

The ponies of Klentner Ranch are taken out for their morning ride. Many of the 35 thoroughbreds are former racehorses that are now being retrained as polo ponies.



# treasure of the SIERRA MADRES

ENGLISH DESIGNER AMANDA MASTERS AND HER MIDWESTERN HUSBAND LAY DOWN NEW ROOTS IN THE FOOTHILLS NEAR MONTECITO.

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY KATE AYRTON



Justin Klentner and Amanda Masters met while working in New York City as successful models in the early 1990s. Like many urbanites, they dreamed of trading in the city for wide-open spaces and sunlit fields. So, in search of neutral ground and a fresh start, the young couple headed west to California, divesting themselves of their New York real-estate holdings and turning a tidy profit that allowed them to embark on a new career path.

In the 12 years since they relocated, Klentner and Masters married, started a business, had two sons—and have prospered in a way that is distinctly West Coast. Arriving in 1995—just after

the earthquake, the floods, the riots and the fires—the Klentners found many opportunities in real estate. They pooled their money and bought a little house in the Hollywood Hills. Without any funds left to hire a contractor, they decided to renovate it themselves, with Klentner tackling the construction and Masters handling the interior design—and the rest, as they say, is history.

Today, Klentner oversees a staff of 30 at Klentner Development, which buys, builds and develops commercial and residential real estate. He is also a partner in Klentner Marquez, an L.A.-based construction company with an impressive roster of Hollywood clients. His involvement in these two businesses allows Klentner the opportunity to work with many of the best architects and designers in town.

“I learn from them,” says Klentner, who modestly credits his success to the fact that he comes into contact with people more experienced and talented than he is. At Klentner Development, he designs all the spaces, working closely with an architect and an engineer, while Masters—who has kept her maiden name professionally—sees to the finishes and landscaping, frequently staying on once a property has sold to complete the interior design. With her own practice and A-list clients, Masters has designed a slew of high-profile projects. For the last three years she has also created the ultra-chic Soho House Villa, a guesthouse set up in L.A. during Oscar week

ABOVE, LEFT: A copper star hanging in the family room was given to Masters by good friend Tom Dixon. ABOVE, RIGHT: Masters and Klentner spend most weekends at their ranch.



The family room is furnished with antique Suzani textiles and stylish, family-friendly pieces like the pillow-backed Louis XIV bench from Maison K in Montecito.

for members of the exclusive club, which has outposts in New York and London.

After spending 10 years developing properties for others, Klentner and Masters decided to look for their own weekend escape, touring the Santa Barbara coast in search of a site, without luck. Fortunately, it all came together after a particularly grueling year.

As Klentner remembers it, Christmas that year brought a bounty of sports gifts, including a tennis racket and a pair of skis—and more importantly, a gift certificate for polo lessons. He knew there was a message in there somewhere. Indeed, the first time he galloped on horseback down the polo field at 35 miles an hour, he was hooked. Perhaps it was in his blood: Klentner was raised on a 100-acre farm in Michigan, where his father worked as a horse trainer and continues to do so today with Klentner's sister.

"Playing polo really reawakened my love of horses," says Klentner. So it wasn't surprising that when the couple stumbled on an old avocado farm, located adjacent to the Santa

Inside the farmhouse, pure white walls and a stained concrete floor set the stage for Masters' eclectic mix of furnishings, including a dining table surrounded with 1950s Italian chairs.



Barbara Polo Club, Klentner instantly nixed the beach house idea. A savvy investor, Klentner quickly recognized that you could get more for your money by moving inland from the coast a few miles. "Not only is there more privacy, but the views are better," he says. Another bonus: The couple's parcel of land in the foothills of the Sierra Madre mountains was interlaced with streams and populated by native oak trees, avocado trees, wildflowers and morning-glory vines.

Today, Klentner Ranch is a working farm with a farmhouse, five pastures, a training ring, two stables and 15 acres of avocado trees. The master plan calls for another five acres to be planted with new crops and 300 more trees, including redwoods, oaks, poplars and Italian cypresses, as well as citrus and olive trees for color and scale. "It has been a real labor of love," says Masters. "We've spent so many

With weather suitable for year-round outdoor entertaining, the Klentners frequently host dinner parties for polo friends and design associates under one of their avocado trees.

From stone and wood, stables were built for the horses and a farmhouse, which will eventually serve as a guesthouse (the family is currently residing there until the main house is complete). For the farmhouse, Masters envisioned a lovely old French or English-style barn. "They marry so well with the landscape and don't mar the view, which is important," says Masters. "I wanted the buildings to look as if they were always there." Klentner ran with this idea and based his architectural designs on an 18th-century icehouse that was on his childhood farm. The spacious, low-maintenance building

days, nights and weekends plotting, planning and imagining what we could create here, and it has given us so much joy—and one or two headaches."



## RIPE OFF THE TREE

GUACAMOLE IS A STAPLE at Klentner Ranch. The house version comes from Brenda Simon of The Secret Ingredient in Santa Barbara. A food processor makes quick work of the fresh salsa; add it to the mashed avocados and season to taste.



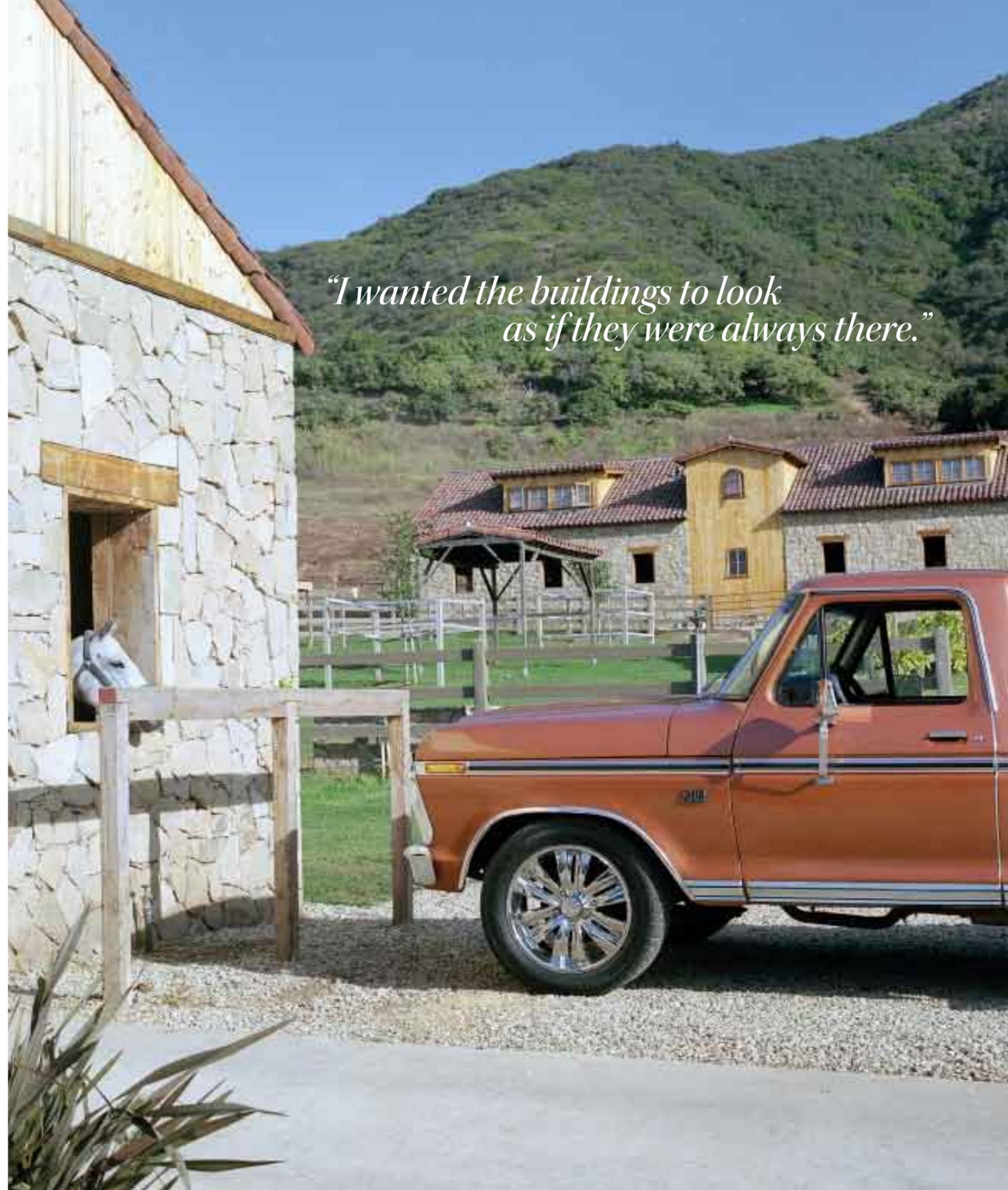
### Guacamole Serves eight.

- 10 ripe avocados, halved and mashed
- 2 tablespoons fresh-squeezed lime juice
- ½ cup tomatoes, seeded and diced
- 1 small red onion, peeled and finely diced
- 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro, chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and minced
- 2 tablespoons fresh garlic, chopped
- 2 tablespoons Cholula hot sauce
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper





ABOVE: Since purchasing the property adjacent to the Santa Barbara Polo Club, Klentner has organized weekend eight-goal tournaments like this one. BELOW: The ranch's classic stables can hold 25 horses, with hay lofts overhead for storage. RIGHT: At seven, Jacob is gearing up to be an expert polo player. His secret: practicing on a retired pony with years of experience to share.



*"I wanted the buildings to look as if they were always there."*



is generously proportioned, bright and airy with natural light. "It's very much a work-in-progress," says Masters. "We are building a main house on the hill that is a little more architecturally diverse, with grander elements, but to start we just needed a barn-like structure."

The concrete floors are made for wear-and-tear, a practical solution to the realities of living on a farm with two young boys. In a recent flood, they just pulled up the rugs and hosed it down. There is nothing pretentious about the space, which looks elegantly bohemian. "It is what it is," says Masters, who likes to mix things up and has outfitted the interiors with a hodgepodge of furnishings and finds from her travels, as well as items found locally. "It's important to me for the house to not only look beautiful, but to feel comfortable and be easy to maintain," says Masters. "When we

The farmhouse, like the barn, was built in the middle of an avocado grove. French doors in the bedroom, which is filled with imported Moroccan accents, lead directly into the yard.

come here we want to be able to relax and have fun with our friends and not worry about the state of the house."

Intent on creating a sense of permanence, the couple built a stone wall that runs the perimeter of the ranch. Crafted by bricklayers, who dry-stacked the stones just as workmen have done for centuries in France, the wall took five months to build. The results are impressive—on weekends, drivers frequently stop on the side of the road to snap photos of the rambling stone wall. "This property is a hugely ambitious project," admits Klentner, "and will more than likely continue until we are well into our rocking-chair years. But this time we are building for ourselves and for our children." ■



ABOVE: The flagstone footpath is part of a design plan focused on creating a ranch with historic resonance. Masters recently planted an allée of orange trees in the inner courtyard. LEFT: An aerial view of the property shows the polo field in the distance and the ocean beyond. BELOW: Amanda relaxes in a hammock, suspended between two avocado trees, with sons, Jacob and Luke.

