

The family's East End, Long Island, house. The photograph of the Palazzo Capodimonte is by the German artist Candida Höfer. Opposite Cosima von Bülow Pavonceli and daughter Antonia

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AT HOME WITH COSIMA



COSIMA VON BÜLOW PAVONCELLI spent her childhood holidays in the formality of Newport. For her own family, interior designer Markham Roberts created a very different sort of sanctuary. *William Norwich* pays a visit.



The library doubles as Cosima's command central. The fabric on the wall (which decorator Markham Roberts says is "chic sound-proofing") is by Oscar de la Renta; the blue chairs are upholstered in de la Renta fabric as well. The painting of the bull is by Allan Ryan.

ON a perfect cornflower-blue day, Cosima von Bülow Pavoncelli is multitasking with the greatest of ease at her Sagaponack, Long Island, vacation home.

Wife, mother, hostess, writer, philanthropist, and otherwise London resident—at a South Kensington town house Monday through Friday, a West Sussex farm on the weekend—she is supervising the activities of her three children, a son aged twelve and daughters ten and five, while organizing a Mexican-themed birthday party tonight for her beloved Brown University friend Markham Roberts, the highly regarded interior designer who recently completed the decoration of this commodious place. But first she is giving lunch—artichokes, salmon, and sorbet—to him; his partner James Sansum, the fine and decorative arts dealer; and a visitor from Manhattan asking about her Christmas plans.

It is one of her favorite times in this house. For the third season since buying the place almost four years ago, Cosima, her husband—Riccardo Pavoncelli, an investment banker, boating this afternoon off nearby Sag Harbor—and their children will spend the holidays on Long Island.

“I found this great red-and-white gingham that we make huge garlands and bows with on the staircase, and we have a big tree,” Cosima says. “I love decorating for Christmas. I think it’s because when I was a child, I used to get incredibly irritated when we would arrive at our house in Rhode Island and the whole thing would be done already and I wouldn’t be allowed to touch anything!” The memory, instead of making her sad, makes her laugh heartily: there is something delightful about remembering how formal life was then compared to the relative casualness of her lifestyle now. “Now we all decorate together,” she says contentedly.

James has gone into town to shop, and Markham and Cosima, who is wearing a brown-and-white Allegra Hicks floral-print dress, have their coffee in the living room, sitting on comfortable sofas Markham has designed and upholstered in an assortment

of Oscar de la Renta fabrics. A large photograph by the German artist Candida Höfer of the Palazzo Capodimonte near Naples, Italy, commands a central perch, its colors bringing together the many other colors, textures, and shapes in the room. “I like things that relate but don’t match,” Markham explains, describing the photograph’s appeal.

Markham, from Indiana by way of Culver Military Academy and Northfield Mount Hermon School, and Cosima, who, as you might recall, grew up in Newport and Manhattan, were both students at Brown in 1987 when they met “on a Ransome—yes, that really was the name of the commuter airline—flight from New York to Providence,” Cosima remembers. “There was a horrible snowstorm, and it was a terrible flight.”

“I was terrified to death,” says Markham.

But it was also an immediate route to an intimate, lasting friendship. He came to New York after Brown, took a job at Sotheby’s, and in 1991 began his decorating career working for Mark Hampton. In 1997, Markham opened his own interior-design firm. Cosima, meanwhile, after a few “very Jamesian, an-American-living-abroad months studying art history in Florence,” followed her father, Claus von Bülow, to London where he had moved after being acquitted in 1985 of the attempted

murder of Cosima’s mother, Sunny. In 1980, when Cosima was thirteen, her mother had slipped into an irreversible coma at Clarendon Court, the family’s house in Newport.

For having supported her father throughout, Cosima’s maternal grandmother disinherited her from her considerable estate, intending instead to divide it between Cosima’s half brother and half sister, Alexander Auersperg and Ala Isham. This situation was eventually resolved so that all three shared in the estate, valued at \$100 million in 1988. More importantly, they are today loving siblings to one another, as well as caring aunts and uncle to each other’s children. In fact, one of the main reasons Cosima and Riccardo bought the Sagaponack house was because “it is very important for my children to get to know their aunt and

uncle and cousins” in Bridgehampton and Newport, where Ala and Alexander weekend respectively.

The animosity of years gone by has been healed. “With my mother dying almost two years ago now, even though she had not been there for so long, it was a finale nonetheless,” says Cosima. “You experience it all over again. This was the first time all three of us went through it together.”

“But I don’t want to dwell on the past,” she adds brightly. “And when you heal, you no longer need to.”

Living in London, compared to New York, Cosima enjoyed a more private life. She even became a journalist, the very profession that had been the bane of her family’s existence in the United States. “Everything from lipstick to literature,” she says. “I wrote beauty pieces for *Harpers & Queen* and book reviews for the *Spectator*.” A series of “at home” profiles of well-known British style figures, including Desmond Guinness and the late Mark Birley, dissuaded her from further pursuing this more invasive form of interviewing. In 1996, when she was married and living in Italy—Riccardo’s aristocratic family has a place in Umbria—her interests turned more to the domestic arts. Writing still appeals to her sometimes, especially from the vantage point of an American living in London. Is she planning a memoir?

Another robust laugh. “No memoir,” Cosima says, “at least not until I have something more substantial to share.”

YOU MIGHT wonder if there is any risk in hiring your best friend to be your decorator. “She calls it my ‘decorator face’ whenever I suggest something that she thinks isn’t going to work and I’m displeased,” Markham says.

But disagreements—a planter here, a frame there—were few.

“I was a little overwhelmed by this project at first,” Cosima says. “It felt very big and very far away.” Built as a nearly 12,000-foot spec house (albeit one with the finest-quality materials, in-

cluding old pinewood floors reclaimed from a barn), it still seemed cavernous and impersonal, even when she pictured how the pieces she had been collecting in London might help fill it.

“The most important thing I did to the house architecturally, before I did any decorating, was change the front door,” she says, from a mahogany slab to a wide, sunlight-friendly Dutch door.

Working with garden designer Tish Rehill, Cosima soon had roses rushing up the front of the house and wisteria flourishing at the pool house. For the terrace behind the main house, tables

and chairs were found at Restoration Hardware. Colorful porcelain ashtrays from Clarendon Court shaped like panthers’ mouths, a motif very trendy in the jet-set 1960s and 1970s, decorate the coffee table. The tennis court was transformed into a multiservice space for skateboarding, biking, and basketball, and the garage, outfitted with seven beds, became the children’s playroom and sleepover spot.

Careful to avoid the clichéd East End, Long Island, blue-and-white room (which practically every house here has), Markham decorated the twenty-by-fifty-foot dining-and-kitchen space “using different, unexpected shades of blue,” he says. The more formal dining room has a handsome mahogany William IV table and wicker chairs upholstered in still more Oscar

de la Renta fabric. Markham is also a photographer; a picture he took of the field at his country house near Millbrook, New York, hangs above the table.

Upstairs in Cosima’s bedroom, Markham took a Robert Lighton British Khaki bed and added an upholstered headboard and a canopy. “A perfect day in this house,” says Cosima, “begins waking up from a good night’s sleep on this wonderful Serta mattress Markham got us. I’ve been looking for one in London but haven’t found it. I might have to ship one over.”

For now, though, it’s back to Markham’s party. “I’ve never done his birthday dinner before,” says Cosima. “It’s always been a rotation of his many other admirers on Long Island.” She smiles, the picture of contentment. “It was so much fun working with him.” ✕



Antonia shares an afternoon secret with her brother, Nicolas.



Dining and sitting areas adjoin an open kitchen.



Pillow fight, and everyone wins.
Opposite: A Robert Lighton British Khaki
bed. Markham Roberts added the
upholstered headboard and canopy.





Marina Pavoncelli and brother Nicolas read on a Markham Roberts custom-made linen sofa beneath a photograph by Isack Kousnsky in their father's study and television room. The blue-and-white ticking on the ottoman is by Carleton V. The lamps are from Circa Lighting.