

After the construction was completed, Mitra decorated with colorful rugs from the Middle East, pillows covered with animal skins and woven ethnic fabrics, and antique furnishings from Bali, China, Africa and India. "The feeling is something of a lair or hideaway, with natural woods and organic textures," says Alexander. "Rhona would never thrive in a shabby-chic environment. She has a multicultural background. There's no designer sweat outfits or tinted glasses for her."

No kidding. Mitra, whose father was a cosmetic surgeon and mother a caterer (they separated when she was 6), spent most of her childhood at boarding schools. "I had read books about what people got up to at school—midnight feasts and snaking around corridors with torches," she says, her eyes lighting up. "The idea sounded fun." Less fun: the school uniforms at her British boarding school. "I'd razor-blade my collars, draw on my shirts, even have dogs bite the cuffs off my sweaters to make them look sloppy," she says. "I tried everything I could to stand apart from the others."

That has never been a problem for Mitra. After spending a year studying at Judi Dench's London acting school, she landed a job appearing at video game conventions as the human embodiment of cyberbabe Lara Croft. "She was an amazingly strong character," Mitra says. "She was out there climbing mountains and traveling all over the world. In my own life I was rock climbing and skydiving. So I thought, Does it get any better than this?"

Apparently it did. Months later Mitra met Alexander (then working as an entertainment manager), who persuaded her to move to L.A. Almost immediately Mitra landed a guest spot on *Party of Five* and small roles in movies like *Sweet Home Alabama*. In the eighth and final season of David Kelley's *The Practice*, Mitra was cast as tart-tongued paralegal Tara Wilson, who traded barbs—and created all kinds of sexual tension—with Alan Shore (James Spader). The following year, the show spun off the series *Boston Legal*, with Mitra and Spader resuming their roles ... and onscreen romance. A certain chemistry exists off-screen as well. "Besides being soft, warm and sexy, Rhona's got a naughty mind and a filthy mouth," says Spader. "And she's always enthusiastic about getting into mischief."

Not right now, though. The big dining room table that she ordered arrived only two days ago, and Mitra's ready to do what makes her happiest: throw a dinner party. Maybe, as a nod to her travels in Thailand, she'll cook Thai food. "Something with coconuts, coriander and lemongrass," she says. Or maybe it will be another favorite: "Meatballs. I'm really good with meatballs." She'll decide when the time comes. "But," she says, "I don't think a house is a home until you christen it with the smell of herbs, garlic and onions." Just keep the guys out of the kitchen. ■

