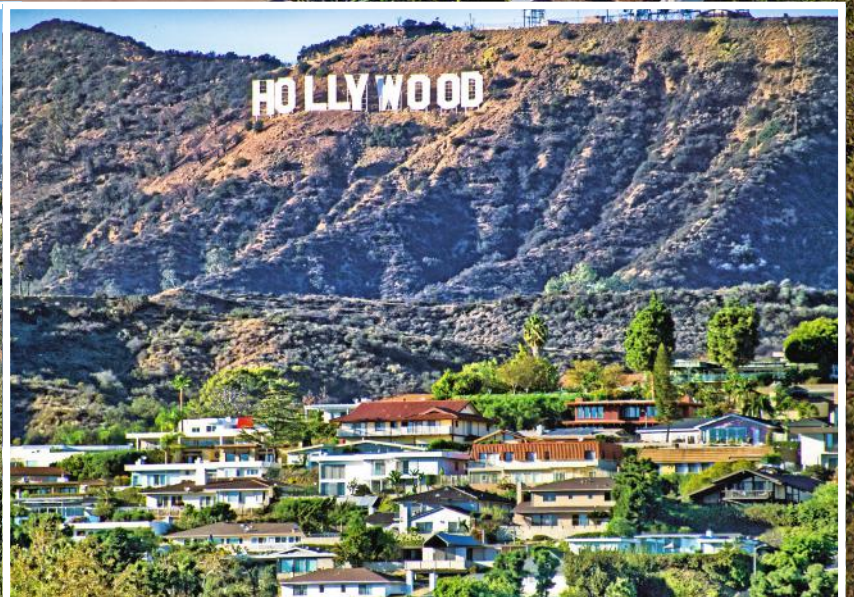




'For me, a house tells the story of the person who lives in it'





**AT HOME IN HOLLYWOOD
WITH DESIGNER TO THE STARS
KARI
WHITMAN
AS SHE REVEALS HOW
SHE SPRINKLED STARDUST
ON HER OWN HOME**

As Kari Whitman says: “For me, a house tells the story of the person who lives in it.”

And the spectacular villa in the Hollywood Hills owned by the designer to the stars tells the story of a woman totally at ease in the showbusiness world, from its colourful furnishings to its cinematic views.

Born in Boulder, Colorado, Kari moved to Los Angeles in the 1980s as a model and musician, then

quickly found success as an actress, with plenty of movie and TV credits to her name. Naturally, she also made lots of celebrity friends. “I think it’s our creative understanding that unites us,” she says.

It was a fellow star who sensed her talent for interiors. “I hated acting,” she says, “and one day, shooting a scene of *NYPD Blue*, I thought: ‘That’s it.’”

“I didn’t really have a plan B, but I’d done the 1990 movie ▶



Kari poses at her villa in the Hollywood Hills (seen from above in main photo). The Pacific Ocean can be seen from the swimming pool, which runs all along the side of the house, 5 while the two-storey property also offers stunning views of Los Angeles (left and second left)





**'Emilio Estevez said:
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wine cellar in Malibu."
It's thanks to him that
I'm where I am now'**



Kari relaxes in the main living and dining area, which opens to the outdoors. The sofa and centre table (above left) are Kari's design, with the eye-catching carpet made by a local artisan. The house also boasts a bar and entertainment area (left) on the lower floor

Men at Work with Emilio Estevez and his brother Charlie Sheen, and Emilio – who is a fabulous person and the brother I never had – said: 'I'm going to give you your first job as a designer. I want you to design a wine cellar in my house in Malibu.' It's thanks to him that I'm where I am now."

Once Emilio had given her that initial push, Kari never looked back.

In 1994, she launched her company KWI, which proved a hit, and in 2007, she found herself back on TV, this time fronting the series *Designer to the Stars: Kari Whitman*, where she was seen working her magic on the homes of the famous.

Key to her success, she says, is the rapport she builds with people. Just as many of her friends have become

clients, many of her clients have become friends.

"I try to understand them, and to tailor their home to their individual needs. That's why my projects are all different, because they reflect the personality of their owners," she says, defining her style as "eclectic self-expressionism".

With Kari's professional and

personal lives closely intertwined, there's been plenty of stardust sprinkled on both.

She met Don Johnson while working on his popular 1980s cop show *Miami Vice* and, after his split from actress Melanie Griffith, they started dating. Soon the designer became part of the family.

"One day, I was at Don's ▶



The dining table and chairs – covered in fabric by Kravet – were designed by Kari. A blue circular artwork by French sculptor Roman Feral is complemented by vintage lighting, art deco silver cutlery, 1970s plates and glasses by Williams Sonoma. Kari (left) whips up a treat in the minimalist kitchen (also seen below right), ready for guests to enjoy the spectacular views (below)

'Dakota Johnson is a bit like my little sister, or even a daughter – we stay in touch'





house when the phone rang; I picked it up and it was Melanie. She said: 'Thank you for being so good to my kids.' And that's how it all started," Kari says.

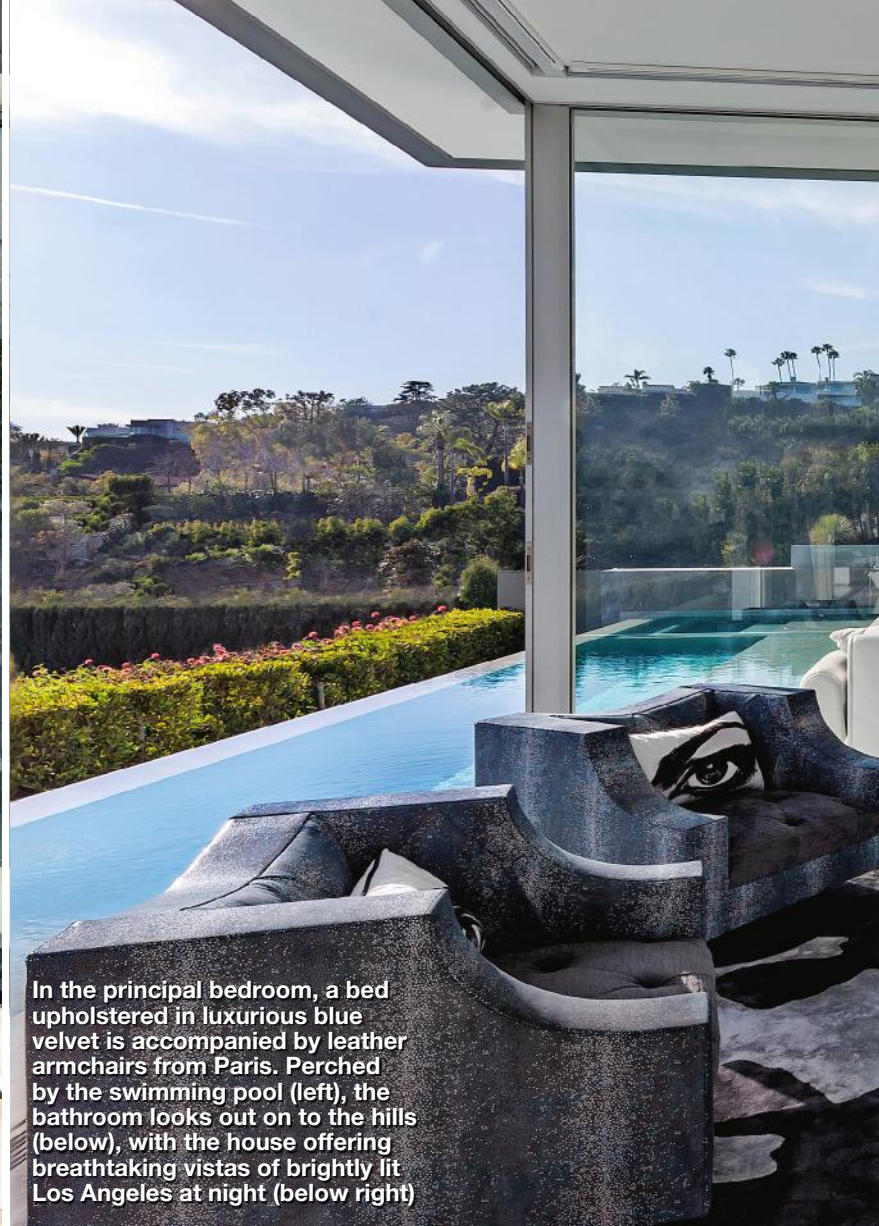
GROWING CLOSE

"I haven't been a mother and although I had no experience with children, it was very easy to live with them and love them because they were so great and so well-behaved," she adds.

"Don and Melanie's daughter Dakota Johnson is a bit like my little sister, or even a daughter, and we still stay in touch. As for Melanie – what can I say? She's fabulous. A wonderful person."

Naturally, when the actress needed a decorator for the Manhattan apartment she shared with her new love Antonio Banderas, she chose Kari. ▶





In the principal bedroom, a bed upholstered in luxurious blue velvet is accompanied by leather armchairs from Paris. Perched by the swimming pool (left), the bathroom looks out on to the hills (below), with the house offering breathtaking vistas of brightly lit Los Angeles at night (below right)





'When my tax advisor saw that I donate half my earnings to charity, he said: "Are you crazy?"'

Another of the designer's clients and friends is Jessica Alba, who shares two of her key interests. "Jessica was eco-friendly before it was cool. She is also passionate about animals, especially dogs," Kari tells us.

And here we come to the real reason why the designer works as hard as she does: to support her charity Ace of Hearts, which is dedicated to finding permanent homes for rescue dogs living in temporary shelters.

TRUE PASSION

She is so horrified by the fact that hundreds of animals are put down each day in Los Angeles, for lack of an alternative, that she donates half her earnings to the cause.

"I have a new tax advisor and when he saw my numbers, he said: 'Are you crazy?'" she laughs.

"But he added: 'It's the most generous action I've witnessed in my career.'"

Kari can be very persuasive ▶





'I convince clients that recycling is a way of life'



in pursuit of her mission. She always designs her clients' houses with the comfort and wellbeing of pets in mind, knowing that if they don't yet have a dog, they'll have adopted one by the time she's finished decorating.

For her, Hollywood's greatest stars are those who have opened their hearts and homes in this way.

HELPING HAND

She says: "When Hurricane Katrina destroyed part of New Orleans and the poor dogs were wandering the streets lost and hungry, we rescued them. [Actress] Daisy Fuentes not only helped me tremendously, but she also adopted two.

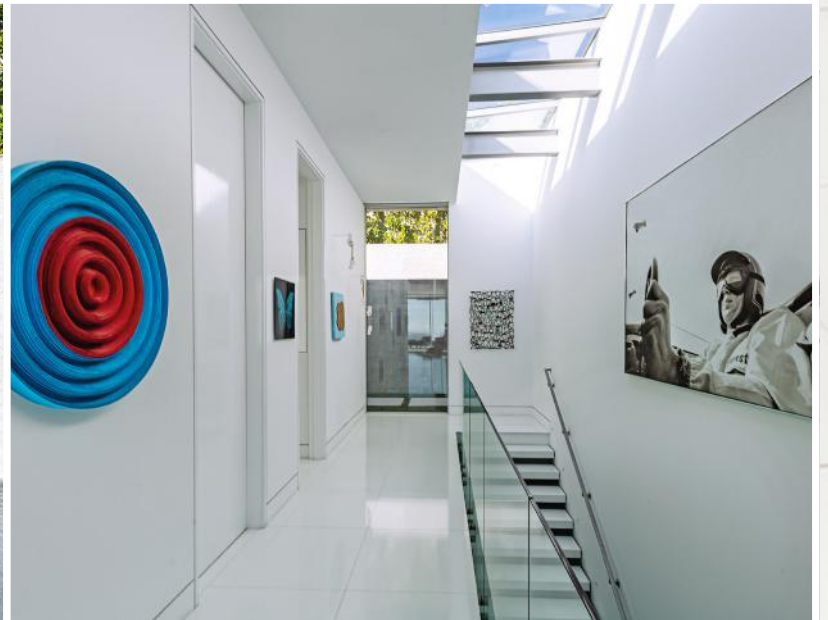
"Michael Keaton adores his animals. Like Kristen Bell, he's had me create a 'doggie oasis' in the garden for them. I feel very lucky to deal with such admirable people."

Kari also practises what she preaches when it comes to sustainability. "I convince ►

The lower floor has a home cinema, along with a games room and dining area (above). Basking in the California light is a sculpture by Berdvaye (left)



Seen from the pool, the Pacific Ocean shimmers beyond Century City. Colourful contemporary art adorns the house's white walls (below left and right), and a piano that once belonged to Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx – embellished by graffiti artist Amber Goldhammer – forms a centrepiece (right and below right)





clients that recycling is a way of life," she says. "Sometimes they want to throw away an old sofa and I tell them: 'No, don't. Nowadays things aren't made as well as they used to be. We'll reupholster it and you'll see how good it can look.'"

As a former musician, she admits she has a soft spot for old pianos. In her villa, one that previously belonged to Mötley Crüe rocker Nikki Sixx takes pride of place.

ROCK RELIC

"Nikki said he was thinking of getting rid of this. 'Get rid of it? With the history it has? I'll take care of it,' I said.

"Now it has a whole new life. It's been colourfully embellished by a famous graffiti artist, Amber Goldhammer, and it reigns here.

"I don't know what it is about pianos," she says. "This is the third one I've recovered from a rock artist and, like my dear abandoned puppies, they've all found a welcome." **H**

PRODUCTION AND INTERVIEW:
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PHOTOS: CESAR VILLORIA

