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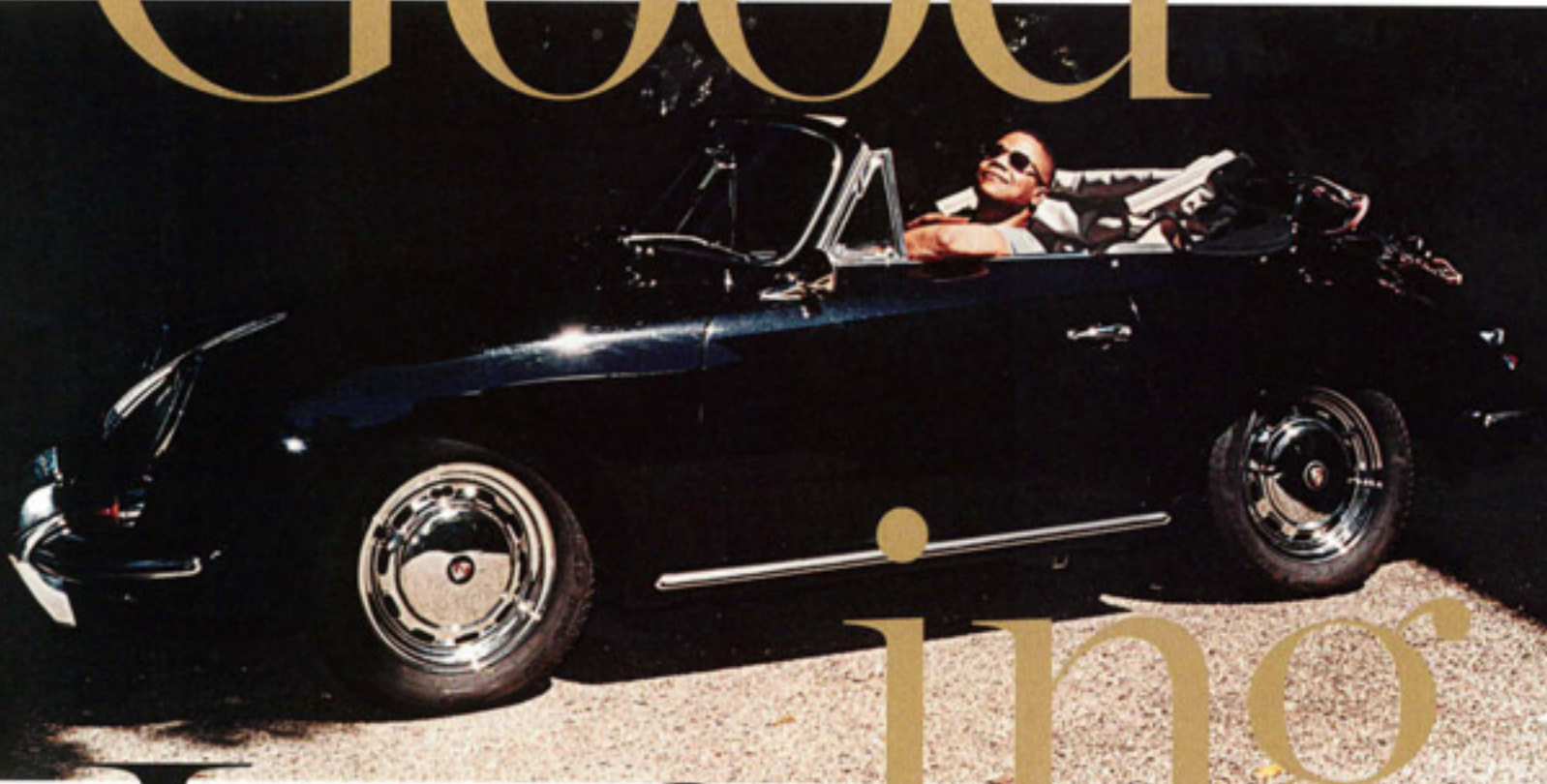
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"Show me the money!"
Not exactly. Oscar-winning actor **CUBA GOODING JR.** and his close-knit family of five live in an L.A. home ...

The

Good



Life

ings

... that is refreshingly unpretentious (vintage Porsche and temperature-controlled wine room notwithstanding)

written by **MARK MORRISON**
photographed by **FREDRIKE HELWIG**



LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

"The property looked like a park," Gooding says, recalling the first time he saw his L.A. spread. Today, the actor does an occasional handspring alongside his house, which is graced with lush landscaping, courtesy of designer Jay Griffith, and a colonnade. Opposite: Va-va-voom! Cuba soaks up the sun in his 1964 Porsche convertible.

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RIGHT, LEFT, RIGHT, RIGHT, LEFT, LEFT, RIGHT. Cuba Gooding Jr. jabs at the air Muhammad Ali-like, as he wanders around the idyllic grounds of his English-country-style house. These are not big *pow* punches or the kind of showy theatrics some may expect from the Oscar-winning star of *Jerry Maguire*. No, these are small, studied moves that speak of finesse, subtlety, restraint—qualities that are on display in his role as a hitman in the dark new drama *Shadowboxer*, as well as in the sophisticated Los Angeles home he shares with his wife, Sara, and their brood, which consists of sons Spencer, 11, and Mason, 9, their newborn daughter, Piper—plus a 200-pound English mastiff named Bootsy Collins. Although the 8,000-square-foot showplace is not yet three years old, it is so rich in quality and character that it feels as though it has existed in this leafy glen for a lifetime.

"We wanted to keep it simple," says Gooding, who recounts how he and Sara pored over books together and drove through venerable Los Angeles neighborhoods like Hancock Park looking at older homes for ideas. Inspiration struck when architect David Applebaum showed them a picture of a small 15th-century English country house with a thatched roof, and they asked if he could translate its timeless blend of charm and comfort to a larger-scaled structure.

The result is a home that's a gracious mix of formal and informal, combining English and French country-home architectural elements. It reinvents tradition with a blue-slate roof, French windows, wide-plank walnut floors, 13-foot-high ceilings, and reclaimed stone pavers and antique fireplaces from France. There are also modern amenities—radiant-heat stone floors, a temperature-controlled wine room, his-and-hers closets, a black-bottom swimming pool with a stacked stone spa,



AS GOOD AS IT GETS Framed by ferns and New Zealand flax, the Goodings' large country-style house (top) offers a suggestion of how complete the actor's life has become. "I had never lived in the same house more than two years until we got married," says Gooding, with wife Sara (above). A wrought-iron chandelier from Rose Tarlow/Melrose House hangs above the step-down living room (right). Linen slipcovered sofas and accent pillows from Brenda Antin Antiques, as well as a soft hemp rug, add to the clean look.



UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS

A back staircase was added to lead to and from the great room. The kitchen table, one of few pieces from the Goodings' former home, separates the kitchen and mudroom from the family area. Black granite counters offer a contrast to white subway-tile backsplash and glass-front cabinets.



FAMILY MATTERS Above: "Everybody lives here," Gooding says of the great room's family area, which Miller kept kid-friendly with khaki slipcovered couches. The custom fireplace is a mosaic of reclaimed limestone from France, and the steel-framed French windows are covered with tortoiseshell-pattern bamboo shades and mesh drapes that let light in from the garden. Below: Gooding helps himself to goodies from one of two well-stocked stainless Sub-Zero refrigerators.



and a theater complete with movie-projection room. The structure is so well-proportioned that it manages to be impressive but not imposing. And the Goodings can entertain Hollywood titans like Jerry Bruckheimer just as easily as high school chums.

"The couple are the most unaffected people," says interior designer Sean Miller, who created fuss-free, neutral backdrops that allow the spaces to flow without interruption, then added vintage fabrics in natural fibers to create a cozy feel. To give the house a greater sense of age and history, the Goodings had him strip the gloss from the stone floors and use honed rather than polished Carrara marble for the kitchen counters; the walnut floors, meanwhile, were lightly distressed, and the undulating plaster walls were done by hand to suggest another time.

Oddly enough, the couple never had any intention of building a new house when they first bought the three-quarter-acre property in 2002; it already boasted a stately vine-covered Tudor-style home that dated to the forties. "We loved that house," says Gooding, though it was barely larger than the



PRIZED SPACES Left: "We wanted a great view of the front yard," says Gooding of his window-lined dining room. The limestone floors stay warm with radiant heating. The unique chandelier—antique glass shades suspended on a pulley—hangs above a farmhouse table and modern Chippendale-style chairs from Rose Tarlow/Melrose House. Above: Gooding's 1996 Oscar for *Jerry Maguire* is in his home theater.

3,000-square-foot San Fernando Valley abode they had called home for nine years prior. But when they went to expand the Tudor, the soil-inspection reports came back negative, and the city ordered them to stop construction immediately. Says the actor, "We knew we were in trouble when the architect said, 'OK, you can't build on this till you recompact the soil. But the good news is, now you can design the house you want.'"

Though they demolished the original house, they created a new one that echoes its quiet elegance. The construction process, once slated for nine months, took two years, during which Gooding shot both *Radio* and *The Fighting Temptations*, flying home to help Sara oversee the project. "At one time there were 56 guys working, but everyone loved being here," says contractor Chris Baber. "Cuba spent a lot

of time walking around, talking to all the guys."

If the 38-year-old actor goes out of his way to be friendly, perhaps it's because he remembers tougher times. His father, Cuba Gooding, a singer with the seventies group the Main Ingredient ("Everybody Plays the Fool"), moved the family from the Bronx to L.A., where Gooding shared happy days with his older sister, April, and younger brother, Omar, on a two-acre spread in North Hollywood. But his parents split up when he was 10 (they remarried in 1995), and his mother did her best to hold the family together, often moving them from apartment to apartment and even to various motels on the outskirts of L.A. "At one point we lived out of a car, going for days without eating," says Gooding, who attended four high schools in four years before graduating from North



THE PLAY'S THE THING Above: Gooding converted a corner of the garage, beneath his 2,000-square-foot home theater and office, into a workout space and play area where he can spar with a trainer (the actor has been boxing since 1991) and the kids can watch TV, play pinball, or saddle up and ride a bucking dinosaur. Right: An avid ice-hockey fan who plays twice a week on a Hollywood team that has included Keifer Sutherland and Keanu Reeves, Gooding built a regulation-size hockey rink for everyday practice. "The kids like to ride their bikes around there too," he adds.



Hollywood High, where he met Sara. "I wasn't into drama geeks," the blonde says with a wry smile. "But everybody knew Cuba. He was well-liked in all circles, just a good guy."

Though Gooding has been a celebrity since his breakthrough performance in the critically acclaimed 1991 drama *Boyz n the Hood*, Sara says her husband has always been "easygoing and positive." The couple exchanged vows in 1994, and their home life has been a definite contrast to Gooding's childhood. "I went months without seeing my father," says the actor, who makes sure he's not away for more than two weeks at a time.

If anything, Gooding is only too happy to be there for his family, whether taking in his boys' basketball games or checking on Piper as she wakes up from a nap with sleepy blue eyes. And better yet, he takes neither his renewed career focus nor his stable home life for granted. "Coming from my background, I never allow myself to feel too attached to any place," he says moments later, sitting comfortably in the coffered-ceiling living room. "To me, we're only borrowing this space. Sara and I may be in this house for the next 50 years. And the next people will have their own experiences here." With this, he takes in the broad walnut staircase, the oversize antique fireplace and the sense of permanence that permeates the place. "But," he adds, "we'll have left our mark." ■



SCENES IN THE LIFE The black-bottom pool and stacked-stone spa are located on the front lawn (and hidden behind a hedge) to make better use of the property. "There are kids here every weekend in the summer," says Sara. Opposite, clockwise from top: "He looks intimidating, but he's just family," Gooding says of Bootsy. The rear colonnade provides shade for alfresco family dining and frequent summer entertaining. Spencer dangles from the top of his bunk bed as Mason sneaks up from below (the second story was extended over the living room to create rooms for each boy). Gooding and the latest addition to the home: Piper, now almost 7 months old.