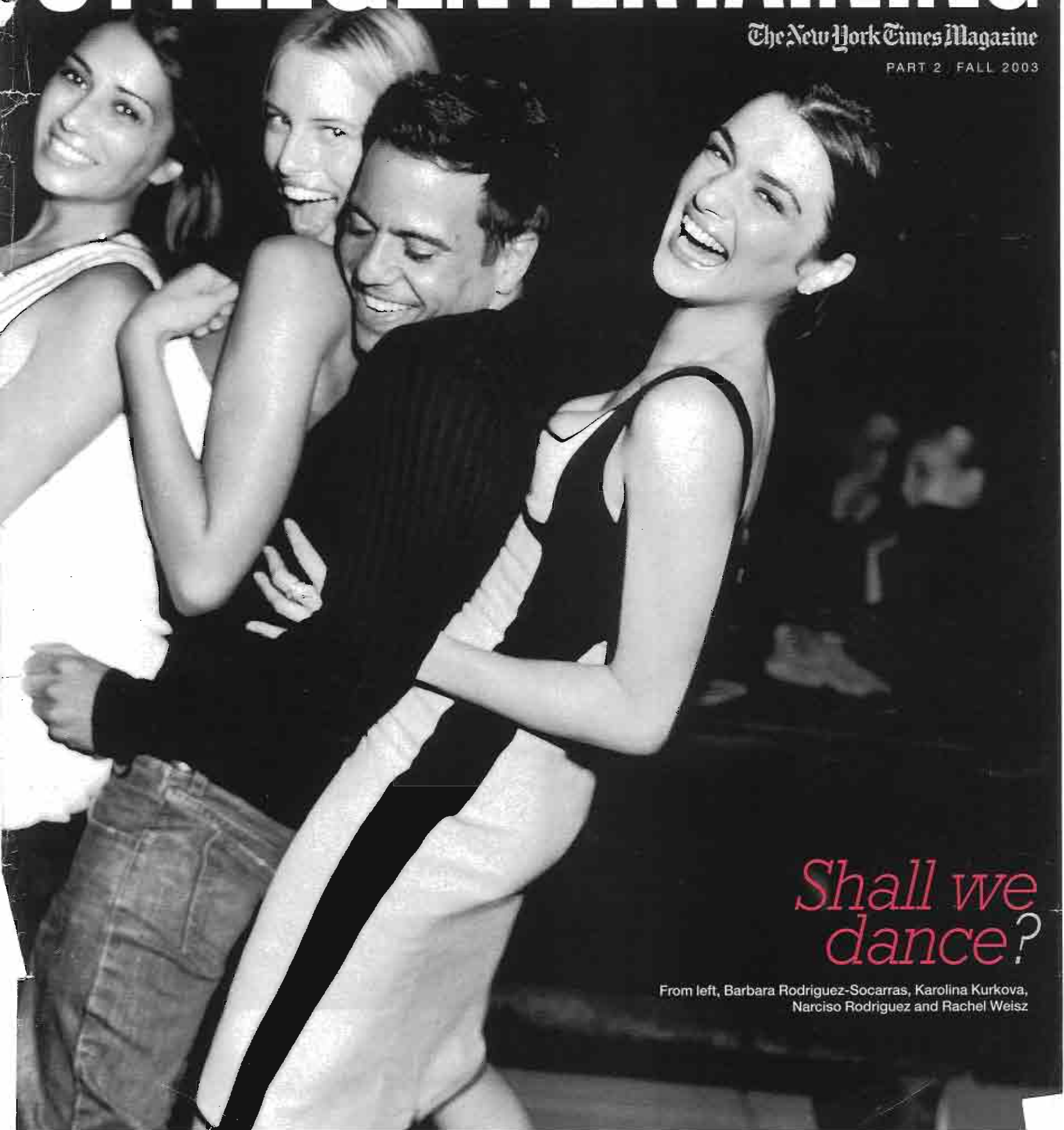


STYLE & ENTERTAINING

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*Shall we
dance?*

From left, Barbara Rodriguez-Socarras, Karolina Kurkova,
Narciso Rodriguez and Rachel Weisz

On the terrace

NARCISO RODRIGUEZ GUARDS HIS FAMILY RECIPES LIKE NEXT SEASON'S DESIGNS.
WILLIAM NORWICH GETS HIM TO SPILL THE BEANS.

Photographs by BEN WATTS
Styled by MIMI LOMBARDO

Even when he was a mere student at Parsons School of Design, Narciso Rodriguez was famous. At the time, the early 1980's, he was known not for his sleek minimalism (which has since earned him the top award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America for two years in a row) but for his cooking. *Really*. Which is not to say that this only son of a New Jersey longshoreman and his wife, who immigrated from Cuba in 1956, did not show abundant promise at Parsons — his senior project, a woven suede sweatshirt with matching pants, was a keeper. But what people talked about when they talked about Narciso Rodriguez were his black-beans-and-rice parties held on Saturday nights at his friend Diane's house in the city.

"I was still commuting from New Jersey," he says, "but would spend the night."

The recipe, a family secret — until now — was handed down to the son from his father, Narciso Rodriguez Sr., who is, on this evening, in the kitchen of his son's chic Chelsea penthouse cooking beans and rice — or *congrí*, in Spanish — along with *boliche*, a pot roast stuffed with sausage; fish grilled on the terrace; a green salad; and, for dessert, *flan*.

"The grand *flanero*, they call me," the elder Rodriguez says, and smiles over his son's hot Miele stove. The designer's mother, alas, is home with a bad back.

In a notebook on a nearby shelf are more secret family recipes, courtesy of Narciso's beloved Tía Bertha, his father's sister. "Before she died, I had her write down all her recipes," Narciso says, opening the book and pointing out highlights like chicken and rice cooked with beer and another dish whose name translates to "old clothes" — a skirt steak boiled in garlic and tomato sauce until the meat becomes as "stringlike as old rope," the designer says.

"Old Cuban food is the best," his father says, checking on his roast. "The new Cubans cook different."

"Like in Miami," the son explains. "Trendy stuff. You know, fusion."

The elder Rodriguez takes comfort in the fact that Narciso has not gone the way of many other second-generation Cubans; the only thing *nouvelle* around here is the acquisition and renovation of the one-bedroom apartment, a tidy achievement of architectural geometry

William Norwich is the editor of Style & Entertaining.





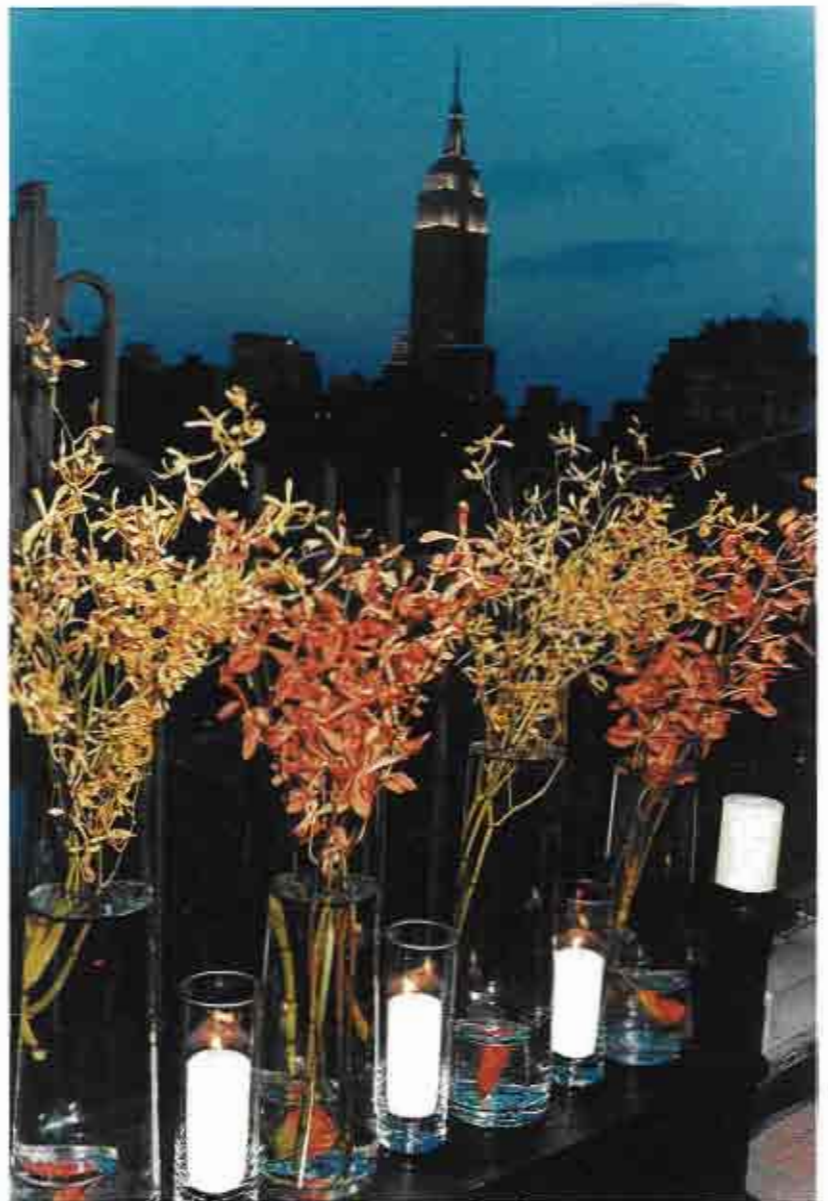
At his rooftop dinner, the designer Narciso Rodriguez sees things nose to nose with the actress Rachel Weisz. She wears his silver-and-black wool dress, \$1,785. At Linda Dresner, 484 Park Avenue, Jeffrey Atlanta New York, 449 West 14th Street, Van Cleef & Arpels diamond jewelry.

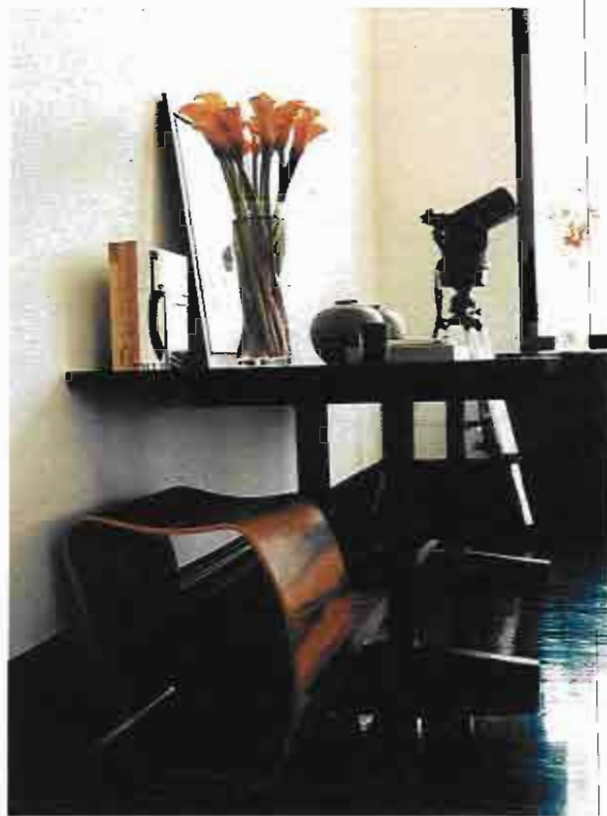


The dogs Lucky, Cliff and John guard the living room. The painting over the hearth is by Udomsak Krisanamis. The sofa is by Paola Lenti from Karkula on Gansevoort Street.



Naroso's own private stairway leads to his heavenly terrace apartment. Flowers, arranged by Dominique Baynes, show that simplicity is the seed of all great design.





The photographer Inez van Lamsweerde, top left, basks in a festive glow. Top center: the westward view of the living room. Above: Karolína Kurková cooks in the kitchen with the Narciso Rodríguezes, father and son.



From left, Carole Radziwill, Rachel Weisz and Veronika Borchers exchange views. On Carole, jersey dress, \$1,525. On Veronika, elastic wool tweeker, \$465, and wool twill skirt, \$520. All Narciso Rodriguez and all at Barneys New York.

accomplished with the help of the interior designer Joe D'Urso, and the expansive terrace with help from the landscape designer Miguel Pons.

"Narciso cooks good," his father states proudly.

The son rises on his toes and kisses his father on the crown of his head.

Guests arrive: the television news producer Carole Radziwill, the filmmaker Darren Aronofsky, the actress Rachel Weisz, Narciso's sister Barbara Rodriguez-Socarras, the fashion public relations executive Veronika Borchers and the photographers Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin, among others. Isabel and Ruben Toledo come bearing a bottle of Malta Haruey. "The Spanish Champagne," Ruben explains.

The model Karolina Kurkova arrives in the kitchen. Like most of the women, except Inez and Isabel Toledo, who is in a dress of her own design, La Kurkova is wearing something from Narciso's fall collection. Standing next to his father, she directs some fashion commentary to the designer. "The heels are too low," she states, despite towering in five-inch heels. "Look," she says, lifting up on her toes, still in the shoes, "see how much better the dress looks with more heel? It makes a difference."

All eyes study the advanced curve of her behind and the fall of her skirt refashioned by the extra inch of height.

Narciso smiles. "Nineteen and rich," he says.

But the supermodel has moved on, giving up on elevation to dip, or try

to dip, into the elder Rodriguez's beans and rice, telling him how much she likes to eat and to cook. Her specialty is potato pancakes, "the Czech way," she proclaims chauvinistically.

Passing by, Weisz quips, "Dressed by Rodriguez, fed by Rodriguez."

Weisz, the star of "The Shape of Things," both onstage and on the silver screen, is expected to star in Neil LaBute's production of Strindberg's "Miss Julie" next year. She is one of Narciso's favorite people.

The designer beholds her as if he were taking a long sip of water after a dry day of urban torture. Then he declares dinner is served on the terrace, as the sun sets. Throughout the year, even when home alone, the health- and fitness-conscious Narciso grills his dinner on the terrace. "In the winter, I usually entertain indoors by the fire. But the weather has been so weird lately that last November I had a dinner party on the terrace."

After the flan comes dancing, led by La Kurkova, the Toledos and the devoted scampering of Narciso's three dogs.

Weisz compliments the cook on the meal. "I'm very insecure in the kitchen," she confesses. "I can't cook, except omelets."

"That's a beginning," Narciso Sr. says.

"Who is going to marry a girl who can't cook?" Weisz wonders.

"Buy a cookbook," he advises, "and come to New Jersey, and we'll tell you everything else." ■