

THE HOUSE THAT REGGIE BUILT

The close-knit family of the late Reginald F. Lewis welcomes us to their summer home.

BY REBECCA LOUIE PHOTOGRAPHY BY WYATT GALLERY STYLING BY MEMSOR KAMARAKÉ



Reginald F. Lewis often drove his family by the grand beachfront estates of the Hamptons, imagining a future in one such magnificent home. As a child, his daughter Leslie called one standout “the Daddy Warbucks house.” The East Hampton, N.Y., estate stood high on the bluff, a classic shingled cottage with seven bedrooms that proudly overlooked the ocean. It was the late 1970s, and her father had just purchased the family’s first vacation home there, a modest three-bedroom that sat on one-third of a woody acre. Fast forward 30-plus years, Leslie Lewis Sword—now an actress, producer, and mom—is seated in the living room of that home she admired as a child. “Isn’t it incredible?” she asks, taking it all in and smiling. The patio doors are open, and though classical music plays throughout the house, the breeze carries in the sound of the waves. “Dreams *do* come true.”

While just an aspirational maxim for most, spinning dreams into destiny has been a rule for the family of the late Reginald F. Lewis, the legendary lawyer, businessman, and philanthropist who built an astounding billion-dollar empire more than two decades ago. Though he died in 1993 at the age of 50, his wife, Loida, and daughters, Leslie and Christina, work tirelessly to preserve his legacy and continue his good work.

On June 26, the Lewis family will open their six-acre East Hampton vacation home for two celeb-studded events that benefit Baltimore’s Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture. By day, a tent will shade the perfectly manicured lawn for the third annual Reginald F. Lewis Foundation Gala Luncheon, a fête to celebrate key power brokers under 50 as well as instrumental figures in Lewis’ career. This year’s RFL Award winner is A-list attorney L. Londell McMillan; the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will perform. Following the gala is the inaugural Beach Glamour in the Hamptons party, a mixer for young professionals.

Lewis was a generous donor to many causes. Several buildings, including the International Law Center at his (and his daughters’) alma mater, Harvard, bear his name. His wife and daughters are also generous philanthropists, contributing to such groups as Partners in Health, Lewis College in the Philippines, and various arts organizations.

“My father taught us about hard work and perseverance, that if you are committed and passionate you can accomplish anything, no matter what,” says Christina, a real estate journalist. “The [2005] opening of the museum was the closest I had felt to my father since his passing. It’s a wonderful extension of his memory.”

From top, on Leslie: **Donna Karan** dress.
On Loida: **Diane von Furstenberg** top.
On Christina: **Rick Owens** dress.
Opposite page: The Lewis home.





“My father taught us about hard work and perseverance, that if you are committed and passionate you can accomplish anything, no matter what.”
—Christina Lewis

1. Christina (left) and Leslie (right), both wearing Ralph Lauren, hang out with their mother in the backyard 2. Loida Lewis wears a Missoni top and a necklace a friend brought her from Uganda 3. a black-and-white photo of Loida is one of many family pictures that hang in the upstairs hallway 4. a 1936 painting by John Ferren hangs in the billiard room; in the background stands Reginald F. Lewis' telescope 5. the warm and comfortable living room invites people to lounge.



6. Leslie and Christina relax on the beach behind their home 7. The pool is one flight of stairs from both the house and the beach 8. A colorful painting from the estate of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis hangs at the entrance of the master suite.

“The only thing left to do is his movie. No, Reginald never said he wanted a film made of him, but we would joke about who would play him if one was. He would say, ‘Denzel.’” —Loida Lewis



Loida Lewis admires the view from the TV room.

And so is this East Hampton home. Right after the family’s second Hamptons house burned down in Amagansett in 1991, the “Daddy Warbucks” estate went on the market. Lewis made an offer, but was outbid by music magnate David Geffen. Lewis died before Geffen eventually backed out of the real estate deal, and Loida immediately bought the house in her late husband’s honor.

Though Lewis never got to live there, his presence is felt. Photographs of him pepper the home (a shot of him and Loida with former President George H.W. Bush and his wife, Barbara, sits below a shot of Loida and Lewis’ mother, Carolyn Fugett, with President Bill Clinton). Paintings by Norman Lewis (no relation), one of his favorite artists, hang throughout the home. A statue of an African fertility goddess stands tall in the TV room.

“He always said our homes must have something original from Africa,” says Loida, a Sorsogon City, Philippines, native who met Lewis on a blind date.

Loida still wears her wedding ring and last year celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. Mrs. Fugett and her family presented Loida with the gift of two telescopes, one for stargazing, the other for the sea, as remembrances of the one Lewis lost in the Amagansett fire.

Like her husband, Loida is a shrewd lawyer and savvy businessperson as well as a dedicated family woman. After taking over his company TLC Beatrice, she increased the value of the empire before selling it off, according to his plan. In 1995, Loida also helped publish *Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun?* (John Wiley & Sons Inc.), the best-selling biography that he started writing before his death. She added a Paris pied-à-terre to their real estate holdings, which include a Fifth Avenue apartment in Manhattan. Decked in the baroque and rococo trappings her husband enjoyed, the two-bedroom flat serves as the European refuge he always wanted for his family.

“The only thing left to do is his movie,” Loida says, punctuating her customary poise with a laugh. “He never said he wanted a film made [about his life], but we would joke about who would play him if one was. He would say, ‘Denzel.’”

Still, it is the women who call this a second home, and the details reflect each personality. Leslie, who recently shot a film here, parks her hula hoops against a kitchen wall. Christina, the household decor specialist, helped design the casual elegant interior with renowned firm Hein + Cozzi Inc. (She also partnered with landscape architect Edmund D. Hollander to revamp the grounds for the June festivities.) Upstairs, a nook adjacent to the master bedroom holds a handful of religious objects, all gifts: an icon from Fatima, a crucifix by an artist friend, the holy family depicted as Filipino peasants sculpted from volcanic ash. Here, Loida sometimes strikes a small bowl gong for a moment of Zen.

On the back patio, the Lewis women gather to take a group photograph for this story. As the shot is set up, Leslie begins to sing. The Susan Werner ballad is slow and thoughtful, Leslie’s voice clear and content as it stretches beyond the pool, the deck and the dunes, and out to sea:

*There is a hope that’s been expressed in you
The hope of seven generations, maybe more
And this is the faith that they invest in you
It’s that you’ll do one better than was done before... ▣*