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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."

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."