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758

PAGES

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FASHION  
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A 9/11 SURVIVOR  
LOOKS BACK

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COLOR  
ON YOUR  
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YOUR BODY

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AT THE MOST  
ROMANTIC  
WEDDING OF  
THE YEAR

MADE IN CHINA  
THE EXPLOSIVE RISE OF


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### OUTER REACH

A catmint-edged artificial-grass walk with rose arches that frame the view of the wraparound terrace. Madison Cox designed the planting with Claude's niece Samantha Schlumberger.

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# ROOFTOP PLAYHOUSE

Claude Wasserstein has designed every detail of her Manhattan penthouse to create an exuberant, fun-filled home for her blended family. Plum Sykes reports. Photographed by François Halard.



**Y**ou could call her the anti-trophy wife. Claude Wasserstein, former spouse of the late financier and iconic New Yorker Bruce Wasserstein, is an ex-CBS news producer, a supersmart, raven-haired Parisian who attended the Sorbonne and the École du Louvre. She recently cofounded a thriving business, Susie's Supper Club, selling healthy, family-friendly frozen meals, but you'll rarely hear her discussing its success. Her reputation as a devoted, involved mother is legendary: She's the type who, when her kids say, "Can we please go and see the Viking mounds in Sweden?," will say, "Sure." She has one of the most spec-

tacular apartments in New York, but she's so private that close friends and family are the most regular visitors.

Claude Becker married Bruce Wasserstein in 1996, when she gave up working in television to embark on the undeniably full-time job of being Mrs. Bruce Wasserstein. They were a fashionable but low-key, intellectual couple. They spent weekends in their Hamptons beach house, where they were known for throwing big, convivial lunches and barbecues that brought together family, friends, and business associates. Although Claude certainly mingles enough in the Manhattan social

scene to be very visible—"I dress up in black tie every other month" (often in exquisite Nina Ricci or Oscar de la Renta), she tells me later—she has retained an alluring mystery by avoiding the cameras rather than courting them.

I meet Claude on a temperamental New York day that can't decide whether to rain or shine. Still, when I step out of the elevator straight into the drawing room of a penthouse with wraparound windows and almost aerial views of Central Park and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the weather doesn't much matter.

Dressed in a black Givenchy blouse and black pants, Claude shows me into the cozy library, where I sip a latte while perching on a comfy sofa upholstered in navy herringbone tweed linen, positioned in the huge bay window. Polished walnut bookcases are perfectly arranged with biographies of everyone from Queen Caroline to Henry Kissinger and Diana Vreeland. The walls are upholstered in a Moroccan-inspired Robert Kime linen printed with red and blue poppies, and the shades on the wall sconces are a navy-and-white ikat. Individual touches like a carved camel that serves as a side table to one of the Robert Kime armchairs, black rock-crystal candleholders, and silver vases of irises add character to the interior, which has a flat-screen TV on one wall. Despite being absolutely immaculate, the library is a lesson in relaxed chic.

Let's discuss, I propose to Claude, having six Wasserstein children in your life and simultaneously having a house this neat. She lives here with Jack (twelve) and Dash (eleven), her two sons with Bruce, and Lucy (eleven) the daughter of Claude's late sister-in-law, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Wendy Wasserstein. (At Wendy's request, Bruce and Claude adopted Lucy in 2006 when Wendy died, aged 53.) Bruce's three grown-up children from his previous marriage are also very much included in family life. "Actually, there's hot chocolate all over these couches," says Claude. "We snuggle in here and watch movies and eat popcorn." The house, she says, has been designed with children in mind as much as adults. It's rare that this combination works, but somehow, with the help of friends like interior designers Jacques Grange, Jeffrey Bilhuber, and Daniel Romualdez, she has pulled it off.

Take the living room, which must be 30 feet long: The walls might be upholstered in the most extraordinary linen printed with exotic golden stars, but all the floors are covered in the squishiest, softest woven green-and-cream ikat carpeting—wall to wall. "I wanted it to be all about the kids running around barefoot all the time, so there are no hardwood floors for them to slip on." Everything is family-friendly: There is a huge, loungey, tobacco-colored silk-velvet sofa made by Romualdez; chic little button-backed fauteuils upholstered in lime-green silk jacquard; small sofas covered in

#### THE BRIGHT SIDE

"I feel like I have a suburban house in the city with a cottage garden," says Claude (LEFT), on a terrace lined with boxes of pink foxglove, snapdragons, lavender, and mint. OPPOSITE PAGE: Splashes of sunny yellow are a theme of the house. In a hallway, a sculptural console by Alexandre Logé and a painting by Rachel Hovnanian. Portraits by Sebastian Kim.





chocolate-and-white geometric prints; a gold palm tree in a far corner. "I like lots of color," says Claude. "I wanted this to be a fun place where the kids can feel good, and it's not too serious." Even the art in the room has a sense of humor—there are exuberant plates by Picasso on the wall, a Cocteau sketch, and a simple Matisse line drawing, which, Claude tells me, "reminds me of the children's book *Harold and the Purple Crayon*."

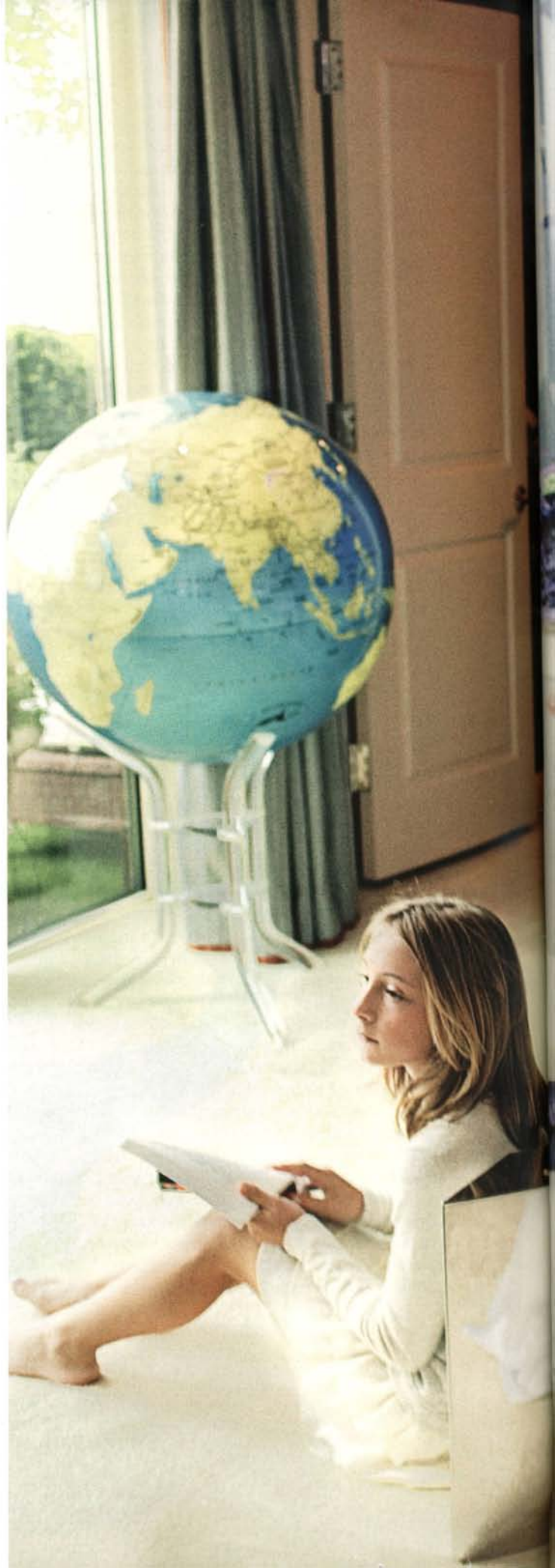
Claude bought the penthouse almost three years ago as a raw space. It was, she says, like a new spec house. It had lower ceilings than the Fifth Avenue apartment she shared with Bruce, which had been grandly decorated by Jacques Grange. All the window frames were pretty basic white plastic. "But I walked in and my eye went straight to the horizon," she remembers, leading me out to the extraordinary terrace with its spectacular view of the city. "I'm French, so I still have a tourist thing going on of 'Oh! The New York skyline! It's so cool!'"

**T**he terrace runs around each floor of the duplex. Madison Cox designed the planting with Claude's niece Samantha Schlumberger. The terraces are edged in soft, cloudlike formations of box hedge to echo the silhouette of the trees below in Central Park. Huge planters bloom with river birch trees, while at the base of the trees Cox planted puffy clumps of fraises des bois. There are allées of climbing roses, which look almost surreal against the outline of Manhattan. In a sunny spot where the family eats breakfast, a weeping cherry grows from the middle of the round wooden table—a truly charming touch. Elsewhere are boxes brimming with pink foxgloves and snapdragons, and yards and yards of lavender and mint. There's a vegetable garden off the kitchen where everything from asparagus to tomatoes grows abundantly. It's all set off by a very convincing artificial-grass lawn. "I feel like I have a suburban house in the city with a cottage garden," says Claude. "I grew up in France, and I love flowers. I love that I can look out and feel I am in a garden with the New York landscape behind it."

Suddenly, clouds start to gather. Claude ushers me up some steps and into the only room in the house that is designated a child-free space. Claude's "secret study" is a tiny room with a fireplace, a long corner couch, and walls upholstered in Muriel Brandolini paisley cotton. She uses this room to meet with girlfriends and have long chats. A great friend is her business partner Marcia Mishaan, with whom she speaks almost daily. "Claude is not only extremely bright intellectually, she is very emotionally intelligent," Mishaan observes. "That is a great asset to have in a friend, and she gives great advice if you have a problem."

Claude's home certainly has been deeply thought through to bring as much happiness into family life as possible. "You have to be playful with your children and your life. Maybe it's because we've had some serious issues that I want as much joy as I can have here," says Claude with a sigh, alluding to the pressure of raising a blended family alone, and one that has suffered the loss of both a mother and a father.

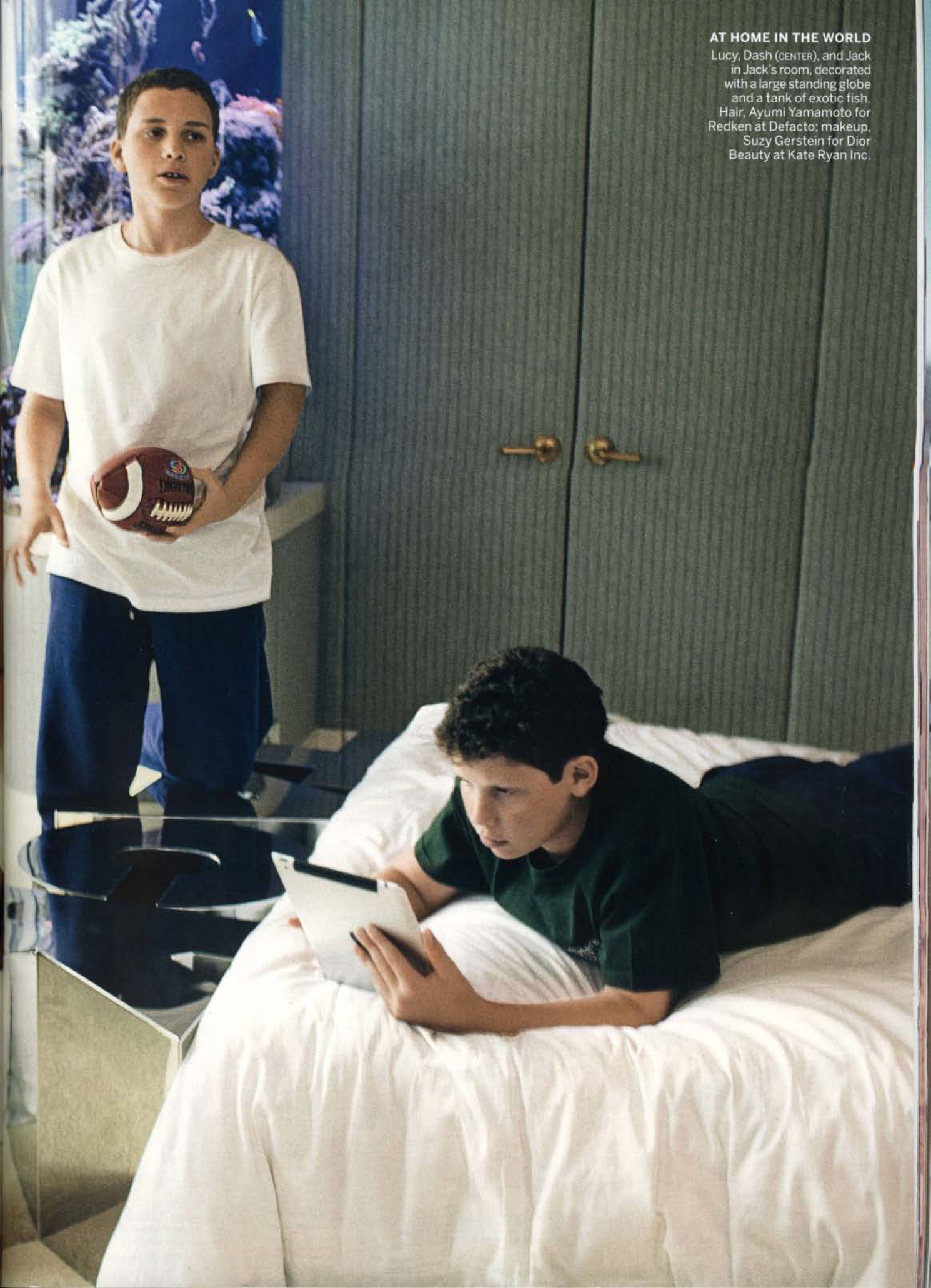
In her pursuit of a joyful environment, Claude has splashes of yellow all over the house to make it feel sunny. The long hallways at the back of the apartment are painted primrose





**AT HOME IN THE WORLD**

Lucy, Dash (CENTER), and Jack  
in Jack's room, decorated  
with a large standing globe  
and a tank of exotic fish.  
Hair, Ayumi Yamamoto for  
Redken at Defacto; makeup,  
Suzy Gerstein for Dior  
Beauty at Kate Ryan Inc.

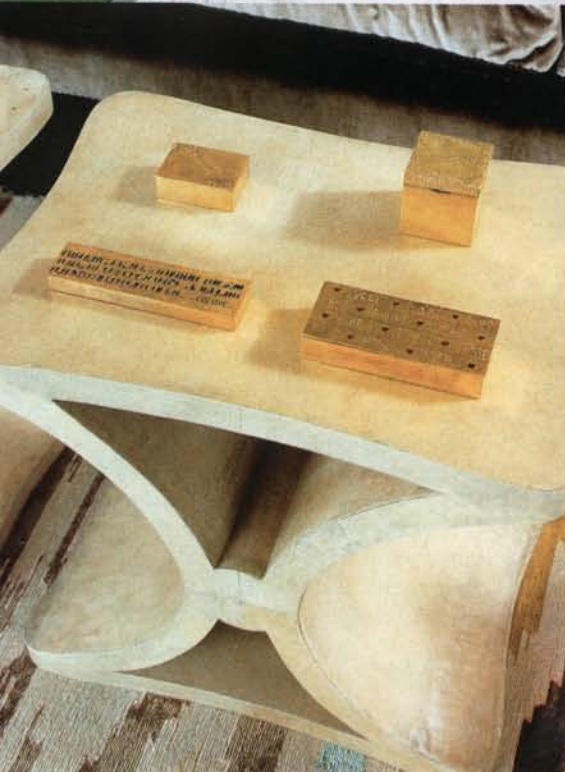






#### POWER PRINTS

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Lucy's bedroom, with a draped bed in Garden Pattern fabric by Hungry Palette, Stonington CT. A custom wool-and-silk ikat carpet by Rug & Kilim, NYC, a Daniel Romualdez sofa, and mid-century Line Vautrin boxes decorate the drawing room.





# VIEW FROM THE TOP

"I wanted this to be a place where the kids can feel good," says Claude. A Suzani cloth is draped over the table in the outdoor dining room.



yellow "because I hate long dark corridors. They scare me." The art is witty and amusing, whether the Julian Opie hologram on a landing or the giant silhouettes on canvas of her children, which Claude ordered on the Internet, that hang above the staircase. The bathrooms are all made from different kinds of dark stone; for her children's bathrooms she found one that contains fossils called "*Jurassic Park* marble. They love it." Her son Dash's room has a basketball net in it, and Jack's has a tank full of exotic fish that he likes to watch as he falls asleep.

Despite the seeming perfection of her life, Claude sits me down at the end of our tour and says, "I love the really ordinary, precious moments with my kids. When you have kids, it's such a responsibility to make them as happy as possible, but they also need to be aware of real life." Claude's adventurous trips with the children are part of her effort to help them disconnect from the extreme Manhattan lifestyle. "I feel like you get a bigger bite out of life living here, but you have to balance it out with escapes." When they travel, the kids take five tops, five bottoms, and five pairs of pajamas,

Claude tells me, adding, "I say, 'That's it; we're traveling, we're not in a fashion show.'"

Alongside her family responsibilities, Claude sits on many charity boards, including the Child Mind Institute, the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creative Ability, and WNET Channel 13. "I pick my causes carefully because I have to be very committed to them in terms of time," she says. It's not surprising that Claude's great friend Lillian Stauffenberg calls her "my example person. I always tell people, 'Claude did it this way, Claude did it that way.'"

Claude might have a sprawling, modern family, but she is a pretty old-fashioned mother. Sunday evenings are devoted to big family dinners where the children get to choose the food. While they're driven to school each morning, Claude reads aloud to them in the car. "We read all the *Harry Potters* that way. It took two years," she says. On school nights, after homework is done, it's dinner and bed for the children. "I'm pretty strict," she says. "We've just gone through a *Downton Abbey* phase," she adds. "My kids are still using that, and when I'm tough on them they say, 'You're like Miss O'Brien'—the evil maid!" □