

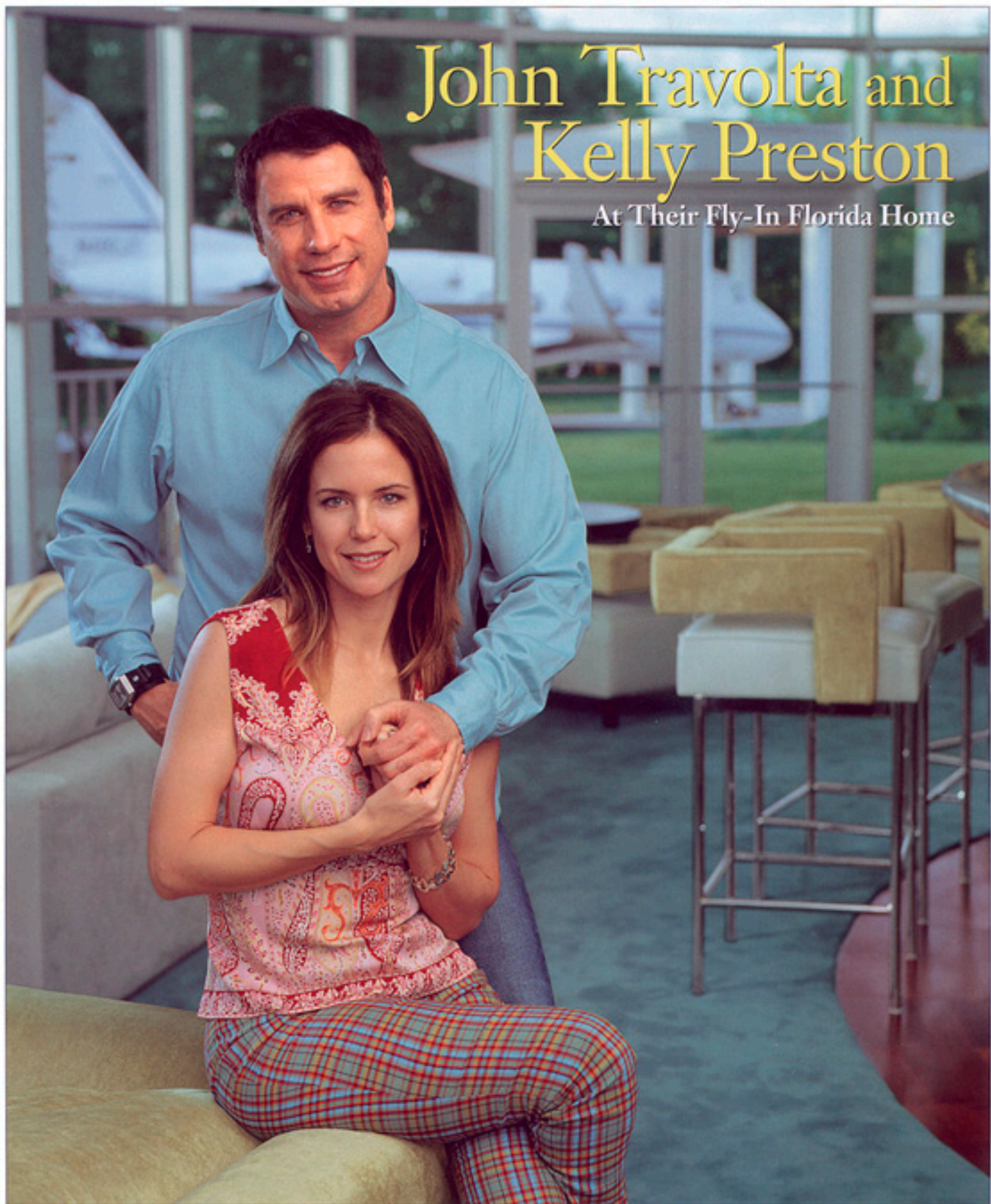
# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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## John Travolta and Kelly Preston

At Their Fly-In Florida Home





# John Travolta and Kelly Preston

THE ACTOR PARLAYS HIS PASSION FOR AIRPLANES INTO A BOLD FAMILY HOME IN FLORIDA



It was always John's dream to have planes in his front yard—to practically be able to pull up to the house—so that when you wanted to go to dinner, all you'd have to do was step out the door, get on the plane and whisk off," Kelly Preston says of her aviation-mad husband. "And we fly in and out a lot. Last year when Johnny was shooting a movie in Tampa, he flew to and from work every day. Each night the kids and I would go out in the golf cart, watch the landing, then bring Johnny to the house while the plane taxied in. It was very exciting."

John Travolta has always been dotty about flying. In fact, when the Hollywood superstar talks about his childhood jaunts, those romantic days when plane etiquette demanded that he "wear a sport coat and tie, my mom and sister white gloves"—his tone grows positively reverential. "The TWA Terminal at Kennedy was only two years old—and I, 10—when I first flew into it on a 707 from Chicago," he recalls. "And then at 15, when I got my first look at Dulles International, well, it just took me."

And how. Three decades

Architecture by Dana Smith, AIA  
Interior Design by  
Michael James Design Team  
Text by Nancy Collins  
Photography by Durston Saylor

ABOVE: "I can't call it modern—it's really a midcentury-style home," actor John Travolta says of the Florida house he shares with his wife, actress Kelly Preston. ABOVE RIGHT: His 1957 Thunderbird is in the front drive of the residence, which was designed by architect Dana Smith.

"Thank God Kelly was such a good traveler and liked to fly as much as I did," remarks the actor. RIGHT: A Gulfstream II jet is parked in one of two plane pavilions. Although the property came equipped with a 7,500-foot runway, Travolta extended the taxiway to reach the house.











"John had a vision of how he wanted everything to be," says designer Sherri James, of Michael James Design Team in Southern California. "We just implemented his ideas." ABOVE: Travolta designed the floor motif in the entrance hall. BELOW: A games table in the great room.

RIGHT: Curved window walls define the great room, which looks onto the tarmac. Above the mantelpiece is a 1967 work by Alexander Calder. Schumacher fabric on pillows in foreground and sofa at rear. Duralac patterned fabric. Kravet chair-seat suede; chair arms, Greeff fabric.















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"Michael Eisner was our first dinner guest," says Travolta (top). "He looked at our planes and said, 'My God, I get it. Within an hour we can be on our way to Paris.'" LEFT: Sandra Hilliard copied the mural in the dining room from a 1937 advertisement in *Fortune*. Kravet chair suede.

ABOVE: Travolta's office features his Qantas 747 pilot certificate, his American Airlines Boeing 707 pilot certificate, an award for excellence in aviation from the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and a photograph of the actor in his ultralight over Florida.



"Building a home might be the most difficult challenge anyone encounters," says Travolta. "It took me eight years to get it going."





Construction of the house lasted two years, but "the plan took, on and off, about six years," Travolta says. "We moved into the guest quarters for a while to oversee it." **OPPOSITE:** Family photographs, books and airplane models are displayed on shelves in the main hall.

and millions of logged miles later, John Travolta not only pilots planes but is the proud owner of two—both of which he likes keeping near enough to touch, much less fly. "When I was a kid, I imagined that by the turn of the century everyone would have his own plane in the backyard," he says. "That didn't happen, so we're hoping to provide inspiration."

Not to mention awe. After all, fellow travelers, it's not every day that you sit in somebody's living room and gaze through 25-foot windows into the face, make that nose, of a 135-foot 707 jet from Qantas, nor for that matter a comparatively modest Gulfstream II. But that is exactly the case in the spectacular 8,900-square-foot concrete-and-glass air palace of John Travolta and Kelly Preston—a futuristic cross between the hippest '50s pad and the hippest airport on the planet.

"Building a home might be the most difficult challenge anyone encounters, and I'm not making light of how hard this was," admits Travolta. "It took me eight years to get it going." But then, the actor had requirements few homeowners run up against—like a 7,500-foot runway. Travolta eventually found it on 400 acres—eight of which he snapped up—in Ocala, Florida, originally used for the airlifting of wild animals kept on the property. "I moved here, primarily, to have the bigger, stronger runway," he says of his spread, "then built a taxiway to the house that would endure the weight of the 707."

That curious design chore solved, the couple turned their

"This is an overbuilt home," Travolta says. "The walls are thicker than they need to be, and there's more metal in it than there needs to be." **ABOVE:** The master bedroom "is serene," James observes. Pindler & Pindler drapery fabric. **RIGHT:** The bath has a poster from *Pulp Fiction*.

attention to an unusual host of others—starting with the view. "Looking from the inside—or out—we wanted to have a view of both aircraft," explains Preston, "to see them from the bedroom, the great room, the dining room." As a result, both carriers, noses safely tucked under individual plane ports, as it were, sit a mere 100 feet from the house, allowing its owner to taxi almost up to his front







door. Once he disembarks, two outdoor walkways lead directly into the heart of the house.

A project this original called for an open-minded architect—especially since the couple knew exactly what they wanted. “Having sat with this for 35 years, I had a very specific vision, modern but elegant—a house that could have been created during the era when the great hotels and terminals were built, 1952 to ’62. The biggest job for Dana Smith was listening to our ideas, essentially mocking up our imaginations,” a process jump-started by the detailed sketches and plan drawn up by the couple themselves.

The inspiration for the six-bedroom main house, as well as a 6,500-garage complete with eight efficiency apartments,



**TOP:** An exterior view takes in the length of the house. Travolta restored the exterior of the Boeing 707, right, which was built for Qantas in 1964. “You can be the ultimate eccentric, like I am, and bring in a 707,” he says. “But you can also bring in any corporate jet or airliner.”

**ABOVE:** “The pool cabana is a grown-up playroom,” says James. “John wanted to use it for dancing, which is why it has a big open space and stone flooring.” A 1989 painting shows his Learjet. **OPPOSITE:** John Adams, of Land Design Group, used tropical vegetation by the pool.



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came from three distinct architectural styles: the clean lines and dark woods of Frank Lloyd Wright; the aeronautical elegance of Eero Saarinen, designer of the Dulles and TWA terminals; and Morris Lapidus, architect of Miami's Fontainebleau Hilton Resort, whose loftily curved lobby windows served as prototype for the towering blue-tinted windows (18 and 15 feet in bedroom and dining room) that swathe the Travoltas' main edifice.

Despite glass grand enough to ogle a jet (whose 30-foot tail makes it as tall as the house itself), Kelly Preston knew that the surest way to people's hearts remains the stomach, not the cockpit. "We started with the kitchen," says Travol-

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ta, a man as passionate about food as flying, "because, as Kelly pointed out, everybody ends up near the food." Anticipating this inevitability, the Travoltas built two kitchens, one for serious cooking, another for lighter fare, surrounding them with three individual dining areas "that spit out from the kitchen," explains Travolta, "like those in great hotels."

Floating artfully throughout the great room are crisp, low-slung sofas and contemporary hollow-backed Italian chairs in soothing hues of aqua and chartreuse. "The sea greens against the blue-tinted windows," says Preston, "all blend into each other, seeming to go on endlessly into the sky."

For the Art Déco dining room, the couple eschewed the '50s for the '30s—beautifully evidenced by the dazzling 15-foot-by-17-foot mural featuring a family dressed to the nines awaiting their flight—an advertisement that Travolta, a collector of old magazines, culled from a 1937 *Fortune*. "I'd been waiting years to do something with this picture until it hit me: Historically, murals were used in dining rooms, and this would be perfect."

Preston's main concern, meanwhile, was comfort, "since this was a family where kids play on the sofa, watch TV, hang out with us." And 11-year-old Jett and three-year-old Ella, says their mother, "love it because it's a fun house. We've got a big pool, a slide, a golf course... we're a family who likes to play a lot." Off or on board. While some might pitch a tent in the backyard, the Travolta kids have the option of a sleepover in a 707.

"The kids are great fliers," says Travol-

ta, who adds that Jett has been known to stay on board after a flight, watching videos while the crew cleans up. Ella, meanwhile, accompanying her mother to Chicago for *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, recently experienced the thrill of her first commercial flight. "She was like, 'Ma, Ma? Who are all these people on the plane?'" her mother laughs. Adds Travolta, "She was so excited to tell me, 'Daddy, there's things called tickets!'" Indeed, if Ella has her way, she may someday be sitting at the controls next to her father. "Barbra Streisand asked Ella what she wanted to be when she grows up," says Preston, "and she said: 'A pilot. Like my daddy.'"

The Travoltas admit that they made some "bold choices—the same as with a movie," says the actor. "Making *Face/Off*, every day I said to Joan Allen and Nic Cage, 'This is either going to be the worst—or most original—thing anyone's ever seen.' And it turned out great. It's the same with homes. You don't know but have to take the risk to break new ground."

Indeed. And would they have done anything differently? "If I'd made my gates wider, I wouldn't have to maneuver so much," Travolta laments, a comment that makes his wife chuckle. "He's talking about electric gates that most people drive a car through, opening up to bring in a 707."

That said, surely the couple must be gobsmacked by what they have pulled off? Do they ever look around... at possibly the world's most elegant private airport... the two planes parked in their front yard and just... giggle?

"Oh, yeah," they laugh in unison. "Every single day." □

## THE ACTOR'S PRIVATE AIRCRAFT

If you had residences in California, Florida and Maine, a growing family, and a collection of relatives on the East Coast, plus work that required you to travel great distances, live on location and only get back periodically, you'd probably want a fleet of private vehicles to take some home comforts along with you.

John Travolta has just that, but instead of a fleet of motor homes, he has had a series of aircraft. The actor owns a Gulfstream II luxury jet and has had a DC3 Dakota airliner, as well as a Lockheed Constellation. The crown jewel of his air force, however, is his 1964 Boeing 707-138B (painted in its origi-

nal '60s Qantas livery for a recent round-the-world goodwill tour), outfitted with every amenity possible: bedrooms, TV/recreation room, three dining areas, office space and crew quarters. The plane, he says, reflects "my obsession with re-creating the comfort of another era."

Travolta is fully qualified to fly his 707 and earned his wings as a first officer on the Boeing 747 jumbo jet in 2002. He is accompanied by relief pilots for long treks, but every takeoff and landing is in his hands. "When I'm flying," he says, "I can't imagine being in a better place." —Peter Haves

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room are a large custom tufted ottoman and two small benches, and on the afternoon porch off the living room, four dining chairs. "I wanted that room to have a garden-y feeling, so I designed some unique pieces for it," Pheasant says. "The pair of bronze consoles in the room look like twigs, and so do the lanterns."

He opted against designing a table for the dining room. "The room is 16 by 28 feet, so a long rectangular table would have made it feel like a conference room," he says.

Instead, he used two dining tables—one round and one oval. The space is dominated by a three-panel Bonnard

**"We found pipes that led nowhere. My clients had to rebuild the house."**

screen depicting a stork, flowers and four green frogs against a deep red. Pheasant had the walls glazed a buttery yellow. "I had to come up with a color that would be a great background for that screen," he says, noting that he also found an Ushak carpet with faded reds in it.

There are four guest rooms on the third floor and two bedrooms for grandchildren on the top floor. On the second floor, the challenge was to create "an apartment for the couple to return to after a day at work," says Pheasant. He tore down a wall at the top of the stairs to make the center room, a light-filled receiving area. To add interest to the master bedroom, he designed an arch alcove as a setting for the bed and installed a fireplace.

"It took four years before the couple could move into their home," Pheasant says. "You really have to want to preserve a landmark house for the future to stay such a long course. No matter how many troubles lurked behind the walls and ceilings, they kept their sense of humor. I remember standing with the wife in the early evening outside the master bedroom during the second year of the renovation. We were chatting, and suddenly she looked at me and kind of laughed and said, 'I'm so glad we didn't buy a fixer-upper.'" □