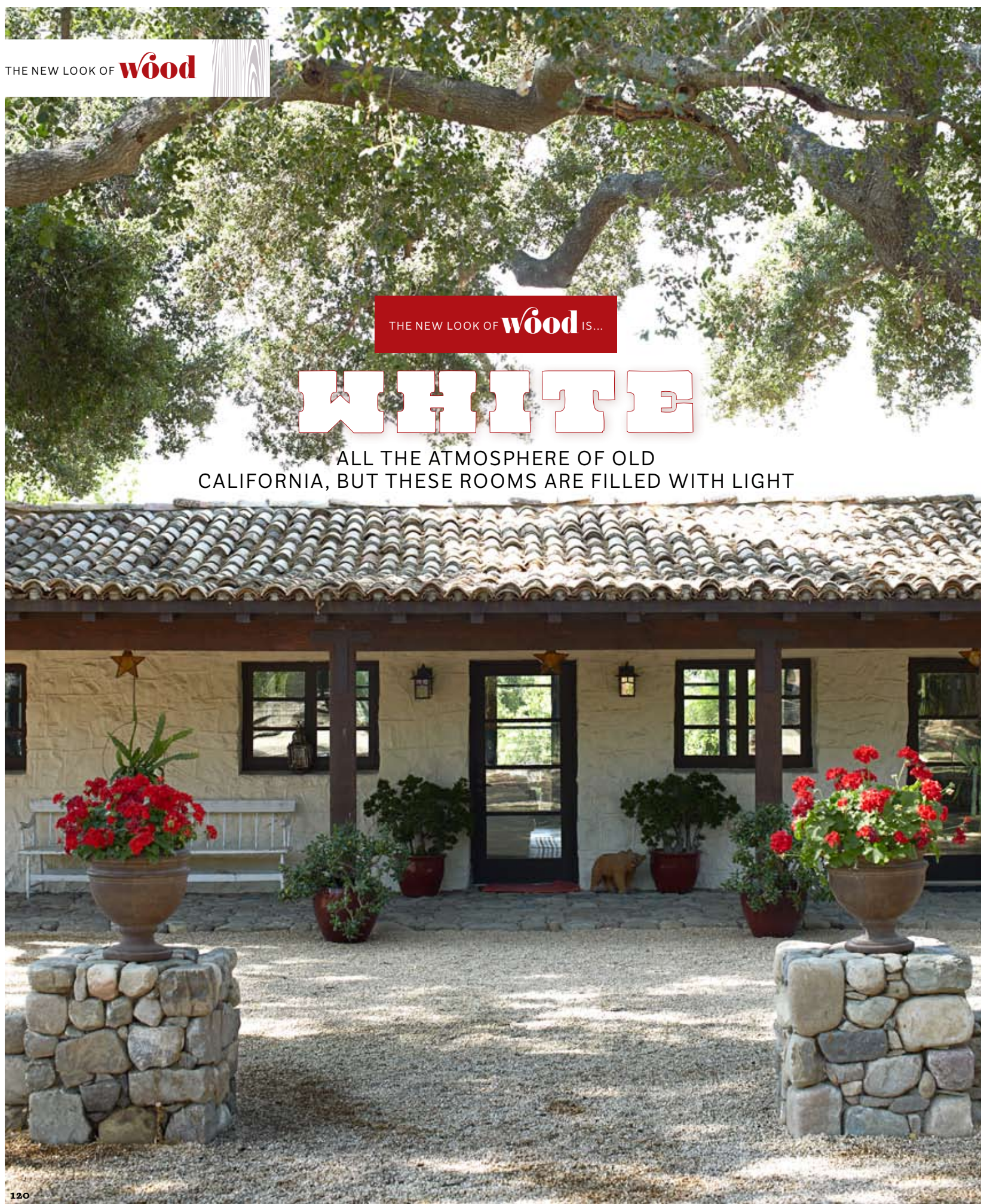


THE NEW LOOK OF **wood**

THE NEW LOOK OF **wood** IS...

WHITE

ALL THE ATMOSPHERE OF OLD CALIFORNIA, BUT THESE ROOMS ARE FILLED WITH LIGHT



Antique Navajo rugs form a path on the front porch of designer Kelley McDowell's 1920 farmhouse in Ojai, California. She gathered the stones from her property to build the porch: "It looks like a 3,000-year-old road in Rome." OPPOSITE: A lofty old oak towers above the classic Spanish-tile roof.

Interior design by
KELLEY McDOWELL

Interview by
JAMES SERVIN

Photographs by
VICTORIA PEARSON



"This isn't a very feminine house, but women love it," McDowell says. She painted all the walls and ceilings the starkest white she could find: a Benjamin Moore primer, Super Spec Flat. Pillows on the living room sofa are by Laurel Adams Design; papier-mâché bulldogs, Animal Art Antiques. OPPOSITE: The dining room's antique table is a charming mix of birch and pine. The floor is reclaimed wood treated with Old Masters Gel Stain in Pickling White. Painted armoire from Nathan Turner.



JAMES SERVIN: First impression—your home is vibrant, cozy, and a little edgy.

KELLEY McDOWELL: I have a double life. I love to wear Prada and very precise Art Deco jewelry, but in my home I love the rustic, the primitive, the handmade. This is a 1920s Ojai farmhouse that my husband and I renovated. It's in the middle of an orange grove, under a canopy of ancient oak trees. When you open the gate, it's like stepping back in time to the California of *Chinatown*, or *The Wild Bunch*. We think of our home as an American, whimsical version of Spanish style.

The whimsy never crosses the line into cute, though.

You have to be disciplined. Cull back, cull back, cull back. Although when it comes to amenities, more is more! Maybe the fact that the floors are white turns the Spanish style on its ear. Most Spanish houses have dark brown inch-and-a-half-wide oak plank floors.

Why did you paint them white?

It's not a huge house—2,800 square feet—so I wanted it to have as much of a reflective quality as possible. You could see these floors in an industrial building, with industrial furniture on them. Or with mid-century modern.

They have a beautiful patina.

I had to have reclaimed wood, and I was freaking out, because all the reclaimed wood I found had been planed. Americans have a tendency to overdo everything. They get a great idea—'Let's reclaim this barn wood'—but then go and shave it so that it looks new. But I finally found some that had been planed on only one side. I hand-sanded every board, assembled them—they're random widths—in no particular order, and treated them with Old Masters Gel Stain in Pickling White. And that, to me, is when the house really came alive.

What was it like before?

It was almost a ruin. It was so dark, you couldn't see without the lights on in the daytime. The former owner was a tile setter, and he had tiled over doors. He tiled the front door shut! The kitchen was almost pitch-black.

He had built cabinets over the windows. **Well, you've solved that problem, haven't you? This is about as bright as it gets. I didn't know white could be so white.**

I went to a paint specialist and asked: 'What's the whitest white I could have?' He said: 'Primer.' I tried it and I loved it. It's Benja-



min Moore Super Spec Flat, an optical white, really reflective. As I was doing the house, I got obsessed with the idea of stark white with dark trim. When I told my husband I wanted to paint the windows brown, he was just going crazy. He hates brown! And brown is so easy to get wrong. But we mixed until we got it right. This brown has so much depth.

Your husband is Malcolm McDowell, the actor.

How big a part did he play in the renovation?

His English agent says that Malcolm is the king of all he surveys. That's what he does: broad sweeps of the arm and pointing at things. I'm 24 years younger, so in the begin-

ning, I think he thought I didn't know what I was doing. Now he lets me get on with it. I'm a tomboy. The first thing I learned to drive was a bulldozer. I was hands-on, and not afraid of being blown to bits. I do everything from rewiring to building lamps. I cook the turkey, he puts it on the table. Let's leave it at that.

Are both of you collectors?

Yes, especially of American primitive pieces. I also collect old pottery and Mexican religious art and objects. Antique Navajo rugs are a recent thing I've gotten into.

Navajo rugs and American flags are an unexpected mix, but the bold reds and blues and the geometrics work together beautifully.

Well, I'm not a flowery person. I worried about the flags because everyone's done them to death. But there's something about the American flag that moves me. When I look at it, I think that someone had divine intervention when they created it.

You seem to be into textiles, too, judging from the guest bedroom.

It's kind of a world of nations in that room. We've got a Suzani quilt, a kilim rug and pillows, a Shaker chair, a Mexican wood chandelier. I haven't put bulbs in it yet. Every home should have at least one thing left undone.

What's the story with the picket-fence bed in the master bedroom?

There's nothing to wax lyrical about that bed, but I do love it. It reminds me of the opening shot of *Blue Velvet*—the picket fence, the perfect American dream, cut to Dennis Hopper. In any event, Malcolm wouldn't stand for poufy, chintzy things. We have three boys, and as a family we read, watch TV, and basically live in the bedroom. You can just lie in that bed and do nothing but look out at the orange groves, and the mountains, and the big old oak trees.

No wonder you've kept your windows bare. And the bedroom and living room doors are open all the time. It's the greatest house, because we use every room in it, every day.

PRODUCED BY VICTORIA PEARSON

ABOVE: Open shelves in the kitchen hold antique Mexican and French ceramics and mugs by ceramist Karen Donleavy. OPPOSITE: McDowell put poured-concrete counters on reproduction 17th-century cabinets by Marcia Bland Brown: "The concrete is practical as well as earthy. I can set hot pans on it." The Early American hooked rugs are from East Meets West Antiques. Cast-iron urns and salt-glaze pots are from Charme d'Antan. Circa Home Living chandelier.



Religious art, stars and stripes, and Navajo rugs are surprisingly harmonious in the master bedroom. The bed was made from an old picket fence. Paintings and trunk from Mediterranean Antiques. Flag pillows and trunk from Laurel Adams Design. Rugs from Ranchfolks.



The bathroom floor is made of Ojai river rock. "It's so strong, you could build a Hyatt Regency on it," McDowell says. She designed the shower door in the style of a metal casement window. Shower faucet by Sunrise Specialty. Cast-iron tub from the Tub Connection. OPPOSITE: A Suzani quilt and kilim pillows give the guest room's Spanish Colonial-style daybed a dose of global pizzazz. The lantern is an early California cowboy lamp. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

