

# a brand-new day

*A hit series, an earthquake and other acts of God*

*have Friends star Courteney Cox changing her house-hopping ways* **by Hillary Johnson**

**O**n Thursday nights, Courteney Cox invites a gang of friends over to watch *Friends*, the new NBC hit in which she stars as Monica, a woman whose apartment, on any given episode, might be similarly overrun by a gang of friends. In fact, some of the friends and some of the *Friends* are the same people, making the occasion of Cox's Thursday night soirées something on the order of a sitcom vérité. Which suits her fine.

"I'm very similar to Monica," says Cox. "I love for people to come over and hang out. This Thursday I'm not working, so I'm going to cook."

The bright, sunny kitchen of Cox's two-story, three-bedroom cottage in Santa Monica eschews the celebrity trend toward industrial ranges and Sub-Zero freezers. It's so homey that you'd never guess it's the fifth kitchen Cox—a habitual mover—has designed for herself in eight years. This one has the feel of a place your grandmother could bake a pie in. "I cook a great turkey dinner," Cox says. "I grew up in the South, so, if anything, I cook with flavor. I wouldn't know how to make swordfish with steamed vegetables and mango chutney. If, however, you want some garlic mashed potatoes, anything with some fat in it..."

Such country comforts notwithstanding, Cox's style today tends toward the lean. *Friends*, slotted as it is between two bona fide hits, *Mad About You* and *Seinfeld*, represents the actress's most promising career opportunity since Bruce Springsteen plucked her from the crowd in his "Dancing in the Dark" video. And Cox, newly focused and fit (from an inescapably new age-sounding exercise discipline called power yoga), is opting for change—if a little manically.

"I've decided to give away everything I haven't worn in the last six months," she says, looking very classic in jeans and a crimson cashmere sweater set with pearl buttons. "It's interesting, because my possessions used to be really important to me. Maybe it's because I'm getting older, but now I know it's all replaceable. Careers,



"The decisions I've made here are the best and worst I've made in a house," says Courteney Cox, in the heavenly bedroom (opposite) of her Santa Monica home. "The best is painting everything white, the worst is having a white-painted deck." On Courteney's dresser is a cherished childhood photograph (above) of her mother, for whom she was named.



clothes, furniture—everything except family and friends ... and boyfriends.” A sly, bemused smile creeps over Cox’s face. Her beau of five years has been the actor Michael Keaton, and the nature of their commitment, given the time invested, might lead to speculation by gossips. “Well, boyfriends, maybe,” she says, reconsidering. “They’re not exactly replaceable, but say it any other way and you sound like a hopeless case.”

Not likely. An hour at home with Cox leads one to suspect that Keaton’s influence is of no particular importance here. Make no mistake: This is her house. There may be an extra toothbrush hidden somewhere, but it’s not in evidence. It’s even conceivable that she makes him take it home.

Born the youngest of four in Birmingham, Alabama, Cox dreamed of being an architect, not an actor, and her personal quirks are more those of a master builder than an attention-hungry exhibitionist. Her Southern accent may be gone, but Cox shares Scarlett O’Hara’s passion for real estate—she has bought, renovated and sold four properties in her eight years in Hollywood. This furious serial nesting is either a neurotic compulsion or a great way for an ambitious soul to compensate for the vagaries of the actor’s life.

“As soon as I don’t have the drama and angst of trying to fix a place up, I move. I like to keep myself busy 24 hours a day. Maybe it’s healthy, maybe it’s not. I can’t decide,” she says with perfect equanimity.

When Cox speaks of her checkered decorating past, it is with the confessional zeal of a recovering design-aholic: “My first place was very modern, clean-lined, lots of black lacquer and Italian furniture. I got over the modern and I went right into American country, just anything from the flea market so long as it had unusual nails and was old and rustic. Then I got into gothic. Every time I sold a house I changed my style.”

It took the divine convergence of her recent 30th birthday, *Friends*, and the California earthquake of 1994 to slow Cox down. She had barely finished the remodeling of her fifth and latest home when the quake hit, causing heavy



“This is the *only* room in the house. There may as well not be another,” Cox says affectionately of her unassuming kitchen, which opens onto a sitting-and-TV area. “I’ve always wanted a casual place where you could sit and someone could be cooking, and someone else could be watching television nearby and not feel left out.” The bedroom (opposite) with its welcoming plush carpet is the perfect setting for Cox to practice her power yoga.

Courtney and Rags, one of her two dogs, lounge in the den (opposite), where friends watch *Friends* and where she keeps an intriguing collection of books—from Dickens to Iacocca (far right). Cox resisted the urge to tear down the living room's elaborately tiled fireplace (near right). "A tile person told me it was very rare, worth thousands of dollars," she says. "It's weird, but you get used to it." The bright alcove near the kitchen (below) is ideal for studying scripts.



structural damage, valuable emotional reckoning, the dramatic reassessment of things material—and, of course, the need for yet another total makeover.

This time, her approach was different in that it reflected no particular theme, but a growing sense of self-awareness and an emergence of what can only be called, in the good old-fashioned sense, taste. Today, it's a grown-up house, not a theme park. It's warm without being sentimental, judiciously furnished with overstuffed chairs, down-filled sofas, big cushions, potted palms, lots of glass and iron, and the occasional well-placed vase.

Gone are the textured paint jobs. Instead here are many, many shades of white, upstairs and down, with names like Cottage White and Swiss Coffee. "I wanted open and bright," Cox says. And she's got it. Her bedroom is a white-on-white oasis of calm and quiet, guarded by an expanse of pristine white carpet that would frighten away all but the very best of friends. "I'm a perfectionist," she explains, "so the white carpet is not good. But I like it, so it's OK—as long as people wipe their feet when they come in." She pauses, looking at the tender ecru under foot. "Or maybe take off their shoes."

The style is something of a milestone in that Cox can't think of what to call it. "I don't know," she says. "It used to be so clear to me. It was country or it was modern. Now I'm into cleaner lines, a little more sophistication..." Cox gives up trying to figure it out. "I just don't want to see anymore dried flowers in my house!"

The question is, Will any of it stick? On that, Cox is ruefully philosophical. "Well, the longest I've lived in a house is two years and this is my second here, but since I've had to redo it I've earned another two years!" Cox laughs with relief—and in subtle acknowledgment of her exceedingly nomadic ways. "Hopefully, I won't be that way when I have a baby," she says. Surprised, herself, by the comment, a fleeting shadow darkens her brow. Clearly the thought of a live-in design consultant—of any shape or size—gives Courtney Cox tremors as much as it tempts. ©

