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WHITE *Diamond*

The Mayo house is a glittering gem overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

BY MERYL SCHOENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK TANNER
STYLED BY JACQUELINE @MONTRAVEL

WITH ITS GLASS WALLS AND 12 SKYLIGHTS, THE MAYO HOUSE STANDS LIKE A MULTIFACETED DIAMOND REFLECTING THE SUN, THE SPARKLING SAPPHIRE OCEAN ITS FLAWLESS SETTING.

Rising up from its perch high above sea level, the home is a vision in white, both inside and out. While that might strike some as sounding stark and monochromatic, the result is anything but. In owner Karen Mayo's artistic hands, there are nearly as many shades of white throughout the house as there are grains of sand on the beach below it.

Karen, a professional photographer, knows the beauty of natural light. She harnesses its rays to cast a subtle glow in each room as well as on the clients who pose in her home-based photography studio.

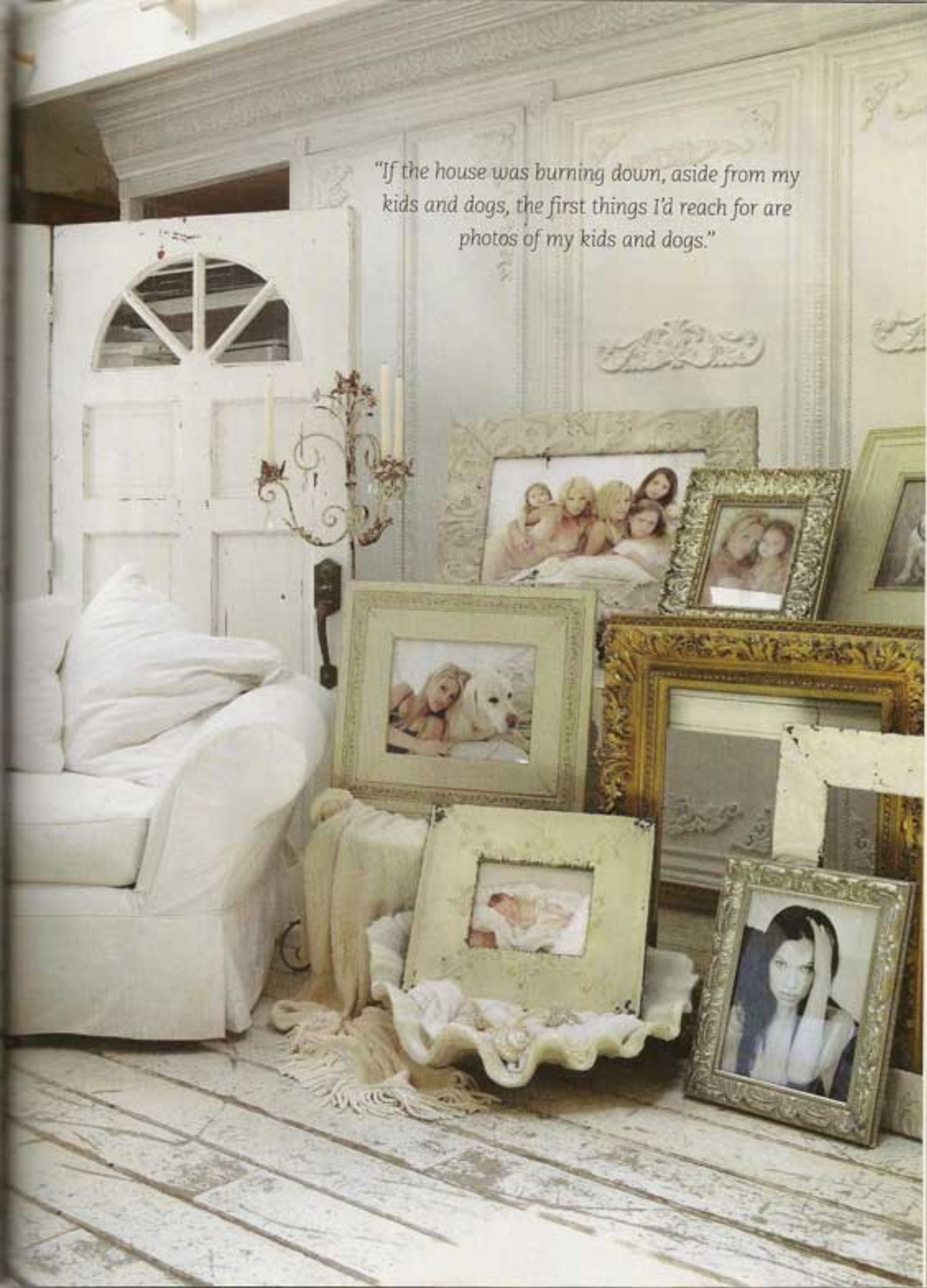
"We installed 12 skylights: six in the studio and six in the rest of the house," Karen says. "Most homes have sunlight in certain rooms and for only part of the day. I wanted our home to have natural light in all the rooms throughout the day."


Her knowledge of photography also helped her make the most of the sunlight by adding accessories that reflect it. "I put chandeliers in every room, and the crystals reflect the light," she says. "I also added large mirrors and lots of glass—windows, doors, hardware, tiles and decorations—that let the sun shine through."

Karen, who shares the home with her family—husband Gordon, daughters Courtney and Kyndra, and their dogs Brooklyn, Chloe and Madison—has lived in Laguna Beach, California, for 21 years. She felt an immediate attraction to the 1946 island-style abode, even though she had committed to buying a different house.

Opposite: In her studio, Karen displays photos in unusual frames found at flea markets and estate sales. She also sells frames to clients for their photos.

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A beautiful armoire that functions as the family's stylish entertainment unit, housing the TV, stereo and DVD player, is the focal point of the sunroom. A sideboard displays family photos and a topiary.



"We were already at escrow on another house, but when I saw this one I loved its architecture, layout and extra-large street-to-street lot. It also had an Old Hollywood style that I related to as a third-generation Hollywood native," she says. "My husband was not thrilled that we lost quite a bit of money by letting the other house go, but he came around," she says with a smile.

The first renovations they made were in the kitchen and master bathroom. "The tile in the kitchen had been cream with dark grout; we changed the countertops to marble and the backsplash to stone-colored tiles, raised the ceiling and added a skylight," Karen says. "We also installed hand-carved cabinetry, stone floors and a bay window where there is good light, so our orchids grow well there. We enlarged the bathroom and added stone, tile and a skylight."

Other renovations that made a big difference in the home's appearance were bleaching the wood floors white throughout the house and raising the ceiling six feet in the living room. The couple also added rooms to increase the space and improve their quality of life.

"The house was built as a vacation beach cottage," Karen says. "It was intended to be used as a second home, but we had to make it more of a functional house. It had been a two-bedroom, two-bath structure; we made it into a four-bedroom, four-bath."

When asked which is her favorite room, Karen chooses her studio, which was created by converting one of the home's two garages. "The concept of having my studio at home started when my daughters were born. I wanted to

Another area of the sunroom features a sideboard topped with antique candlesticks and a box Karen found at a flea market that she uses to store DVDs. Two framed architectural mirrors complete the look.



work at home to be with them, so we converted the upper garage to a photographic studio," Karen explains. "We put in six skylights so I could shoot in natural light, and installed a window seat and white wood floors." She also provides a wardrobe for her clients. Many of her subjects are children and babies, who she dresses in vintage-style clothing and accessories. Karen, who has been a photographer for 20 years, also does her clients' makeup and hair, sometimes with the help of an assistant.

Karen describes her interior design style as neo-classical, an eclectic mix of vintage and new, structured and not overly feminine. The color palette she chose was inspired by nature, specifically sand and water. There is no carpeting in any of the rooms. A hint of color is added with a celadon leather sofa and pillows. Decorative accessories are a blend of family antiques, flea market finds and estate sale items. While she doesn't consider herself a collector, Karen does display three generations of black-and-white family photos in groupings. She gives credit to home stylist Valerie Spelman for "making sense" of her belongings by showcasing them in their best light, such as grouping family photos on sideboards rather than having them scattered through the house.

"Valerie helped me balance my purchases," Karen says. "I had 12 urns in the house; Valerie said I only needed six and placed the other six outside, then she put orchids in the urns. I had a big urn with a lid in the bathroom; Valerie took the lid off it, rested it next to

Top left: An elegant placesetting on the dining room table features dishes from the Horchow catalog. A napkin ring from Neiman Marcus adds sparkle and glamour.

Left: Placing a white flower in a glass bowl softens the décor and brings the outdoors indoors.



An antique table that belonged to Karen's husband Gordon's grandmother anchors the dining room. The chairs are bleached wood with suede seats. Their rounded backs are upholstered with a nailhead trim.

the urn and put orchids and ivy plants inside the urn. I think it's a good idea to invest in a home stylist because if you have great things, a stylist will show them to their advantage."

Among the accessories found in the Mayo home are sconces—some electrical, others with candles. Family photos are displayed in exquisite picture frames, some of which Karen had made from old tin. "I look for silver and pewter frames at flea markets and have refinished some as well," she says. "I also love chunky damask frames." In a melding of home and business, Karen offers unique picture frames to her clients for their photographs.

Karen is particularly fond of her dining room set; the table had belonged to her husband's grandmother. The chairs are bleached wood with suede seats and rounded backs upholstered in nailhead-trimmed damask. Other notable furnishings are two columns flanking the windows and a pair of French side tables in the living room on which antique candlesticks and photos are displayed. "I buy everything in pairs, such as two stone vases and a pair of cherub statues holding bowls in which I place seasonal ornaments, such as pine cones," Karen explains.

However, of all her home's stylish accessories, Karen points to her family photos as her most cherished possessions. "If the house was burning down, aside from my kids and dogs, the first things I'd reach for are the photos of my kids and dogs," she says. "Photos before furniture," she adds definitively.

When the family moved in, the walls

Right: Vignettes in the living room showcase glass bottles and shells, and bottles with leaded glass crosses from McKee & Company.

Opposite: The living room is filled with sumptuous furnishings and interesting accessories.





were yellow. Karen faux-finished them in sand and taupe. Then the oak floors were sanded and bleached white.

The home's exterior was also upgraded. "It was the ugliest house on the street," Karen recalls. "The outside was pebbles and concrete. We built a courtyard with two outdoor fireplaces and added lots of pale pink bougainvillea, hydrangeas and ivy as well as roses, gardenias and impatiens—all in white. For architectural elements, we put two columns in the garden, stone and iron urns, and stone benches. We consider it a ceilingless room."

Karen enjoys relaxing among the fragrant flowers, listening to the birds and the flowing water from the fish pond. The couple also added a raised swimming pool, inspired by a trip to Italy the year before, where they saw many above-ground pools that allowed for extra seating. The edge of the pool is limestone with quilted pale-pink tile in a diamonds-and-dots design. Urns filled with ivy and trumpet flowers are placed at each corner of the pool. Outdoor furnishings include a daybed near one of the fireplaces and a 20-foot granite bench on the veranda overlooking the ocean.

"We have a stone wall around the house, but thanks to our home's high elevation, even with a six-foot wall we still have a view of the ocean," Karen says. "The wall allows for privacy and security, but because of the three-level slope, it's private without being confining."

The outdoor space is perfect for entertaining. "I have an annual party for my clients, with pony rides for the kids and a barbecue," Karen says. Guests use words such as "ethereal," "dreamy" and "heaven" to describe her home.

In the master bedroom, wood-carved cornices are fitted with sheer draperies to let the light in. The bedding is cotton and silk matelasse. Venetian plastered walls and an antique chandelier add Old World elegance.



INSIDER TRADING

Karen Mayo and stylist Valerie Spelman share their decorating tips.

■ "As a home and garden stylist, my focus is to work with the client's existing furnishings and make suggestions to enhance their homes with the things they love so it reflects their style, not mine," Valerie says.

■ "By grouping similarly themed items, there is more visual impact," Valerie explains. "Using things in pairs helps to balance out a room. Karen loves distressed pieces such as urns; I moved some outside and filled others with flowering branches, plants and orchids to bring nature inside the house. By adding these elements, the interior and exterior flow together."

■ Distressed furniture and accessories can be picked up at flea markets and garage sales inexpensively and repurposed to give the room its own personality.

■ "I placed large columns on either side of the windows to frame the view of the Pacific Ocean," Valerie says. "Then I rearranged the furniture to create more comfortable conversation areas and better traffic flow. The goal was to showcase Karen's beautiful things and love of photography, and the outcome reflects her style and taste."

■ Karen says one of her favorite tips is to use "the magic of paint." She says, "If you have a piece that you've tired of, use muted colors to make it look aged. Apply pewter paint to crevices to create an aged look." Karen used that process on her sideboards and bathroom vanity. "I was about to get rid of those pieces but reinvented them that way."

■ Karen thinks of hardware as the jewelry of the house. She inexpensively replaced the handles on the French doors and kitchen cabinets for a fresh look. "I found \$16 glass door knobs at Anthropologie," she reveals.

For more information on Valerie Spelman, call (949) 218-8022 or visit vignettesofrefinement.com.



And while it is mainly thought of as reflecting the sun, the Mayo home had its own moment in the sun a few years back when a production crew descended on it to film the TV series "Laguna Beach." Daughter Kyndra, who attended Laguna Beach High School at the time, auditioned for and won a role in the show, and the home's interior and exterior rooms provided the backdrop for many of the scenes. It was only fitting that a home that bestowed light for so many years finally had the spotlight on itself.

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Opposite: Karen considers the outdoor area a "ceilingless room." She often has photo shoots on the daybed near the pool.



