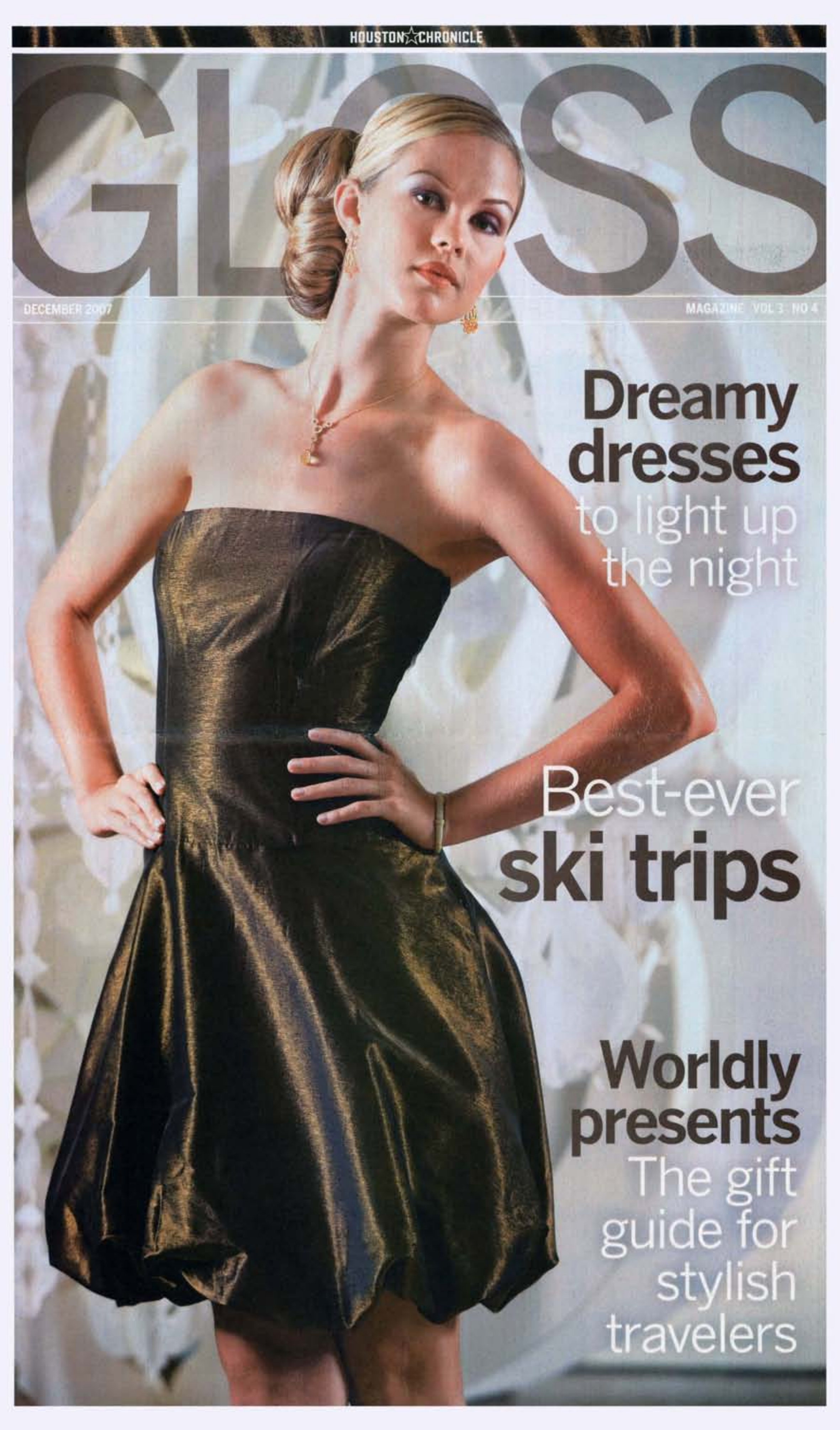


# GLOSS

DECEMBER 2007

MAGAZINE VOL 3 NO 4



**Dreamy dresses**  
to light up  
the night

Best-ever  
**ski trips**

**Worldly presents**  
The gift  
guide for  
stylish  
travelers



**THE HERMITAGE APPROVED:** The red room in the River Oaks home of Larry Hokanson and Michael Siller is the first space visitors see after climbing a grand spiral staircase from the front entrance.



**ITALIAN FLAIR:** An Italian console holds a signed photograph of Nicholas II.



**NEOCLASSICISTS:** Michael Siller, left, and Larry Hokanson in their River Oaks home.



**TABLETOP GALLERY:** A French Restoration desk holds signed photographs of the imperial family of Russia.

# CZAR POWER

Larry Hokanson and Michael Siller's home overflows with museum-quality décor

Story by Maggie Galehouse • Photography by Bruce Bennett

**F**rom the lofty 14-foot ceilings to the custom carpets in rich reds, golds and greens, the River Oaks home of Larry Hokanson and Michael Siller is fit for a Russian czar. And that is precisely the point.

The pair spent more than two years building and furnishing a home that pays homage to their fascination with pre-Revolution Russia. The adventure took them all the way to St. Petersburg and the basement of the State Hermitage Museum, where they ordered replicas of consoles, chairs, paintings and chandeliers that once decorated the homes of Russian royalty. "I've always been an amateur historian," says Hokanson, founder of Hokanson Inc., a luxury custom carpet company. "I got consumed with the whole story of the fall of the Russian Empire."

Siller, an interior designer and Hokanson's partner of 27 years, fell for the Romanov aesthetic. "We had toured France and England and, while they were spectacular, I had never seen design carried to the point the Russians had taken it," he says. "I was blown away by the pinnacle they had reached. The proportions of Russian classicism were almost perfection." By the mid-19th century, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Munich and other European cities had embraced the grand scale and simple geometric details of neoclassical architecture — a shift away from the exhaustive fussiness of Rococo. Hokanson and

Siller hoped to bring neoclassical details to their River Oaks home and augment them with furniture handcrafted by the Hermitage's restoration department.

But before the museum would agree to replicate anything, the couple had to provide blueprints of their home, still under construction, to prove that the space was fit for the royal treatment. Then they had to face Valentina, a forbidding Hermitage spokeswoman who simply said "nyet" to the pieces the Hermitage was unwilling or unable to reproduce.

And then they waited two years to have the pieces made and sent to Houston.

"It was like adopting a child," says Hokanson. He's used to high-profile spaces and demanding clients. His company created the official Oval Office rug for president George H.W. Bush, as well as the carpeting for Elton John's Atlanta home and Vladimir Putin's apartment at the Kremlin.

Siller, whose projects, including this house, have been featured in *Architectural Digest*, found gold in the Hermitage basement. When he spied a dining room chair made in 1820 for Alexander I peeking out from behind a sled that belonged to Peter the Great, he knew he needed it.

"As soon as I saw it," says Siller, "I knew that that was our chair." Make that 12 chairs, now flanking the dining room table.

Hokanson and Siller created three grand Russian rooms in traditional colors: a yellow dining room, a red living room and a green library, where floor-to-ceiling shelves on one wall

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**AUTHENTICITY MATTERS:** The ornate dining chairs — replicas of those built in 1820 for Alexander I — were made by the restoration department of the State Hermitage Museum from white birch logs — just like the originals.



**GREEN SCHEME:** A Russian cavalry coat from 1890, worn by one of the czar's escorts, is displayed in a room where Hokanson and Siller also keep antique Russian china and books.



**HOME PLATE:** A bust of Nicholas II, the last czar of Russia, is displayed alongside an antique plate from his Crimean palace.

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display antique Russian china. Hokanson and Siller also collect antique Russian books, clothing and memorabilia — all displayed without detracting from the comfortable opulence.

They laugh when they recall their lives in 1987, when the Houston economy bottomed out and they each launched their businesses. They moved all their living room furniture to Siller's River Oaks office so clients would have a place to sit. And when Hokanson began getting lucrative commissions in New York, he took a small apartment on West 57th Street that was a showroom by day and — thanks to a Murphy bed — a place to crash at night.

These days, life in Houston is busy, but every six weeks Hokanson and Siller sneak away to their new getaway, a home on four acres of lakefront property in Eagle River, Wis.

They sold their River Oaks home in November and are shopping for land on which to build their next great adventure: a home that reflects the mid-'30s architecture of Fascist Europe, particularly Italy and Germany. Doesn't the prospect of doing this all over again exhaust them? No, they say.

"We have the same taste," Siller says.

"In the evenings," adds Hokanson, "we'll just sit in the green room and talk about design."

**See video of the Hokanson/Siller home at [chron.com/gloss](http://chron.com/gloss).**