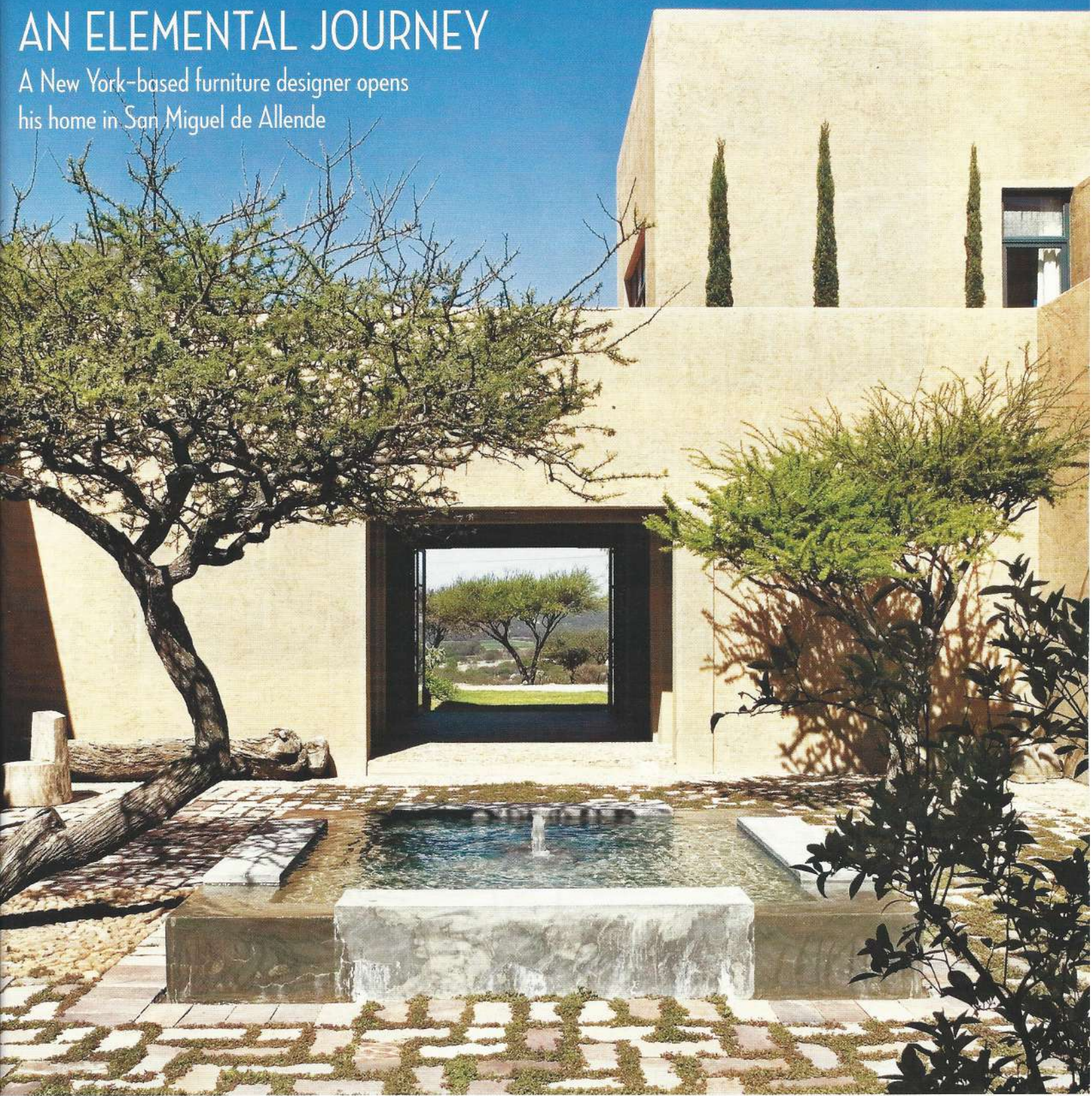


AN ELEMENTAL JOURNEY

A New York-based furniture designer opens
his home in San Miguel de Allende



GIVEN SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE'S origins, it is not surprising that the town, founded by Franciscan monk Fray Juan de San Miguel in 1542, draws soulfully inclined individuals searching for a meaningful place to buy or build a second home. An array of 17th- and 18th-century baroque and neoclassical buildings tells the story of the area's once-booming silver-mining industry, which reached its pinnacle in 1770. When the silver ran out, around 1900, the town—which was declared a national monument in 1926—was left with a plethora of grand Colonial homes.

Today, because of conservation efforts, the colonial Mexican town is a cultural haven, offering chamber and jazz music festivals, sophisticated design stores, and traditional local shops filled with indigenous lifestyle items. With all this, plus a temperate year-round climate, the 6,400-foot-high town in the Sierra Madre Mountains holds a special allure for many visitors from the north. "I was in San Miguel de Allende for 36 hours, and I fell in love with it," says New York-based furniture designer John Houshmand. "I overheard a conversation on the street about a hilltop property for sale with 360-degree views. I asked to see it, and that was it." Two hours later, Houshmand the tourist became Houshmand the property owner.

It is easy to understand Houshmand's impulse buy. The serene hilltop he acquired once held a simple palapa, but

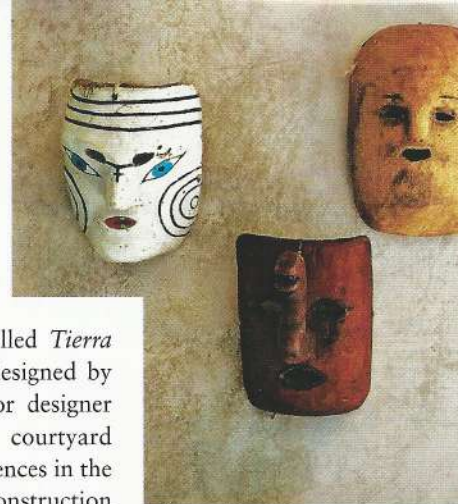
now boasts a beautifully appointed villa, called *Tierra Adentro*, meaning "inner land," which was designed by architect David Howell and his wife, interior designer Steffani Aarons. "The 11,000-square-foot courtyard house was inspired by the hacienda-style residences in the region," says Howell. "We used traditional construction technologies, but we gave the retreat a modern look."

Local artisans crafted most of the villa's furnishings, although Houshmand designed some of the most personal furniture, including the wood sofa in the living room, the tables in the dining room, and the cocktail tables on the patio. "All of the pieces were inspired by Mexico—the mesquite trees, the rusticity of life and objects, and the pervasive artisanship of the country," he says.

The weekly rental rate for the six-bedroom villa, which includes housekeeping and daily breakfast, ranges from \$5,000 to \$8,000. The international airport is approximately 70 miles west, while Mexico City is roughly four hours southwest—an easy pilgrimage by *bajío*, or lowlands, standards.

"The pilgrimage traditions of Mexico include bringing a stone from one's beginning point," says Houshmand. "This site was covered with small red stones, which were likely deposited over many years of pilgrimages." [Saxon Henry]

Tierra Adentro, 505.205.1234, www.retreatmexico.com



OPPOSITE: Water features at the 11,000-square-foot villa include five fountains and a hot spring-fed swimming pool.

LEFT: The villa's owner, furniture designer John Houshmand, conceived many of the original furnishings in the home, such as the living room's wood sofa. **ABOVE:** Decorative accents from local artisans help the modern home fit in with its historic surroundings.