

STYLE

WILLIAM LAMAN

Casual elegance sets the tone for this decorator's shop, style and home



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TOP: Dried lavender in a Tibetan bowl. BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: Cartier Tank watch; vintage find with mother of pearl; Alessi watch designed by Michael Graves.

William Laman has mastered the art of informal elegance. Both at home and in his perfectly edited cottage-shop in Montecito's Upper Village, this man of relaxed style combines influences from around the globe and right here at home.

How did you determine the look and feel of your store?

What we carry in the shop reflects the architecture of the building, which is very early California ranch style and almost has the feel of Cape Cod. Large woven baskets, hammered sterling silver serving utensils and elegant oversized matchbooks with botanical motifs are similar in sensibility to the casual yet refined design of the building. I thought it would be interesting to set up the store like a series of rooms in someone's home, that way the shopper can see the merchandise without things being lined up.

Did you decorate your home in the same manner as your store?

My shop and home are very different because what's in my house is a combination of things that I have collected over many years. I like combining things that are classical with things that are primitive, yet I enjoy contemporary decor too. There are modern artworks paired with turn-of-the-previous-century chinoiserie cabinets. But the key thing is the mix.

Who is your favorite interior designer?

I would say my very favorite interior designer is my partner, Bruce Gregga, because I have learned so much from him and he has incredible style. I've seen things he installed 35 years ago—a wonderful clothing boutique he designed in Chicago called Ultimo, and the section he did feels completely modern, even today.

Who is your style icon?

One of my icons is someone probably not many people know, a woman named Shirley Cohen, but everyone calls her Coco. She owns the Coco Company, which is where I worked in Chicago doing wholesale buying and working with clients before I moved to Santa Barbara in 1995. She imports the most fabulous woven baskets and trays from Spain, the Philippines, the Far East and Indonesia, and the way she puts things together is most unusual, a visual treat for the eyes.

Where do you like to shop?

For everyday clothing, mostly Banana Republic, which is great for staples. But for things that are more specialized, I generally go to Los Angeles. I like Tod's for shoes or James Perse for T-shirts, and I go to Barney's New York, Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue.

What childhood influences are evident in the way you dress?

I come from a large Irish-Catholic family—I have seven brothers and sisters—so a lot of what I had growing up were hand-me-downs, my older brothers' jeans and shirts. Jeans are my trademark. If I had my choice, I'd wear them for every occasion because they are so comfortable.

What is your favorite clothing item?

A new Issey Miyake jacket. It's grey, beige and off-white, and I love it because it's woven so beautifully. It's frayed at the edges, so it reminds me of old Japanese textiles. I love the look of it, and when I put it on, it envelops me. I don't shop very much, but I've learned to pick up a few basics—I have one very nice navy blazer that I can wear for almost all occasions. I can wear it with jeans or a pair of great trousers to dress it up a bit more. That's basically how I live.

What is your favorite accessory?

My very first watch. Before Alessi was introduced to the United States, Bruce had been traveling in Italy and brought



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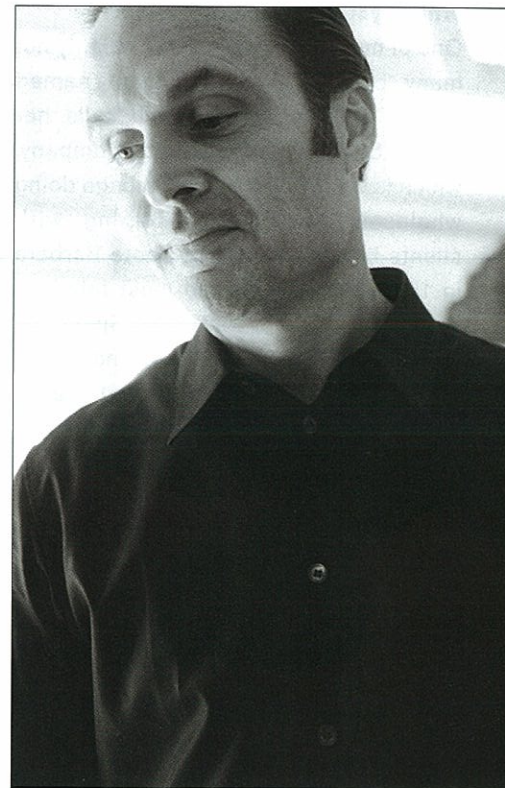
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one back for me as a gift. It's very simple and architectural—the watch portion of it actually pops out and you can carry it around as a pocket watch (see page 68). I've started a collection and I have 15 now, including Italian diving watches and a Cartier Tank that I love. I'm also a shoe freak—I love Puma, Tod's, Louis Vuitton and Gucci. Every opening in my closet is filled with shoes, and they're even doubled up in some places.

Do you have any rules for dressing?

I dress in neutrals. I like black, navy and earth tones, with a dash of color mixed in. Sometimes I incorporate an interesting pair of shoes or accessories like a crocodile Kieselstein-Cord belt.

What's a great gift for a man of style?

Something he will use a lot. At the shop, I usually recommend something functional, like a wonderful tray that a man can put his jewelry on or a pewter tumbler that he can put in the bathroom or use as a *Continued on page 72*

WILLIAM LAMAN'S FAVORITE HOME ACCESSORIES

Music—Russian classic composers like Rachmaninoff. His *Piano Concerto No. 2* helps me unwind and relax.

Cashmere—I love TSE sweaters, and I have throws and blankets from Nepal all over the house.

Pioneer flat-screen television.

Wood and metal collage by Vasily Ermilov, circa 1924.

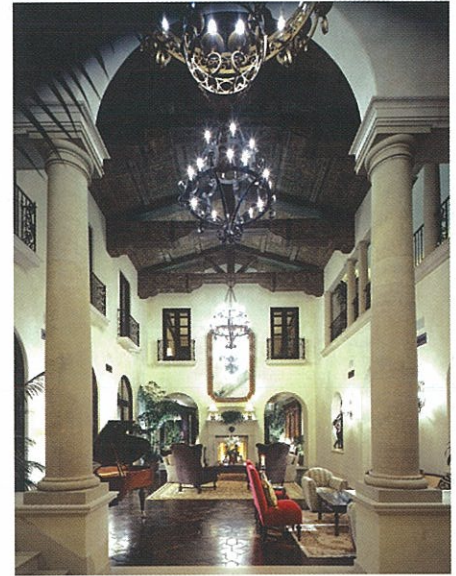
Picasso oval ivory plate.

French lavender in any form—concentrated oil, room spray, candles or dried and set in bowls around the house for its scent and color.

Handblock-printed table linens from India.

Eclasion, a wood sculpture by Axel Cassel, circa 1990.

A glazed ceramic frog that my mother made for my garden. Nothing is more special than something that is handmade—it's from the heart.



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desk accessory. It's a matter of determining the person's lifestyle and choosing an item that fits.

What item in your home is the most sentimental to you?

An oval ivory-colored Picasso platter with a facial pattern is very special to me because it was a gift from Bruce. Another item I really love is a unique piece of 1924 Russian deconstructionist art by Vasily Ermilov. It is a three-dimensional collage of wood pieces in muted colors that are put together to create a face, set behind Plexiglas. It looks very industrial.

You love to travel; what are your favorite cities to visit?

I love flea markets in Paris and antique stores—you can always find something very quirky, but some of the prices have gotten out of hand so I have to be careful about buying there. There are some great dealers, one of which is Petrouschka on the Left Bank, where I bought my Russian deconstructionist pieces. I love Brussels, which I find to be a very affordable city. There's an incredible tribal market there.

What was the last thing you purchased for your home?

I collect late-18th-century miniature ladders from Mali, in West Africa. The full-sized ones are a Y shape and were used in a Dogon village for climbing in and out of homes. The miniature ones look like little Brancusi sculptures, but they are actually ladders that were placed on an altar to enable the owner's soul to climb to the hereafter upon his death and join his ancestors. I have 12 in different sizes and shapes.

You can't live without...

My two Jack Russell terriers, Buster and Mazie—their love is unconditional.

WILLIAM LAMAN

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