

# body & soul

BY LESLIE A. WESTBROOK PRODUCED BY JENNY BRADLEY

## perfectly content

Designer H el ene Aumont recharges in her California country home.

Picture a soccer mom in sequined mules. That's H el ene Aumont—a down-to-earth chic former model, current designer of furniture and interiors, co-owner of an upscale antiques and art shop with husband Patrick, equestrienne, and mother of teens Arthur, 15, and Anouk, 13.

"It's so nice to live in the country," says the Paris-born designer who, despite her hectic schedule, radiates tranquility. "The atmosphere is conducive to creativity. I unwind here."

"Here" is Pepperhill Farm, an oasis of country living in Santa Barbara's wine country. The heart of the 10-acre

compound—set in a broad valley ringed by mountain ridges—is the Aumonts' main residence, a cozy 1940s-vintage farmhouse. Down the hill is a stable for H el ene's beloved ▶

H el ene Aumont relaxes in the tented oasis that she created in her backyard.



## summer hues

For color in the tent, Hélène's son, Arthur, painted the 19th-century cabinet from Europa Antiques Provençal blue (805/969-4989). **Above:** Atelier du Viel plates from Charlotte Moss New York, \$165–\$225 (212/308-3888). **Below:** Grange "Provençal Bookcase," \$5,995 (800/472-6431), trade only.



body&soul

Friesian horses, Floris and Romeo. A vegetable garden, tended by Hélène and her children, provides produce for family meals. The Aumont clan also shares Pepperhill Farm with two dogs, a dozen chickens, and a rooster or two.

In an outbuilding, three assistants work with the designer, known for simple style punctuated by dramatic flourishes, mixing clean design with opulent fabric, and blending mid-century with baroque. Here she checks on her latest projects—a new line of tiebacks and ribbon-covered chandeliers, and a jewelry boutique within Europa Antiques, the couple's retail shop in Summerland, down the coast from Santa Barbara.

After tending to design projects, trips abroad, soccer games, and piano

lessons for Arthur and Anouk, Hélène sometimes needs to recharge. In the rose garden she loves just outside her office sits a stone table under weeping willow branches that sway in the breeze like underwater seaweed. Here she enjoys the view of cows and horses grazing in the valley and grapes ripening in the sun. The sound of children playing drifts up from the small school yard just down the hill.

Or she heads for the backyard. Tucked into a corner at the end of the verdant lawn sits an Italian canvas tent fringed playfully with green tassels and decorated with Hélène's usual panache. As with everything ▶

## bolster bash

Use pattern to add exotic appeal, like John Robshaw Textiles' "Maharaja" bolster covers, \$65–\$120 (212/594-6006), trade only.





mood lighting

"Filigree," \$295, and "Fez Wedding" lanterns, \$550; Imports from Marrakesh (212/675-9700).



pillow power

Patterned pillows are perfect for outdoor spaces. Hélène's came from Rooms and Gardens (805/565-4877).

Fabrics from left: "Paola" from Clarence House (800/803-2850), Nancy Corzine's "Silk Cords" (310/652-4859), and Clarence House's "Monica." All trade only.



coffee break

The porch (top) off the master bedroom is ideal for sipping coffee. Porcelain and pewter cup and saucer from Botanik, \$99 (805/565-3831).

the Aumonts tackle, fitting out the cabana-like structure has been a family affair. Arthur and Anouk assisted in the tent's construction—installing a section of the flooring composed of recycled Italian and French tiles that surrounds thick, rope-like abaca matting. A 19th-century cabinet was painted by Arthur and filled by the family with seashells and coral. Rattan furnishings are covered in a lively mix of fabrics and patterns that adds energy to the otherwise peaceful space.

Fresh bouquets of Hélène's roses scent the air in the tent. Hélène, who has become a bona fide country girl, insists on no phones and no electricity

in the space. Set under enormous pine trees, the tent is silent except for the soothing sounds of a fountain pouring into the backyard swimming pool. The quietude allows for some much-needed relaxation and leisurely lunches. "I love to have lunch in the tent in the summer," says the designer. "This is a place where I feel in total harmony with the world, where my mind can rest from the constraints and frustrations of my active life."

Even when simply lounging and gazing around, however, Hélène confesses she finds herself "redesigning parts of the garden."

Seems this creative mind rarely takes a rest—even in the country.



hang it

- Hélène advises hanging fixtures outdoors for an unexpected touch. The “Passy Petit” chandelier, \$5,600, from The Hélène Aumont Collection comes in 22 custom colors (805/884-0440).



light it

“It’s all about ambience,” says Hélène. Brick House candles, \$36, and soaps, \$14, come in a plethora of garden scents (brickhousesoap.com).

cabana couture

Create your own tented hideaway with decorating tips from Hélène.

- In a garden setting, use vivid, vibrant, and playful colors.
- Lanterns are a must. Hélène’s collection ranges from ornate Moroccan tabletop lanterns to the clear glass hanging variety.
- Add candles (of varying sizes and heights) and fresh flowers. It’s all about ambience.
- Leave the electronics indoors! Let the sounds of nature calm you.
- Hang things—whether it’s a hammock or a lantern.
- Add something exotic or ethnic, such as a Balinese umbrella.
- Dress up inexpensive furniture (the wicker chairs in Hélène’s tent are from Pier 1) with great fabrics on the pillows and cushions.



leggy beauty

The organic “Negresco” coffee table, \$5,850, is designed by Hélène and incorporates her love of the outdoors (805/884-0440). A woven resin chair adds a bit of the exotic to any space. Thomas Pheasant outdoor lounge chair, from \$2,825; from McGuire (kohlerinteriors.com).

Find it ... For more information on The Hélène Aumont Collection, visit [heleneaumont.com](http://heleneaumont.com).