

YOU'RE INVITED: INSIDE THE HOTTEST PARTIES EVER

InStyle

CELEBRITY+LIFESTYLE+BEAUTY

Flawless Skin!

A Step-by-Step Plan

Perfect Party Dresses

The Right One for You

Going Out Guide

Presto! Dress 10 lbs. Thinner

Body Shapers that Work

Easy Shopping

143 Great Web Sites

Faith Hill

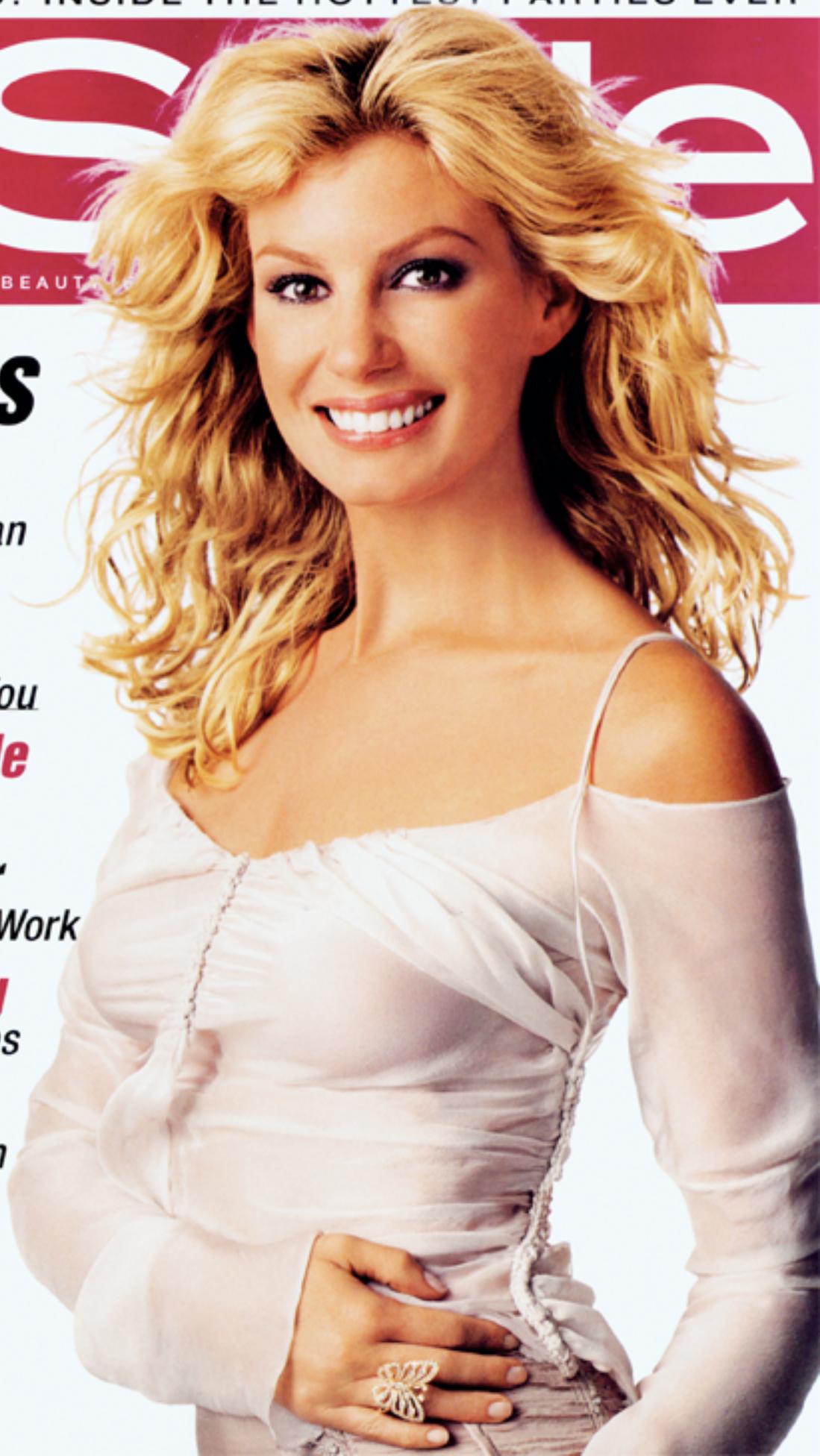
Her Secret Passion

NOVEMBER 2002
\$3.99US \$5.95CAN 11>



0 72440 10645 1

INSTYLE.COM AOL KEYWORD: INSTYLE



A photograph of a family in a kitchen. A man in a light blue button-down shirt stands on the left, smiling. A woman in a bright blue top stands in the center, also smiling and gesturing with her hands. A young boy in a blue t-shirt is in the foreground on the right, smiling. The background shows wooden kitchen cabinets and a tiled wall.

ROMANO EMPIRE

A man's home may be his castle,
but if Ray Romano were left to
furnish his, there'd be a beanbag
chair where the throne should go.

Luckily, his wife, Anna, took on
the role of decorator, so he could
play court jester

by Lisa Arbetter

photographed by Matthew Hranek

"The idea was to create a level of informality and intimacy in a large house," says designer Bebe Johnson. In the living room, that meant pairing contemporary art with French country furniture. Opposite: the entry hall (top) and den, with a painting of the Sicilian town from which Anna's family hails.



"I just wanted carpeting. I was campaigning for carpeting through the whole house," says Romano. "I like to be able to roll on the floors—with the kids, without the kids."



"I go for cozy. I don't want to feel like I'm living in a museum," says Romano, summing up his design aesthetic. Here, Ray, Anna and their four children cook up a ruckus in the kitchen.

RAY ROMANO

Ray Romano and his wife, Anna, are standing on the second-floor balcony of their new Mediterranean-style home, looking down over their front lawn. "For three months I've had to live in this house without a fountain," Ray whines. He's just pretending to be aghast that the circular stone structure at the center of the yard isn't up and spouting, but Anna ignores him anyway. She's been supervising the building and decorating of this 9,500-square-foot San Fernando Valley spread for the past two years and wouldn't mind a word of appreciation, thank you very much. "Sometimes I just want him to say, 'Wow, this is nice,'" she says. "But with him, nothing. And he'll admit it. He really has no interest."

"I helped pay for it," he reminds her.

"Oh, yeah," she deadpans. "I forgot."

If this seems like a scene from some glitzier version of *Everybody Loves Raymond*, it's probably because Real Ray and his television counterpart, Ray Barone, share a talent for wife exasperation, as well as other traits. After all, Barone is based on Romano, 44, a regular guy who loves sports, revels in family life, reflexively cracks wise, and is about as inclined to flashiness as Liberace was to L.L. Bean khakis. This is a man who splurged on a butter-yellow '69 Cougar convertible (the car his older brother, Richard, had when Ray was about 18 but wouldn't let him drive) but is too embarrassed to take it out on the highway. "I'll look like I'm trying to show off," he says. So is it any wonder that he's amused by—and even a little uncomfortable with—the fact that he's now living in a fountain-worthy home?

Anna, it seems, could take or leave the fountain too. She admits that some of the grander elements of the seven-bedroom house—with its curved staircase and piano room—are a little, well, over-the-top for their tastes. They have four kids—Alexandra, 12; twins Gregory and Matthew, 9; and 4-year-old Joe—and socks have been known to wind up hanging from the foyer's chandelier. Sure, Emmy-winner Ray stars in



"The mood here is really serene," says decorator Bebe Johnson of the master bedroom, which mixes contemporary celadon-colored walls with traditional pieces like a Venetian mirror. Opposite: At the foot of the bed is Ray's favorite gizmo, a pop-up television (top); the marble-tiled master bath.



Although no one in the family plays tennis, Ray insisted on having a court. "At our last house it was everything," he says. "It's where I taught the kids to ride bikes and play baseball."

RAY ROMANO

and produces his own show (the highest-rated CBS sitcom since *Murphy Brown*), and he's developing his first live-action film, *Action Abramowitz*. But, says Anna, "We're still who we were in Queens."

As their accents attest, that's where the two grew up and lived until five years ago, when they moved into a rented house in L.A.'s Tarzana neighborhood. And it's where they met in 1983, when Ray, who has also toiled as a gas station attendant and futon deliveryman, got a job as a teller in the bank where Anna worked. Not surprisingly, he was the office cutup. "He was so funny," Anna recalls. "He used to write these goofy poems about everyone."

Unfortunately, when it came to the actual work, Ray needed some—how shall we say it?—hand-holding.

"He was so slow," says Anna, a petite, youthful 39.

"Yeah. She helped me out," he concedes. "I remember the first words I said to her were, 'How do you sign off from your computer?' Now, any time we're in a situation where we can't believe how far we've come, I say, 'How do you sign off?' and we remember how it all started."

Actually, their romance didn't *really* start until a few years later (it seems Ray was a little slow with the asking-out too), when, after spending lots of time hanging around in a group, the two finally went out alone on their first official date.

"I should have known then, I should've known," recalls Anna, laughing. "He drives me home, and we're in front of my mom's house and so we kiss. Well, usually you look at each other after, but he just stared straight out the window. I'm like, 'Ray?'"

"I kissed her, then I thought, I'll count to 10. If I turn around and she's still there, it's a good sign," he says. "I gave her a chance to run away."

"It was so weird," she says. "Even today he's bad with eye contact." Ray, not missing a beat, looks at the floor and says, "That's not true, Anna."

The couple's George Burns–Gracie Allen repartee seems a





"She's pretty girlie," says Anna of daughter Alexandra, so her pink-infused bedroom features embroidered drapes, ruffled lamp shades, and a custom-painted floral bed and desk. But where are the Britney posters? "We let her hang them in the closet," says Anna.



natural outgrowth of 15 years of marriage. And though Anna says that "after so many years and four kids, things can get on your nerves," she adds that Ray has made all her dreams come true. And he still tries hard to make her laugh. "It's one of my favorite things to do," he says.

Strolling around their backyard with its broad patio—Anna holding the saucer-eyed Joe on her hip—the two chuckle as they recall their old home in Queens. That house was in the same neighborhood where Ray's parents, Albert, a retired engineer, and Lucie, a retired piano teacher, still live and where the Romano boys—Ray; Richard, a retired N.Y.C. cop; and Robert, a third-grade teacher who also runs rayromano.com—grew up. It had a backyard about a quarter of the size of their new home's pool deck, and, adds Ray, "I'm not kidding: It was concrete."

Compare that with this new place and its one and a quarter acres, three fireplaces ("We have never, ever lit a fire before," says Anna) and pool house, and *The Jeffersons* theme song ("Movin' on Up") might spring to mind. Still, Anna wanted it to feel comfy. So decorators Bebe Johnson and Ellen Geerer of Bebe Johnson Design went to work refining the blueprints—adding archways and casement windows and opening up the floor plan to let in more light—and choosing soothing, neutral colors to unify the house. Durable chenille fabrics cover couches and chairs in rooms where the kids congregate, and wooden pieces were bought lightly distressed, on the good chance they will meet with a flying Godzilla doll or Barbie head.

Though Ray never pored over paint chips or fabric swatches, he did call the shots when it came to his office. Its shelves are dotted with family pictures, softball trophies (won by both the *Everybody Loves Raymond* team and his old Queens team), sports memorabilia (including a baseball signed by members of the 1969 Mets who appeared on his show), and a beat-up copy of *The Lords of Flatbush* album. "I saw it when I was a teenager, and I loved the soundtrack," he says of the 1974 Sylvester Stallone movie. "I found it on Ebay for \$5. In fact, when I met Sylvester Stallone, I told him I'd just bought it."

"I think he asked you, 'Why?'" says Anna with a knowing chuckle. "What was I going to say?" Ray retorts. "You're Rocky, man!"

If Romano doesn't picture himself the big star, he does possess at least one star-worthy indulgence: his own putting green. To say he

RAY ROMANO

loves golf is like saying Janet Jackson has decent abs. Just mention the game and he'll pull out a tape of one of his all-time highs: the 2002 AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am. Watching the screen intently, he relives a difficult putt that would either take him out of the game or let him play the next day. Miraculously, Ray, who has a slightly-above-average 16 handicap, pulls through, and the crowd goes wild. "That took about two weeks to get out of my system," he says.

Well, not exactly. "I had to hear about it *forever*," says Kevin James, star of *The King of Queens* and a friend since their New York comedy circuit days. "He needs a lot of validation when it comes to golf and comedy. Don't get me wrong, he's a great guy. He just annoys me tremendously."

But seriously, folks. Though playing in that tournament—as well as hosting *Saturday Night Live* and performing at the White House—was a favorite perk of his celebrity, Ray knows his success has its downside. Mostly he and Anna worry about how his fame affects the kids and their ability to appreciate things. "In the long run you just show them," says Ray. "You teach them the values you have and show them you love them, and hopefully it doesn't matter what financial position we're in. Hopefully."

So they take the kids to the beach or to Disneyland, and vacation each summer at the Jersey shore with their extended family, as they have for 10 years (though they rented a house in Malibu for the first time this summer too), and their version of a fun night is still something as unfancy as a cutthroat game of Taboo. "If you think Ray has changed," says James, "just look at that \$20 Casio watch he wears."

Only their favorite meal has experienced a trade-up, with sushi replacing pizza as the food of choice. Ray claims it was out of necessity, not pretense. "You can't get good pizza here," he says. "Everybody says, 'You've got to try this place, it's just like New York,' but it never is."

The city of their birth, it seems, still tugs. Anna says

she misses Italian sausages and ices, while Ray fondly recalls all the nights spent running from comedy club to comedy club, doing as many as seven sets an evening. "I was always rushing, being late, parking in front of fire hydrants, and then looking out at the crowd and wondering, 'Did I just tell this bit to this audience?'" he says, smiling. "To quote Neil Sedaka [whose CD he plays in his car], 'I miss the hungry years.'"

But he's not complaining. "I like it out here," he says. "Just the fact that we don't have to dress four kids in boots and coats makes everything easier."

And if *that* doesn't call for a "How do you sign off?" nothing does. ■



"We're homebodies. We like to hang out in the backyard," says Anna. "It's beautiful, and if the kids are running around screaming, it's not like they're on top of you." Here, the clan in a rare quiet moment. Top: What a swinger! Ray lets loose on his putting green.