

A SUMMER PLACE



After a long week of dealing with courtroom dramas, cranky judges and crafty perps, *Law & Order's* assistant DA, Elisabeth Röhm, chills out at her summer home in the Hamptons—a place where the prosecution can truly rest *by* ERIC MESSINGER

photographed by MATTHEW HRANEK

Röhm stands on the footbridge connecting the property to the beach and bay. It passes over a small creek, which is ideal for a day of fishing and crabbing. Opposite: Whether from the porch or the second-floor terrace, the back of the house offers spectacular views of the surrounding bay.





Like the brainy assistant district attorney she plays on *Law & Order*, Elisabeth Röhm has an eye for incriminating evidence, even when it's self-incriminating. "This seemed perfect for me," the 31-year-old actress says, pointing to a magazine picture she keeps taped to her refrigerator door. It's a photo of the great Katharine Hepburn, reclining on a rough patch of earth with a picnic basket by her side. The caption is a telling quote from the legendary actress: "I love anything you can do alone. That's the trouble with acting. It requires other people."

After reading the quote aloud with some embarrassed laughter, Röhm explains that she herself enjoys working with other actors, but like Hepburn she is definitely someone who treasures her solitude. "I've always been a loner and a homebody," she says. "That's why I love it here. This is where I get away."

"Here" is Röhm's cozy rental home in the Hamptons, which she has had since last summer. Located near the Long Island Sound, it's a classic beachside cottage with wide porches, a shingle roof, and a sunset view that must sometimes seem custom-ordered for Röhm and her boyfriend, TV newsman Dan Abrams. The actress also rents a two-bedroom apartment in New York City, but she spends many weekends out at the cottage, and even the occasional weeknight. "This is where I come when I've been shooting for 16 hours and I'm just exhausted," she says. "I'll get here, have a pizza and a glass of red wine on the porch, look at that view, and go to sleep. It's like my house of healing."

But even though she needs her quiet time away from the set (and the city), no one would ever mistake Röhm for a slacker. In addition to acting in television, she has written a novel (unpublished) and regularly dabbles in singing and songwriting. Lately she has also been busy shooting her first big movie role, playing a rival to Sandra Bullock in *Miss Congeniality 2*. "We're both FBI agents, but my character is neurotic, ambitious and totally disrupted by Sandra's character, who doesn't play by the rules. So we're on the warpath," says Röhm. "I'm having a total blast."

Not that she has any plans to give up *Law & Order* anytime soon. Now entering its 15th season, the show is still one of television's most successful and respected dramas. Plus, it has been a dependable star-making vehicle for actors and actresses on the rise, including Jill Hennessy, Carey Lowell and Angie Harmon, the three actresses who preceded Röhm in the assistant district attorney role. Röhm joined the cast in the fall of 2001, after a few seasons on the *Buffy the*



Clockwise from top: A charming cobblestone chimney anchors the house. A cozy corner in the living room features a brown wicker chair that is one of the few pieces of furniture from the original cottage. The small un-screened section of the porch overlooks a new inlaid swimming pool.

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The cottage's living room has a warm, comfortable vibe that is accentuated by the earth tones of the furniture, including a classic George Smith sofa and kilim-style ottoman, 19th-century Renaissance Revival armchairs upholstered in rough velvet, and a Turkish flat-weave wool rug. The balcony (above) leads to the outside terrace.





Though the kitchen has a high-end stove and refrigerator, its cabinetry gives the room an un-sleek, rustic feel. The wicker bar stools were inspired by a visit to a local ice-cream parlor. Another nice touch: a ladder, which leads to a small sleeping loft.

Vampire Slayer spin-off, *Angel*. Her *Law & Order* character, ADA Serena Southerlyn, is smart and determined but also a little greener than the ADAs she followed. In fact she seems quite different from Röhm herself. "Liz is a much looser, freer spirit," says veteran actor Sam Waterston, who plays Röhm's boss on the show. "She's like a big center of enthusiasm and engagement."

A native New Yorker, Röhm grew up outside the city in the affluent Westchester town of Bedford, where she developed a love of horses and became a competitive equestrian at the age of 5. Her adolescence, though, was less than idyllic. Her parents divorced when she was 10, and by 14 she was, in her own words, "a pretty screwed-up kid" who spent a year at a "juvy school." "It was a horrible place," she recalls, but it inspired her to settle down and become a better student. Röhm decided to attend an elite coed boarding school in Tennessee and later went on to Sarah Lawrence College (back in Westchester), which is where she first discovered her passion for acting.

These days, however, the former wild child thinks less about issues of self-discovery and more about how to balance the things she knows she wants: an acting career that continues to grow and prosper, and a relationship that does the same. "One thing I learned from Sam [Waterston] is that you have to find a partner who really admires your passion, as opposed to someone who wants to distract you from it," she says.

Someone, in other words, like Dan Abrams. As the chief legal

correspondent for NBC News and host of his own nightly show (*The Abrams Report*) on MSNBC, he knows something of being passionate about one's work as well. Introduced more than four and a half years ago, Röhm and Abrams had been friends until they decided to up the ante about 11 months ago. "The more you see someone be good, or always try to be good, you know they're going to be good to you," Röhm says. "I guess you could say that we dated through friendship."

Röhm and Abrams spend much of their relaxed and fun times together at the Hamptons house, where they have friends over for dinner parties, or just hang out by themselves and make occasional forays to the kind of glitterati events the Hamptons are known for. (Not surprisingly, Röhm likes the horse shows.) Although she doesn't own the three-bedroom cottage, Röhm finds that its design and décor suit her perfectly. "Honestly, if I did own it, I'd change very little."



Clockwise from above: The architects loved the old cottage's kitchen sink so much they designed the room around it. As a cook Röhm likes to improvise ("Whatever looks freshest at the local market, that's what I make"). A 19th-century French washstand is now a fully operational bathroom sink.

ELISABETH ROHM



Built in the late 19th century, the cottage used to be a much denser living space, with small, boxy rooms and low ceilings. In the redesign, the Cambridge, Mass., architecture firm of Foley Fiore vanquished just about everything except the exterior walls and the kitchen sink, and created an interior that was appreciably more airy and modern. Now you can sit in the first floor living room and enjoy a panoramic view of the rest of the place, as well as the adjoining property. Look up and you see two beautiful stained-glass windows leading to the high ceiling. Look out and you survey a scattering of cedar trees and a grassy knoll sweeping down to a creek, where a footbridge goes to the beach. As Röhm points out, “the cottage’s soul is driven by the beach. It’s the kind of place where the door has to be open, and the sand can be tracked into the house.” Yet at the same time, it’s a beach house that would feel welcoming in any season. Its lovely pine floors and Douglas fir ceiling give the place a warm cabinlike aura. And its eclectic furnishings—which range from amusing, unpretentious items like floor lamps resting on supersize camera tripods to sentimental antiques like

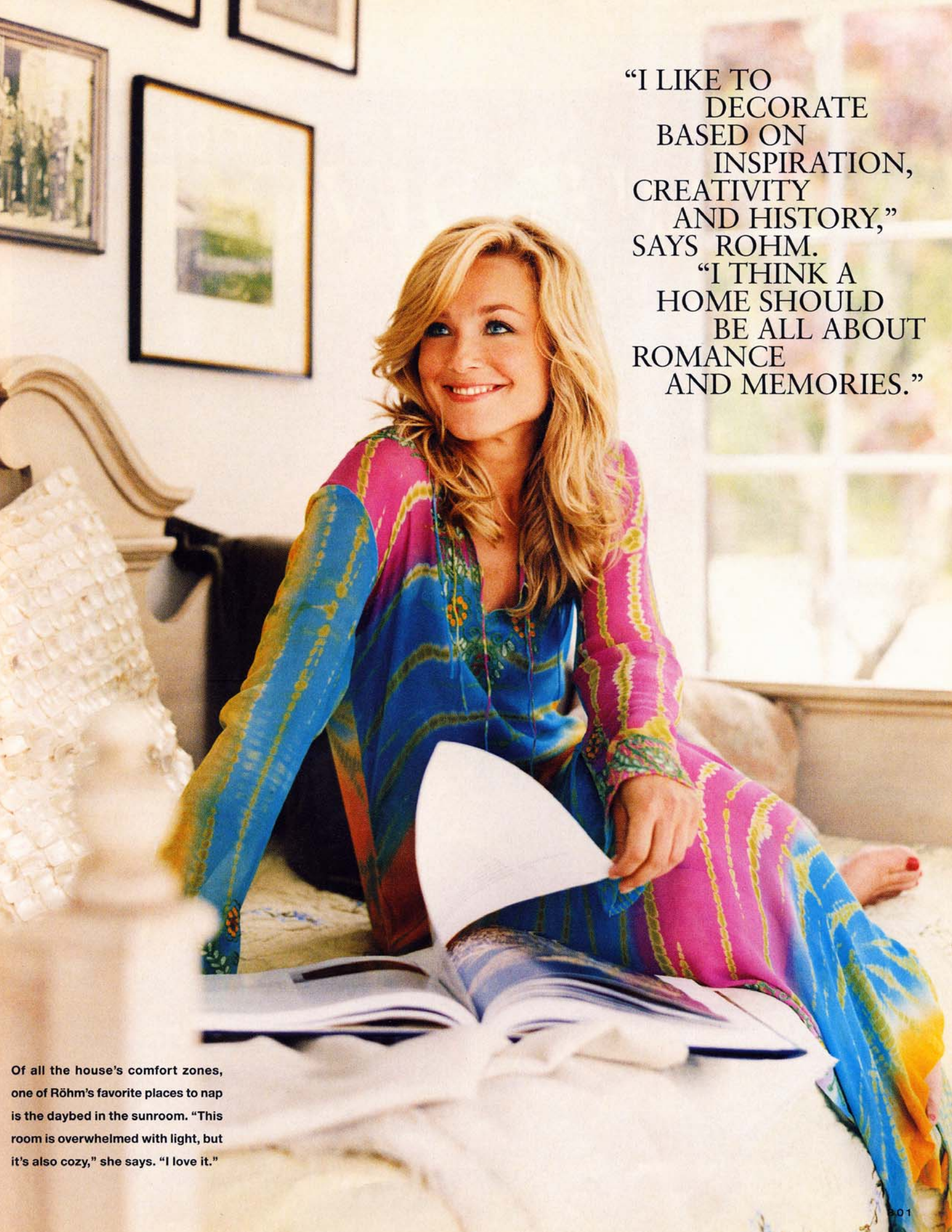
Left, top: With its big sliding windows and light colors, the sunroom is true to its name, and is used as both a porch and a guest bedroom. Bottom: Like the sunroom, the bedrooms have a lighter look than the rest of the house. One upstairs bedroom features an early-19th-century cottage pine dresser with a landscape painted on each drawer.

treasure chests and an old wooden sled—add to the homey, relaxed vibe. Assembled by New York City interior designer Beth Copeland Williams, most of the furnishings came with the home. But Röhm has also added some of her own favorite accents, including a horse saddle, an antique Ferris wheel sign, and

a miniature wicker banana boat that really can float in the ocean. (She has checked.) “I’ve been decorating since I was 14, and everywhere I’ve lived I’ve filled with historical knickknacks. That’s why this place was perfect for me,” Röhm says. “I don’t like to decorate based on fine lines and serenity. I like to walk around a home and see objects that have history and character and wonderful stories behind them.”

Her favorite spots in the cottage are its comfortable nooks. There’s the back porch, of course, but there’s also a kind of alternative porch: the splendid sunroom on the side of the house. Inside Röhm likes to do some writing (and napping) on the two elegant daybeds in the corners of the living room. On a hot summer day, though, she’s likely to be lounging in the sun or going kayaking with Abrams on the bay in the back of her house. Röhm confesses that spending all this intimate time with Abrams has even compelled her to rethink her ideas about what a home is. “I always wanted to share a house with somebody,” she says. “Now I realize it doesn’t matter if I have a house or a box—it’s the companionship that matters. I always liked being at home, nesting. Now I understand that nesting is having a pal.” Sounds like it might be time to take Kate’s photo off the refrigerator. ■





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Of all the house's comfort zones, one of Röhm's favorite places to nap is the daybed in the sunroom. "This room is overwhelmed with light, but it's also cozy," she says. "I love it."