her restaurants—warm, inviting, and rich with flavor. **DAVID HOCHMAN** savors her hospitality.
- 192 FASHION: *Neutral Territory***
A warm-weather wardrobe of soft, creamy hues comes alive in Buenos Aires.
- 202 BEAUTY: *The Cure for Cellulite? Seriously?***
VALERIE MONROE tests out a cutting-edge technology. **PLUS:** The best treatments for splotches, stretch marks, and veiny bits.

RECIPE FOR LIVING

First she got the entire Napa Valley eating out of her hand. Then chef Cindy Pawlcyn seasoned her own life, house, and entertaining style to taste. **David Hochman** pays a visit.



NOW SHE'S COOKING
Larger than any other room in the house, Cindy Pawlcyn's soaring kitchen features an enormous tiled Moorish-style oven ("We'll do whole pigs and lambs and roasts," she says), French advertising posters from the 1920s and '30s, and a cherrywood central island that combines oak cutting boards, Carrera marble countertops, and zinc panels for appliances. Refrigerator, Sub-Zero. The sunny deck (opposite page), a frequent spot for entertaining, is topped by a custom-built metal canopy. ▶



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MELANIE ACEVEDO
STYLING BY CARLOS MOTA

“A PLACE IN THE WOODS WITH A POOL WAS ALWAYS THE FANTASY,” SAYS CINDY, TAKING ME OUTSIDE TO THE SALTWATER POOL WHERE SHE, JOHN, AND THE DOGS SWIM ON WARM MORNINGS UNDER DOUGLAS FIRS.

IT'S NICE TO LIVE just up the hill from where I work,” Cindy Pawlcyn says. The energetic, silver-haired chef and cookbook author is standing barefoot in her kitchen, looking out over the valley she helped make famous—the Napa Valley, that is. One of the first female chefs to champion fresh, local, seasonal food at her groundbreaking restaurant, Mustards Grill (and at many that would follow), Cindy was a pioneer who helped put the region on the epicurean map as much for its food as for its wine.

With French doors opening to her pool and gardens, copper pots gleaming on an industrial rack over the sleek kitchen island, and Cindy's roly-poly Labradors, Dingo and Cole, snoring in the sun, the vibe, like her renowned cooking style, is simple yet hip, elegant but unfussy—and very California. As Cindy, who's only 5'2" but grabs your attention with her deadpan Minnesota delivery, says, “If I didn't live here, I'd want to live in a place exactly like this.”

It's a nice place to be a guest, too. Cindy, 53, is so warm and genuinely gracious (“Can I get you a glass of wine? Beer? A cocktail?” she says, opening cherrywood cabinets. “Oh, and you have to try these walnuts”) that it's easy to see why customers have been returning to her San Francisco Bay Area restaurants for 25 years.

Long before star chefs such as Thomas Keller discovered the culinary possibilities of wine country, Cindy was making confit of local goose and slicing heirloom tomatoes from the same backyard gardens she still uses to fuel her restaurant menus. Her authentic, seasonal, hyperlocal aesthetic—“We're talking Persian limes grown outside my bedroom window,” she says—helped put the region's cuisine on par with whatever the Mondavis and others were uncorking down the road. “It was this idea that the food should be as good and local as the wine,” she says of her original concept. “Nobody was really thinking that back then.”

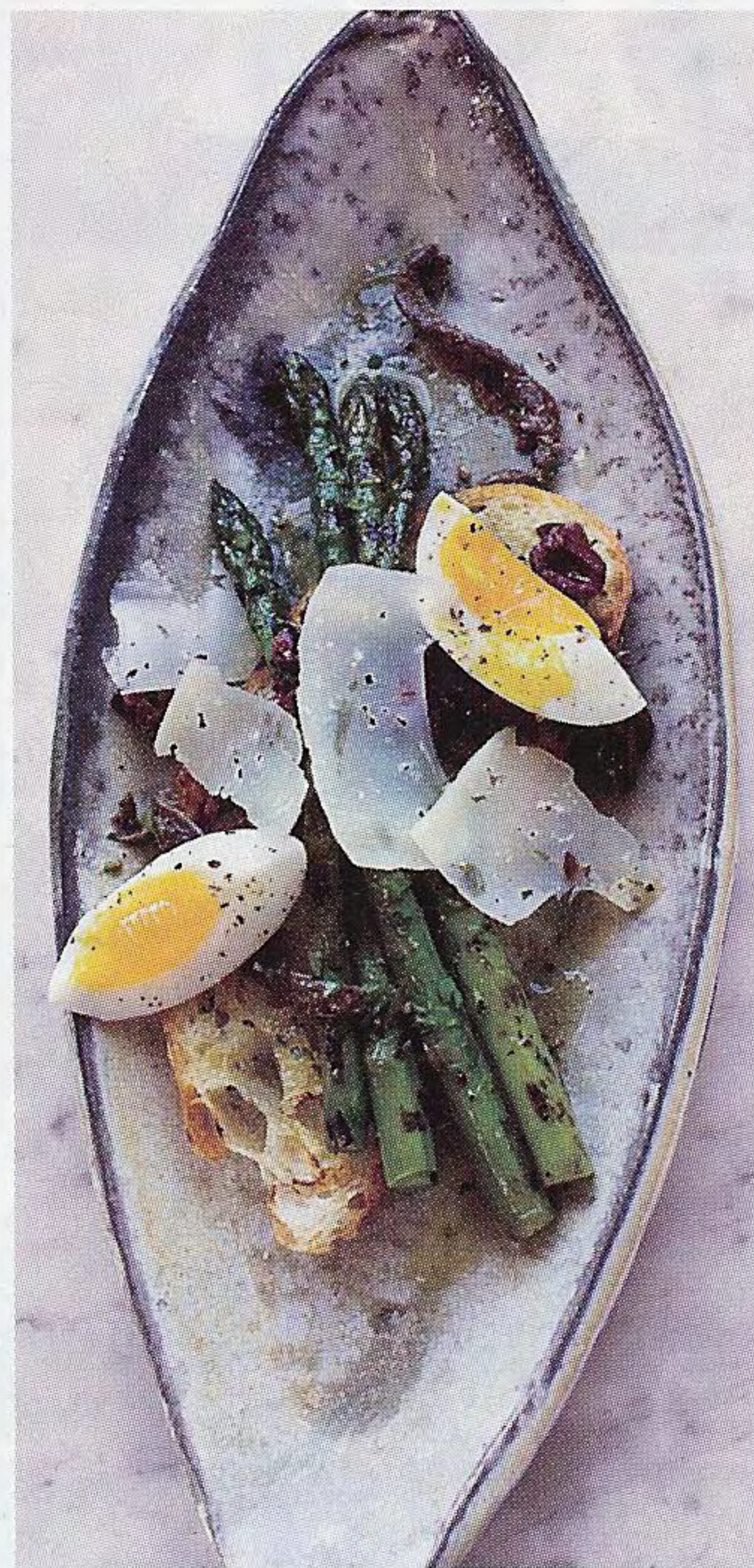
After a few too many childhood winters in suburban Minneapolis, Cindy, who trained at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, moved west and opened Mustards Grill in Napa in 1983. Among the region's very first serious restaurants, Mustards (think Cordon Bleu meets California farmers' market) was conceived as a place “where winemakers could come in wearing their boots and sit down with some table wine and get truly great food,” Cindy says. She has since been involved in more than a dozen Bay Area restaurants, including Tra Vigne, Bix, and the famous Fog City Diner, where she paired cheeseburgers with Champagne. Her latest Napa establishments are Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen, an upscale home-cooking (with Latin flair) sort of place, and Go Fish, a bustling seafood restaurant, both in St. Helena. In her precious spare time, Cindy makes ceramic serving pieces for her restaurants in a shed behind her house and has written four cookbooks including, most recently, *Cindy Pawlcyn's Appetizers*.

“Fortunately, I have a home where I can pull back from it all and just relax with my husband or entertain friends,” says Cindy, referring to John Watanabe, a human resources executive she married last May after meeting him a year earlier on eHarmony. It's the second marriage for both, but they still act like honeymooners. Cindy's eyes twinkle as she describes weekends spent camping in the canvas-walled guest cabin 500 feet from the main house. “We'll pack a suitcase and everything,” she says. The tentlike bungalow has an outdoor shower and sink, wood floors painted with koi fish and dragons, and a cedar-plank deck, which Cindy festoons with candles when the couple kick back to watch the stars. “It's my Minnesota dock in the middle of the forest,” she says.

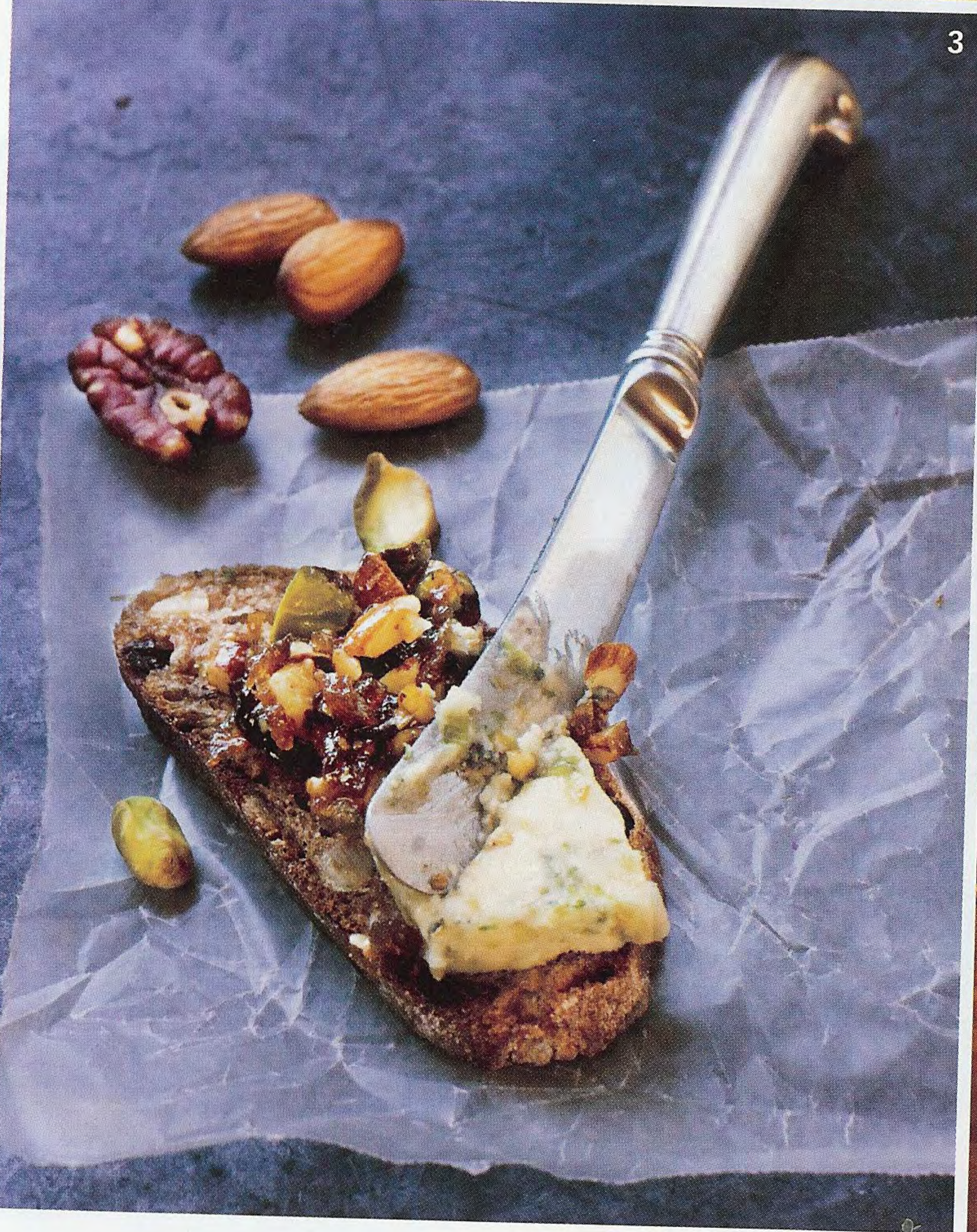
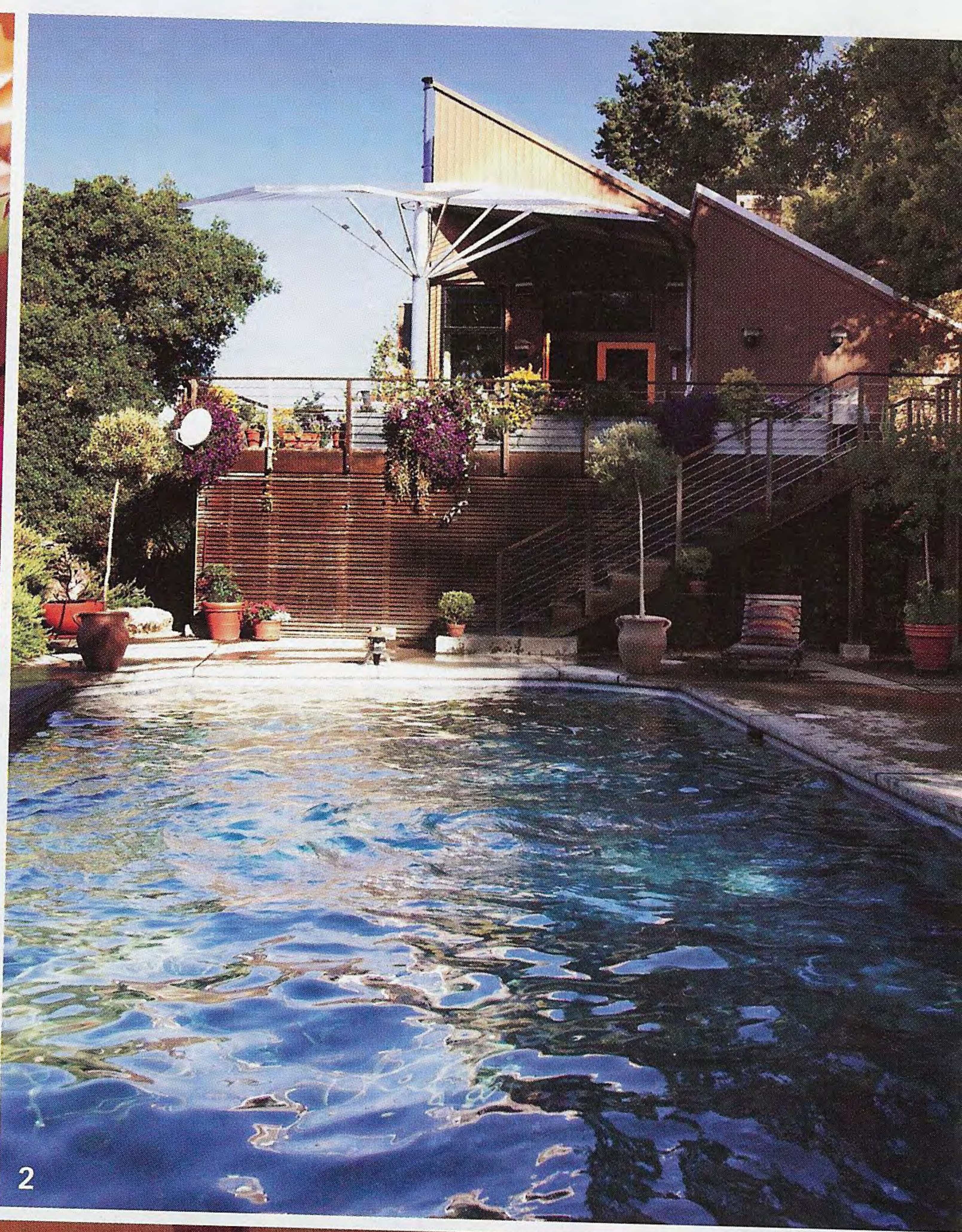
Cindy had dreamed of a house (and a life) like this—“a place in the woods with a pool was always the fantasy,” she says, taking me outside to the saltwater pool where she, John, and the dogs swim on warm mornings under Douglas firs. But the house and the setting weren't always so idyllic. Cindy bought the property in 1989 at a time when she was so consumed with the business of being a chef that the joy had gone out of her cooking. “I was working so many hours, I had no life,” she says, but adds that she now understands the reason: “I was trying to escape my marriage.”

Leading me along a curving path through her one-and-a-half-

acre garden, passing baseball-size red onions, shimmering English peas, and the plumpest figs I've ever seen, Cindy admits her first decade in the house “was an absolute nightmare. My first husband was very antisocial, and a pack rat on top of it,” she says, plucking a Meyer lemon from a tree for me to sniff. “When we bought the house, it was essentially a weekend home with one big room, and it remained like that for a long time. The closets were narrow, the lighting was horrendous, and the bathroom was so tiny she would “sit on the toilet and bump my knees against the shower.” But the kitchen was the biggest disaster. “All we had were two ▶



THE DELICIOUS LIFE
Grilled asparagus with fresh eggs, black olives, and shaved dry Jack cheese (inset), served on one of Cindy's handmade ceramic plates, makes an enticing spring appetizer. **Opposite page: 1.** Artifacts from around the world fill the house: here, a mask found in Oaxaca, a West African “medicine man” necklace, an antique French pitcher. **2.** “I like to swim in the morning,” says Cindy of her gunite, black-bottomed pool. “When it's really hot, I'll just jump in first thing and then take an outdoor shower.” **3.** A terrine of Roaring 40s blue cheese smeared on walnut bread and topped with honey-nut sauce is a Pawlcyn party special. **4.** The serene bedroom is filled with light (pouring in from ample windows and a skylight) and “books, books, books!” says Cindy. At the foot of the bed are Ashanti stools from Ghana. **Bedding, Home Treasures. Throw, Textillery Weavers.**



WORLD BEAT
Cindy's casually chic living room holds a trove of global treasures. The red Howdah chair from Thailand (right) is traditionally used for riding elephants. The antique Yoruba Egungun mask (foreground) is from Nigeria, the rugs are

Afghan kilims, and the teak table and bench are Indonesian. Over the fireplace is the mixed media *Untitled*, by Minnesota artist Stephen Hartman—“the first piece of art I ever purchased,” says Cindy. The orange-and-cream pillows by NV add a shot of brightness.





SPRING AWAKENING
Individual buttermilk pudding cakes with fresh strawberry sauce and chantilly cream (above left) are a graceful endnote to a seasonal meal. "I've been making these since I was 16," says Cindy. "They're relatively healthy, and I like the colors." The teaspoons are from her collection of sterling silver. Cindy's cookbook library (above right) comprises roughly 4,000 volumes—everything from M.F.K. Fisher to Julia Child to Marcella Hazan to José Andrés—and is organized by regions of the world.

electric burners and an electric griddle," Cindy says. "If I wanted to do any serious cooking, I'd have to go outside and fire up the barbecue—even in winter."

The makeover of the entire house that she commissioned in 2000 fixed all that. The kitchen, now larger than any other room in the house, is the centerpiece that exemplifies Cindy's plainspoken sophistication. Under high, angled ceilings of exposed timber, it's one of those spaces that invite you to participate. The countertops—in cherry, stainless steel, zinc, and Carrera marble—are set low to accommodate Cindy's small frame, and there's plenty of room for friends. "Parties tend to start and end in the kitchen," she says. "The trick is to put people to work as they walk in the door. Someone's sautéing olives, someone's taking bread out of the oven, someone's pouring wine. I get their hands busy, and the conversation flows from there."

Cindy's parties are all about the flow. "People start to fidget if they're stuck at a table all night," she says. She'll roll a wooden buffet cart onto the deck overlooking the pool to serve favorite appetizers. In spring, she might dress up grilled asparagus with soft-boiled eggs, oil-cured black olives, and



shaved Vella dry Jack cheese. "The cheese is from right up the coast, and I'm very much about keeping food simple, local, and happy. Plus, when the asparagus is warm, the cheese melts and...mmm."

As dusk sets in, Cindy will call her guests into the living room, with its panoramic views of Mount Veeder and Mount St. John, across the valley. There's more food, of course: perhaps a terrine of Roaring 40s blue cheese alongside homemade walnut bread and honey-nut sauce ("It's like picnic food for cocktail hour," she says with a laugh), and local halibut with new potatoes, leeks, and spring garlic aioli. A fittingly seasonal coda might be a buttermilk pudding cake with fresh strawberry sauce.

Her living room, highlighted by a wide, hearthlike fireplace, mixes unfinished woods and brushed concrete to give the interior an air of understated chic. "You can spill a drink without it being a big deal," Cindy says. Her sister Mary, who sells Asian and African art, added exotic touches like Moroccan hanging lamps, Yoruban masks from Nigeria, Balinese shadow puppets, and, in a nook behind the dining table, an ornate Afghani camel saddle that's been re-invented as a storage unit. ▶

CINDY DESCRIBES WEEKENDS SPENT CAMPING IN THE **CANVAS-WALLED GUEST CABIN** 500 FEET FROM THE MAIN HOUSE. "WE'LL PACK A SUITCASE AND EVERYTHING."



Up a short flight of stairs is the couple's bedroom, a jewel box of a retreat with cherrywood floors, a modish black-metal fireplace, delicate Chinese furnishings, and windows behind and over the bed that look out onto the trees. "When it's windy, these massive pinecones drop down onto the skylight and scare the living heck out of me," Cindy says. A second bedroom was converted into a library for her extraordinary collection of cookbooks from around the world. She has close to 4,000 volumes—so many, they fill the library's built-in, floor-to-ceiling birchwood bookshelves and spill over into another tent cabin she uses as an office. Cindy, whose knowledge of culinary techniques, flavors, and history can best be described as encyclopedic, has developed her own system to keep track of titles. "It starts with French," she explains, pulling out Julia Child's classic *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, "then the shelves go to Spanish, Italian, Greek, Middle Eastern, and I basically work my way east around the planet."

Dingo and Cole wag their way in, signaling to Cindy that it's time for their afternoon walk—and time for her to think about getting back to work. These days, she puts in one shift a week at Mustards, one at Go Fish, and one at Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen. "Weekends I'll go wherever I'm most needed," she says, "and the rest of the time is for writing, pottery, and for John." It's a schedule she loves, though it does present its challenges. With the sun glinting through the trees and a golden glow spreading across her face, Cindy looks out to the valley she's served all these years. "The hardest part about this house," she says, "is sometimes I actually have to leave it and go make a living." **Q**

HILLTOP HIDEAWAY
Two invitingly roomy backyard tent cabins from Sweetwater Bungalows, complete with cedar plank decks and an outdoor shower and sink, serve as a guest bungalow and (left) houses the overflow

from Cindy's cookbook collection. The painting in the bedroom (opposite page) is by local Sonoma artist Chester Arnold. Meyer lemons from Cindy's garden sit on a delicate Chinese rosewood chair. For details see Shop Guide.

