The canyons are alive with the sound of rock music as Fleetwood Mac’s Lindsey Buckingham and family settle into their new, already much-loved Los Angeles house.
“It was great—like making an album,” says Lindsey Buckingham of the time he and wife Kristen (together in her study) put into building their Spanish-style residence, a project they undertook with decorator Madeline Stuart. In the entry hall (opposite), Will and Leeloo Buckingham share a story. For product information, see page 233.

By Margy Rochlin
Photographs by Art Streiber
Four Seasons in Beverly Hills. It was two years’ worth of mounting hotel bills and the sight of a very pregnant Kristen trudging through the grand lobby that finally signaled the need for Lindsey to put his old place on the market and search for a permanent family home.

Then he heard news that changed everything: potential buyer Richard Donner, the director of the Lethal Weapon films, planned to raze the house and “make it like a castle, with subterranean parking,” says Lindsey with a shudder. Suddenly his appreciation for the property and its site—a westside promontory with a spectacular view of the L.A. basin, from the beach to downtown—was renewed. “Location-wise,” he says, “we couldn’t have done any better.”

Slouched on a sofa in Kristen’s new ground-floor study, Lindsey, in faded black jeans and a softly wrinkled linen shirt, idly picks out a tune on a blond-wood Spanish guitar and recalls coming to “the conclusion we’d be better off tearing it down ourselves and making something totally our own. It was great—like making an album.” He laughs and then punctuates the sentence with a quick guitar-string arpeggio. “Times two.”

They began in the summer of 1999. Agreeing on a look—the 1920s Mediterranean Revival style of architect Wallace Neff—was easy; getting the size and siting right was a different story. “Too big, by about 5,000 square feet” is what Lindsey remembers thinking of L.A. architect Kevin Clark’s first two designs, one of which aimed the house exclusively toward the Pacific. But strategy number three succeeded beautifully by reorienting the house to incorporate sweeping vistas of the downtown skyline and the Getty Museum and by scaling back the proportions to those Neff himself might have come up with for one of his movie-colony clients.

“Back then, people didn’t build houses that were out of proportion,” says Kristen, a photographer by training (she met her husband on a shoot for one of his solo albums). She signed off on a final floor plan that included four bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, a study, a family room and a trio of ground-floor loggias. That last touch was partly inspired by her memories of porches in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin, the small town where she was raised, and by the balmy southern California climate. “Sitting outside

The house, designed by Kevin Clark, was styled after the 1920s work of L.A. architect Wallace Neff. Opposite top: High-backed chairs and curtain pelmets faced in velvet echo the soft curves of a barrel-vaulted ceiling in the dining room. Bottom, left to right: A Victorian painting tops an Anglo-Indian cabinet in the family room; Lindsey in his recording studio, a separate building with its own bedroom and terrace.

For nineteen years, Lindsey Buckingham lived in a 4,000-square-foot hilltop house in L.A. that was distinguished less by architecture (he calls it a third-rate post-and-beam faux Neutra) than by its status as a monument to the blue-eyed, high-cheekboned Buckingham’s days as a rock-icon bachelor.

“A lot of things happened up here,” says the dry-witted singer/songwriter/guitarist/producer, whose recording sessions in his garage for Fleetwood Mac’s mid-eighties reunion album, Tango in the Night, were so ego-charged they ended with his famous decadelong hiatus from the band. “It was crazy,” he concludes.

Lindsey is fifty-four now and cozily domesticated, with a wife, Kristen; a six-year-old son, William; a four-year-old daughter, Leelee; and a third child born in April. During their preparenting days, the couple avoided the house and its ghosts of excesses past, preferring the polite luxury of the
Modern prints and vintage photographs command space over a Louis XVI demi-lune table in one corner of the living room. Casual though the living room is, the Buckinghams still prefer hanging out in the kitchen (opposite), whose windows face the kids’ play area.
while you watch your kids play ball on the lawn—you can’t beat it,” she says.

During the months before construction began in fall 2000, the Buckinghams pored over books, met with experts and drove around southern California, checking out historic sites for details they hoped would give their new house a lived-in quality. “Kristen would say, ‘How will we find an example of the way we want the stucco to look?’” Lindsey recalls. “Then we’d check out the Biltmore Hotel in Santa Barbara and say, ‘Okay, this is what we want.’ It became an obsession.” (Over the years, the two had already applied a similarly single-minded approach to building their now-healthy collections of art, books and photographs.)

Inside the house, it’s easy to pick out architectural elements in the spirit of various Mediterranean Revival styles, including arched doorways, beamed and painted ceilings and a wrought-iron railing that snakes up a curving stairway. When it comes to categorizing the decor, however, Madeline Stuart, the voluble Los Angeles–based interior and furniture designer who began collaborating with the Buckinghams in 1999, is at a loss for words.

“I’d love to come up with a name for it,” admits Stuart, who grew up in a 1920s Spanish-style house in Beverly Hills and is the daughter of a producer/director father and a decorator mother whose work was favored by film stars. “Maybe something about how it lacks pretense and formality yet is comfortable and elegant.”

Stuart is preoccupied with the idea that if you were to visit the home of one of her other celebrity clients—actor Jason Alexander, director Gary Ross, production executive John Goldwyn—you wouldn’t detect a designer’s hand. “I want people to walk in and think that everything has always been there, that it feels natural,” she says.

At the Buckinghams’, this means a highly dedicated eclecticism: fur-topped antler stools for watching TV in the family room; the master bedroom’s 1930s leather-and-nickel chaise that, local lore has it, formerly belonged to Brad Pitt; Mexican dining chairs covered in cracked red leather around a table in the sunlight-filled kitchen; and a seashell-encrusted armoire in Leelee’s room, just one of the many eccentric pieces Stuart and Kristen bid on successfully at the 2001 Christie’s auction of the estate of Tony Duquette, the late L.A. decorating legend.

The vintage effect comes across so well, in fact, that it’s not always easy to discern what’s genuinely old and what’s a custom-made Stuart/Buckingham knockoff. “If we couldn’t locate it, then Madeline and I would research it and have it made,” says Kristen, who found herself for the first time sketching things like drawer pulls, light fixtures and patterns for the tobacco-tinted terra-cotta floor tiles that vary slightly from room to room. “Once Kevin Clark gave us the original drawings, I just thought, I want to change this and this and this,” she says. “The chance to draw something and have it built—that’s amazing, really amazing. I thought, Wow, this is going to live on for years.”

While Kristen has overseen the finishing touches, Lindsey’s been on the road for much of the past twelve months, crisscrossing the United States, Europe and Australia with Fleetwood Mac on their “Say You Will” tour. But when he’s home and he walks out into the backyard, with its 280-degree

A new old house: that’s what the Buckinghams wanted and succeeded in creating, down to the tiniest detail. In the living room (opposite), seating designed by Madeline Stuart complements a Chinese root table from J. F. Chen, a 19th-century Spanish tole-and-crystal chandelier and parchment-topped nesting tables. Decorative painting on the ceiling was done by Jean Horiyama.
view and its new swimming pool, he starts to imagine a future filled with... pool parties. "Kristen and I have always joked, 'If we build it, they will come,'" he says, gazing at the palm trees rustling overhead. "People who've been friends of mine for a long time need a place to come to reflect on the last twenty-five years of their lives. They seem to like being up here—it's so welcoming."

It's also exactly what he'd envisioned while encamped at the Four Seasons; a family place that has helped him put the past into proper perspective. Adjacent to the house, just beyond the gurgling French limestone fountain that Will and Leelee like to zoom around in their toy cars, is Lindsey's new recording studio, filled with maracas, tambourines, bells, a mixing console and twenty-five guitars, where he can hole up to work and sleep. The studio is constructed of old, pitted bricks Kristen found on the Internet and imported from Ohio; so the architectural historian who appeared on the premises one day not long ago can be forgiven for expressing alarm. "He's putting out a book on old homes in the area, and he thought he'd missed us," says Kristen, laughing. "We simply could not convince him that this was new. I consider it one of our biggest successes."