

Hillary Hits Home

The First Lady's projects with the arts include landmark acquisitions for the White House renovation program.

By Cathy Horyn
Photographed by Patrick Demarchelier

On a day when her husband was defending his practice of inviting Democratic biggies to sleep over at the White House and her chief of staff was under fire for palming a \$50,000 political check, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton strode into the White House's Blue Room looking like a woman whose hot-pink Oscar de la Renta suit was made of Teflon. Her smile was relaxed, her hair a smooth bob, and when she sat down in a gilded armchair for a portrait by photographer Patrick Demarchelier, it was with the unhurried charm of a woman who knows how to have an intimate conversation in a roomful of aides and onlookers—about 15, in our case.

Actually, it took Mrs. Clinton about a fourth of a second to break the ice.

"I know, I know," she said teasingly to Demarchelier as he steadied his big camera and waved an index finger away from the lens. "Look natural! Act natural!"

"Exactly!" he said, beaming.

The First Lady gave him an elegant smirk. "Some people are very good at that.... Some people have such a way of just conveying being totally at ease and natural with a camera." Then Mrs. Clinton turned her blue gaze on me, as if to take me into her confidence, and said, "I am not in that group."

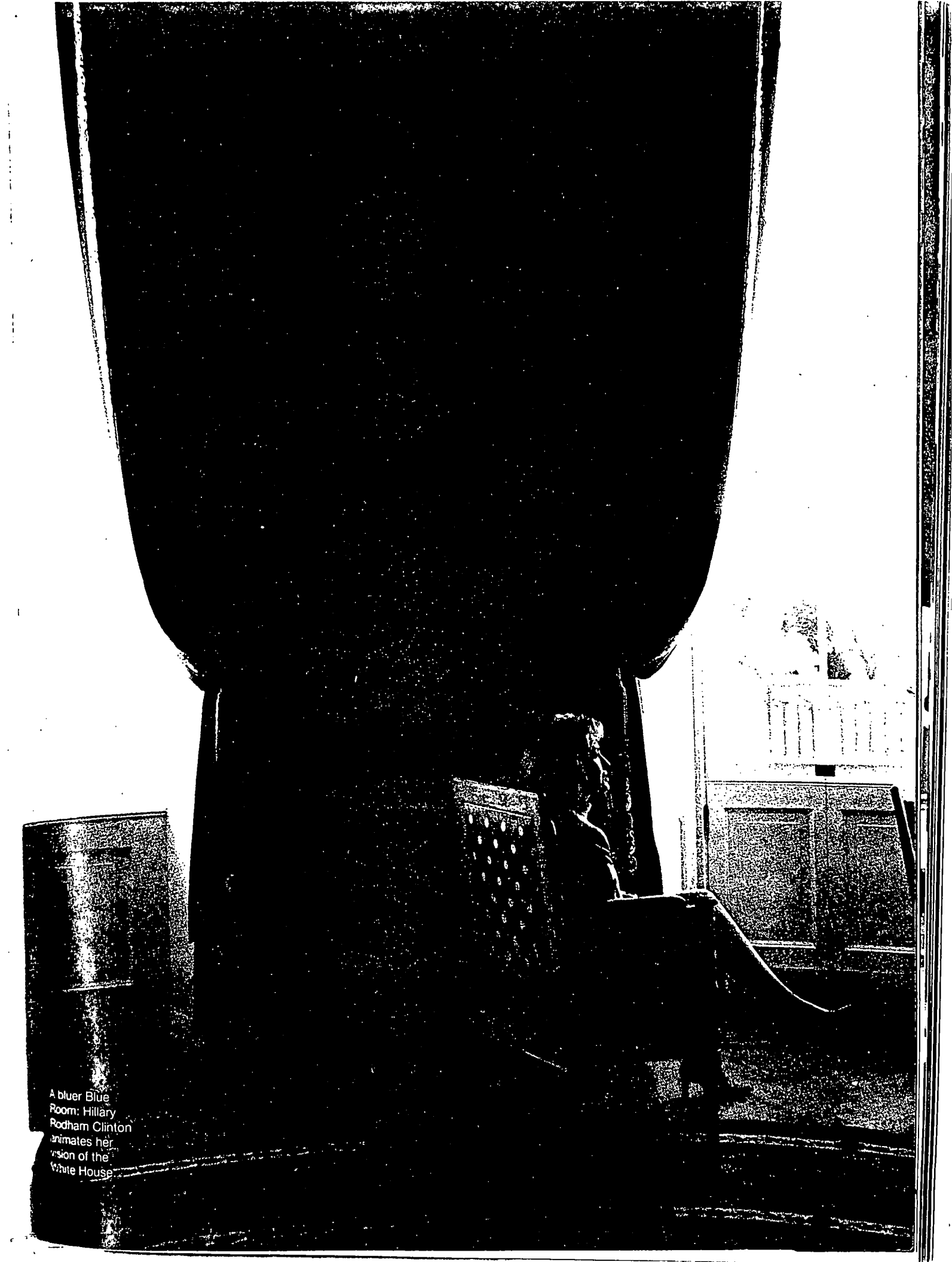
She did a good job of hiding it: Mrs. Clinton made easy small talk with Demarchelier about the upcoming fall collections in Paris, asked me about a move I was making. Had I found a house yet? One would have thought we were old acquaintances—which, of course, is part of her great capacity to make people feel comfortable, as though they were talking to a neighbor and not the First Lady of the United States. Today Mrs. Clinton wanted to talk about some projects she has undertaken at the White House—the redecoration of the Blue Room, for instance, and the first acquisition of a painting by a black American artist, *Sand Dunes at Sunset, Atlantic City*, by Henry Ossawa Tanner, for the White House permanent collection. "To swag or not to swag" may not seem the most riveting of subjects to be discussing with a modern First Lady, but our scheduled time quickly turned into an absorbing conversation, as Mrs. Clinton talked about the character of the nation's premier house—and revealed a good deal about herself in the process.

First ladies have taken varying degrees of interest in the look of the White House, but it was Mrs. Kennedy who focused national attention on the public rooms, hiring French decorator Stephane Boudin, of the House of Jansen, and later starting the White House Historical Association, to encourage private donations. In fact, according to recently retired White House curator Rex Scouten, about 80 percent of the

furniture and fine art in the house has been acquired since the 1950s, and many of the finest pieces were procured during the Nixon years. "It was Pat Nixon, quiet Pat Nixon, who wanted to accumulate these things," says historian William Seale. "And she did assemble an enormous collection of truly wonderful pieces for the White House." Mrs. Clinton has the opportunity to leave an equally indelible mark on the house. For one thing, the White House Endowment Fund, which Barbara Bush started in 1990, has only recently produced enough income from its \$21 million capital to finance major renovations and acquisitions. Last year, Mrs. Clinton approved a separate fund, the White House Acquisition Trust, for donors who wish to make specific contributions for decorative and fine art. So Mrs. Clinton now has more means at her disposal to make improvements than had any previous first lady. Already she has expressed her desire to acquire works by 20th-century American artists, particularly women (the White House has a policy against acquiring works by living artists), and sometime soon, Georgia O'Keeffe's painting *Bear Lake, New Mexico*, will go up in one of the public rooms. It will be the first modernist work of art in the White House's permanent collection of 450 paintings and sculptures.

"This was a dramatic change," Mrs. Clinton said, glancing around the oval Blue Room, with its oatmeal flocked-medallion Brunschwig & Fils wallpaper and the gilded Bellangé chairs, purchased by James Monroe in 1817 and now covered in sapphire-and-gold Scalamandré silk. The room was also redecorated in 1972, but it was Boudin's design, in 1963, that caused the biggest stir. Mrs. Kennedy's stylish decorator selected off-white-striped silk for the walls and confined the signature color to the drapes and festoonery. The effect was stunning, but shocking after the homey Truman and Eisenhower years, when most of the White House was furnished with American reproductions from the decorating department of B. Altman. Mrs. Clinton and her team of curators and decorators from the Committee for the Preservation of the White House have given the venerable Blue Room a much-needed polish. "I wanted it to be bluer than the color that was here before," she said. "I wanted more vibrancy. I wanted a color scheme that would look good at all times of the day and into the evening." Some have complained that the color is too vibrant, but then, White House hues invariably produce a cry. In Andrew Jackson's day, the ladies found the color of the Green Room "odious ... from the fallow look it imparts."

Overall, though, Mrs. Clinton's careful approach has been applauded. "It's subtle, but it's good," said Seale. "I'm ▶ 200



A bluer Blue
Room: Hillary
Rodham Clinton
animates her
vision of the
White House

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very pleased personally with the direction of the Clintons. It's sort of a polishing, a weeding out, a clarifying."

Or as Mrs. Clinton put it, "It's not just what happened two hundred years ago, or one hundred years ago in the house—it's fifty years, it's something that happens right now that makes this house so special."

Like her husband, Mrs. Clinton is an enthusiastic student of White House history, and given that she is a baby boomer, it is not surprising that she is drawn to parts of the house that involve more recent history. She was positively wide-eyed as she told me about how she discovered the Map Room. "When I arrived here, it was pretty much a storage room. Occasionally chairs would be pulled in for a meeting, but it wasn't furnished and it hadn't been painted in a long time. And that was where Franklin Roosevelt plotted the Allied strategy in the Second World War. And when I discovered that, I thought, My gosh, this is one of the most historic rooms in the house. I mean, when Churchill would come and stay for weeks, he and the president would go down in the elevator and into the Map Room and look at all the maps and have their generals and admirals available." Eventually she found a former military aide who recounted details of the room, including the fact that he owned the last troop map prepared for Roosevelt before his death. "It was an extraordinary piece of history, which he had in his own possession," she said. "Once the room was fixed up and treated with the respect I think it deserves, he was willing to give up the map."

Mrs. Clinton was now going strong. The photographer was clicking like mad. And although I could feel her aides edging closer, mumbling something about schedules, the First Lady did not appear to notice. She was talking about some stonework near the North Portico, scorched in the fire of 1814, and about how she had decided to leave it exposed, so future generations could imagine the horror of that night.

"And you can think back to what it was like when Dolley Madison was here and her husband was the last commander in chief who actually led his troops in the field, and he was out, probably ten miles from here, not much further, and they could hear gunfire. She was preparing a meal for her husband and his military commanders when she got word that the British had broken through the American forces and were on their way into the city, and she had to flee. So she cut the Gilbert Stuart portrait of Washington out of the frame, grabbed a few other things, and literally fled."

Mrs. Clinton paused, shaking her head. "I mean, people don't often think about the courage it took for Dolley Madison to do that."

I asked Mrs. Clinton—just hypothetically of course—"If the White House were burning..."

"What would I take?" She roared with laughter. "Well," she said, her eyes twinkling, "aside from my daughter and the cat"—she didn't say anything about the President, but one imagines that POTUS can take care of himself—"mmmm ... I think I would do what Dolley Madison did and take the Gilbert Stuart of Washington. And I would do it because it's been here from the beginning. This is a house George Washington designed; he sited it, he hired Hoban, the architect. He never got to live here, but to me, that Gilbert Stuart represents the beginning of this country and the beginning of this house."

By now Mrs. Clinton's press secretary had placed herself next to my chair. I could feel the nap of her tweed jacket brushing against my shoulder. Still, Mrs. Clinton did not seem inclined to stop, and with her blue gaze upon me, she told me how she had "snuck" a painting by a living artist (he has since died) into the family's private quarters. "So we were fortunate enough to get this fabulous de Kooning—on loan from the artist—one of his later pieces. And then a Kandinsky, which the Guggenheim lent us, which looks great in the Yellow Oval Room."

"Oval rooms are something that I never lived in before," Mrs. Clinton murmured. "I adore oval rooms. And they're not as hard to furnish as I thought they would be."

"I get the impression you really enjoy this," I said.

A peal of laughter. "I love this. I love it. I mean, we spent hours here one day trying to figure out how to make the wallpaper work, because what we had bought didn't work. I was experimenting with my heart in my throat. Well, I think we should cut this out and move that up and—"

Mrs. Clinton shook her head. "You know, it's scary enough when you redecorate something only your friends and family will see."

Now she rose to go, and immediately the nap lifted from my shoulder. Suddenly, there was a great rustling of papers as everyone prepared to leave.

"I'm very pleased," Mrs. Clinton said with spirit. "I love this room ... the house has so much vitality and vibrancy that every time you turn around you feel like you're coming smack up against some piece of history."

Then she was gone, trailed by members of her staff, their voices echoing in the direction of the East Room, where in a few hours her husband would address the problems of the day. "Now, about these sleepovers in the White House, Mr. President...." ■

TOMMY TIME (continued from page 169)

speedometer to be 100 miles an hour. "Speed is great," Hilfiger says, in that deceptively simple, Warholian way of his. But he has just revealed his drive.

Day two. Cellular phone to ear, he breaks neither his stride nor his stream of conversation as we walk to a property on Boot Key Harbor, a beach house that has been rented for a day of waterside shooting.

"It's still *Thelma & Louise*, but now they're at the beach. The road trip continues," Courtney Moss explains. "I think we should send a letter to Bill and Hillary," her boss is saying on his phone, "thanking them for a lovely evening."

Today is all about khaki: khaki and white; khaki, navy, and white; khaki, red, and white; khaki, red, white, and blue. Wearing the first of the four options, the models have been lined up on the beach for a group shot. To inject some excitement into the moment, Hilfiger opens a carton of Marlboro Lights. Grabbing two handfuls, he shouts, "This is what all models like!" and throws them at the assembled. They greedily snatch the packs like manna from heaven.

2:00 P.M. It's time for the man himself to do some modeling. Changing clothes as he's talking, Hilfiger stands in front of me clad only in a T-shirt and briefs. Tommy Hilfiger is wearing Tommy Hilfiger underwear. The image is so striking that I'm prompted to ask, "What's it like, wearing underwear with your own name on it?"

"I was so happy when we signed a licensing agreement with Jockey," Hilfiger says, pulling on his pants, "because I used to wear Jockey. Yay! I don't have to wear that label anymore."

4:30 P.M. The sun is setting among scattered clouds as Hilfiger, wearing a gray suit, white shirt, and red tie, walks along the pier. "FBI, baby," he says as Arthur Elgort snaps away. Nature is adding a nice touch: The wind whips his hair a bit, giving him a tousled look.

"There's a little bit of youth going on there," Mike Toth says. "Very Kennedyesque." Hilfiger looks to the horizon: This pose says Man with a Vision.

Later Toth explains that the concept they're testing for Hilfiger, a new gentlemen's fragrance, is the American dream. "Tommy is the perfect example of it, of course," says Toth. No argument there. Hilfiger is patiently posing when Toth suddenly says, "I want to try something wild. I'd like you to wear this flag. Wrap it around your waist like a skirt."

"You're not paying me modeling fees," Hilfiger says. "The answer is no. No, no, no."

5:45 P.M. The white stretch limo pulls out onto the Overseas Highway, bound for the airport in nearby Marathon. Hilfiger is now in full mogul-mode as he talks business. "We've decided to hold off on a high-end women's line for now," he says, amending an earlier report that a collection was due this spring. "We want to wait and ► 208

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do it well. Intuition tells us which business to turn up and which to turn down." Among those business concerns that are getting the green light: cosmetics and athletic goods.

"There's a certain customer who will always want to buy the brand with image, with attitude," Hilfiger says. "In this category, it so happens that the consumer is buying designer over athletic." The success of the Tommy and Tommy Girl fragrances has prompted more developments with their licensee, Aramis. "We've started a company called Tommy Hilfiger Toiletries," he says. Among the products in the planning stages for this new company are shampoo, shave gel, and moisturizers. A body mist will be introduced this month, with a body wash and a soap following close behind. Bobbi Brown has been consulted for the cosmetic line.

Looming on the horizon is a plan that Hilfiger defines in vague, slightly ominous terms: "It's a combination of advertising, marketing, and futuristic thinking, a multimedia thinking. It has to do with the Internet, publishing, the making of CDs, videos. Expanding the whole presence worldwide through exclusive media as well as publishing." Hilfiger leans forward, blue eyes alive with the promise of the future. "My journey plans are somewhat changing all the time," he says. The limo turns into the airport and pulls up to a beige Challenger jet.

6:45 P.M. "This wine is cold enough," Hilfiger tells the black-clad stewardess, who has just handed him a glass of white. "Could you please remove the ice?" Behind him, a blue-screen monitor says ESTIMATED ARRIVAL TIME 8:57 P.M. Jacket and shoes off, Hilfiger gets comfy in his private jet. He's changed out of his business clothes and into gray sweats and a tan cashmere sweater. I feel it's time to ask him how he's responded to a physical description that several reporters have drummed into print, namely that he looks like a grown-up version of Billy Mumy, from the '60s television show *Lost in Space*. "Who is Billy Mumy?" he asks, unfazed. "I've never seen the show. I did, however, receive a letter from someone claiming to be Billy Mumy's wife, which said: 'My husband is a fine actor. How dare they make fun of him.'" The stewardess has just placed a plate of softshell crab in front of him and now pours more wine. "I have never given much thought to my looks," Hilfiger says. "I'm normal-looking."

Being comfortable with his ordinariness is a quality that marks all of Tommy time, even as the mogul prepares to enter sleepy time. "Now don't write that I snore," he says. It's hard not to. Hilfiger has the medium-loud, steady snore of a man who works hard and enjoys his sleep, when he can get it.

A day later. Back in Manhattan, it's a drizzly afternoon. The commandeering Courtney Moss has just taken me on part one of the Hilfiger-empire tour. On 39th Street there's almost an entire building given over to showrooms and executive offices. Under construction next door is an amphitheater, where all of Tommy Hilfiger's shows will be staged. Just walking through the various divisions, seeing the boards set up for Hilfiger to approve, is like being in a waking anxiety dream, where the rooms never stop, the maze continues, the work goes on and on.

And this is just half of it. We're on our way to the Hilfiger offices on Fifth Avenue, which house more designers, more staff, more, more, and more Hilfiger product. Traffic is slow; we're navigating a pedestrian-congested street. Suddenly we both look up as a familiar face appears in the crowd. There's Tommy. Cell phone to his ear, Hilfiger smiles and waves, walking briskly, searing the crowd. He may look like your average guy, but as Mike Toth said, the man is nimble. ■

BACKWOODS BABE (continued from page 186)

response to a question about her family life—"We transisted between socioeconomic aspects."

But not, alas, between media. "In terms of procuring work," she says of the Judd imprimatur, "it has not helped." After a bit role in the Christian Slater disaster *Kuffs*—for which she turned down an audition for the female lead because the part required gratuitous nudity—Judd appeared semiregularly as Swoosie Kurtz's daughter in

Sisters, the since-canceled TV melodrama. She didn't really make a name for herself until her star turn in 1993's *Ruby in Paradise*, a sweet little independent film that swiftly altered her career trajectory. Soon after came roles in *Heat*, *Norma Jean & Marilyn*, and *A Time to Kill*, as well as a two-month run in a Broadway production of *Picnic*, an impressive performance in *Smoke*, and a one-scene role that was spliced out of *Natural Born Killers*.

Although a number of her characters have been of the good-wife variety—the kind played by Jeanne Tripplehorn and Anne Archer—Judd nabbed a meatier role in *Kiss the Girls*, alongside Morgan Freeman. (She will also be appearing in *The Locusts*, a romantic drama with Kate Capshaw and Vince Vaughn, later this year, in a role that seems a natural: a sexy, flirty country girl with romance on the brain.) *Kiss the Girls*, based on the James Patterson novel, is a psychothriller about a detective on the trail of a psychokiller. "I took the part because the script scared the bejesus out of me," says Judd, who jumped at the chance to work with director Gary Fleder (*Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead*) and the usually stoic Freeman, whom she nevertheless describes as "a rascalion." She says the only real impact she had on the script was changing her character's avocation from karate to kickboxing. "It's no awesome masterpiece," she says of the film's plot, "but there are a lot of small side streets that come in and support the town square of the major plot, and we had to eliminate some of those."

Judd will gladly talk about any of her movies, but she gets most involved when discussing *Normal Life*, a 1996 film that virtually no one has seen. That's the point. Costarring former-teen-idol Luke Perry, the film—about a bank-robbing couple—was, as Judd tells it, sent to video after a corporate shake-up at Fine Line Features, which distributed the movie. Judd, who adores the film, flatly blames Fine Line, which has argued that the picture was never slated for wide release. "Oh," Judd says, echoing the argument she made to the studio suits, "do I look like I'm having the kind of career where I select projects that are going straight to video?" Judd says she'd never once been mistreated in Hollywood—until this.

Which, if you think about it, is noteworthy. Here is a comely young actress with an Appalachian accent—a God-fearing churchgoer—and it took years for her to be trampled by the Hollywood horde. Well, yes, she is a Judd, so she arrived well-armored—or, in her phraseology, "better prepared for certain aspects of the contingencies of this life." And anyway, who says Hollywood is all that different from backwoods Kentucky? "Do you know how many Christians I end up with in the hair-and-makeup trailer?" asks Judd, who has been known to quote verbatim from Revelations. "Seriously. I mean, people who go to church. People who do devotionals on a daily basis. People who want to see my devotional." She shrugs. "Go figure."

All things being equal, then, Judd moves easily between Hollywood and the woods—in this case, the family's sprawling Tennessee farm. She's lived this way ever since her beach house burned down in the 1993 fires that ravaged Malibu. There's only one difference. When she's in Los Angeles, she shares a luxury hotel suite with a pop superstar. If he visits her in Tennessee, he just might sleep in the barn. ■

COMIC STRIP (continued from page 199)

or remote controls. When we were growing up, we would all get really excited when certain cool shows came on—*Casino Royale*, *The Avengers*, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* My oldest brother, Peter, would read *TV Guide* and tell us when *Matt Helm* was coming on, and we'd stock the TV room with popcorn and Cokes days in advance. Of course, Peter told me that I had a rare and fatal disease called boogeritis, so I learned to take what he said with a grain of salt. But he was right about these movies. I saw them and I wanted to be those guys. Thank God for the movies—without them, I might still be wearing muscle tees and rising-sun Ninja armbands.

Now, for my next movie, I'm thinking of a Merchant-Ivory type thing, set in the court of Louis Quatorze. I think those pantaloons and codpieces might be the next big retro statement.... ■