A photograph of a room with a large window showing a close-up of a person's face, a round armchair, and a typewriter.

SO COOL

The Photography
of **JONN
COOLIDGE**

Story by **Lulu Berton**





Interview by **Lulu Berton**

“If you put me in front of a private art collection, I become like a kid in a candy store,” says interior design and still-life photographer Jonn Coolidge as we take a seat in his stunning apartment nestled in the Hollywood hills. You could tell he’s fascinated by art just by taking a glance at the interior decoration of his space, which includes works by American abstract artists such as Donald Judd, Richard Serra, Ellsworth Kelly and very well-edited design pieces from the ’50s and ’60s.

After graduating college in Philadelphia with a degree in Graphic Design, Jonn began exploring fashion photography and eventually found himself drawn to the world of interior design. Soon after, his career took over and since then he has been working with notable clients such as Neiman Marcus, Gucci Group, B&B Italia, Kravet, West Elm and Williams Sonoma Home as well as contributing regularly to such publications as *Elle Decor*, *Veranda*, *Interior Design* and *House Beautiful*. Jonn worked in NYC for 11 years and then moved to Los Angeles. “I was very hesitant in moving,” he effuses while sipping some peppermint tea, “because I was at a very high peek in my career, but then the design community here in LA was very supportive all time.”

What drew you to photography in the first place?

When I was studying design in Philadelphia I had no interest in photography, and then a very good friend of mine who was majoring in photography convinced me to take some classes. I felt head over heels for it, and picked it up soon after that. I became interested in fashion photography at the time, and did Paris and London for months on end just to discover how hard it was to be a fashion photographer.

Until the world of interior design captured your attention ...

A friend of mine who was working for a great magazine asked me if I could shoot [photos for] some interior stories. I didn’t deny myself the opportunity to take my career that way, although I didn’t know the difference between a sofa and a club chair. I knew nothing about design and had no interest in it. My career took off very quickly. The ball just started rolling as I picked up assignments for *House Beautiful*, *Elle Decor* and *Metropolitan Home*.

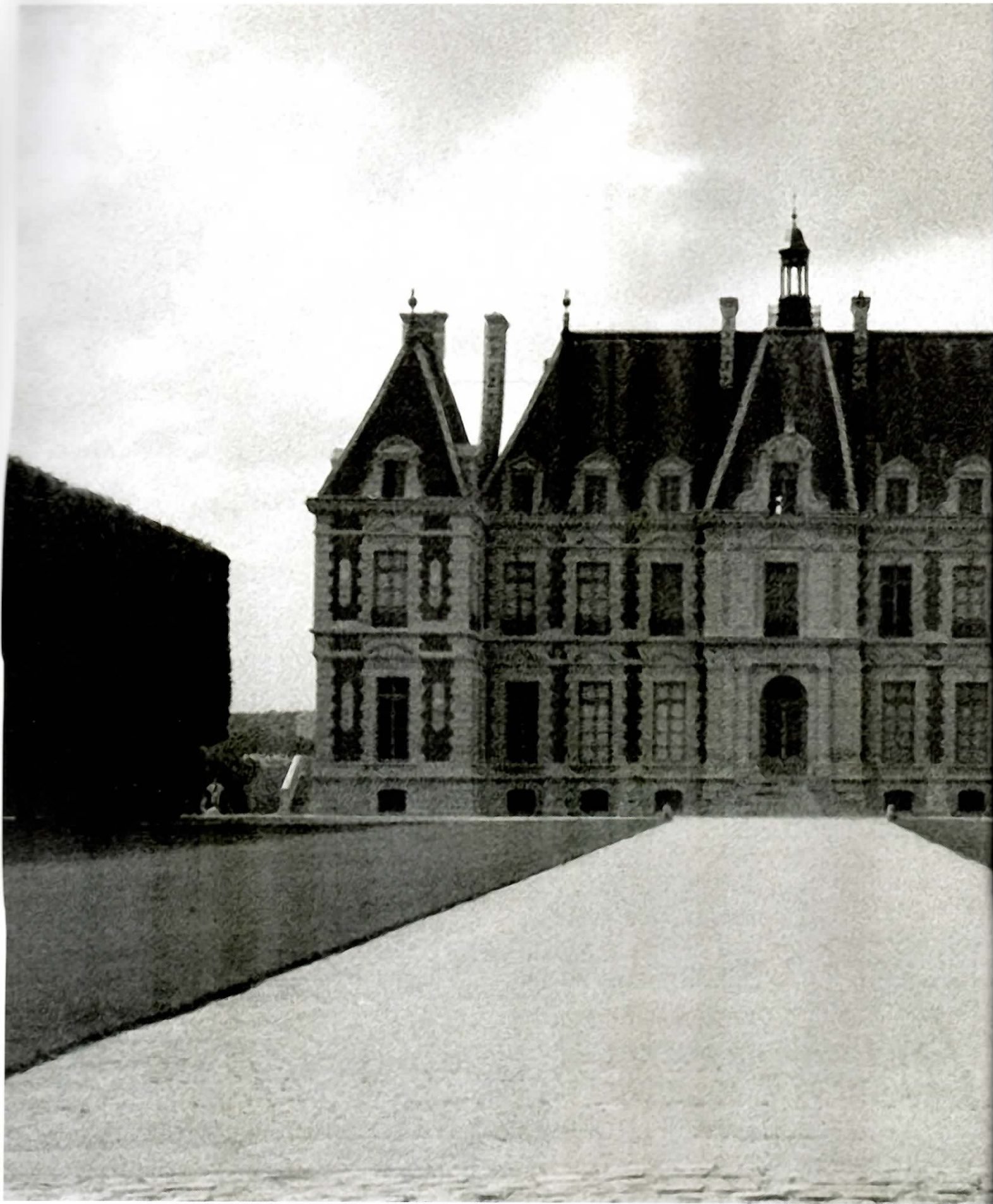
Are you a self-starter?

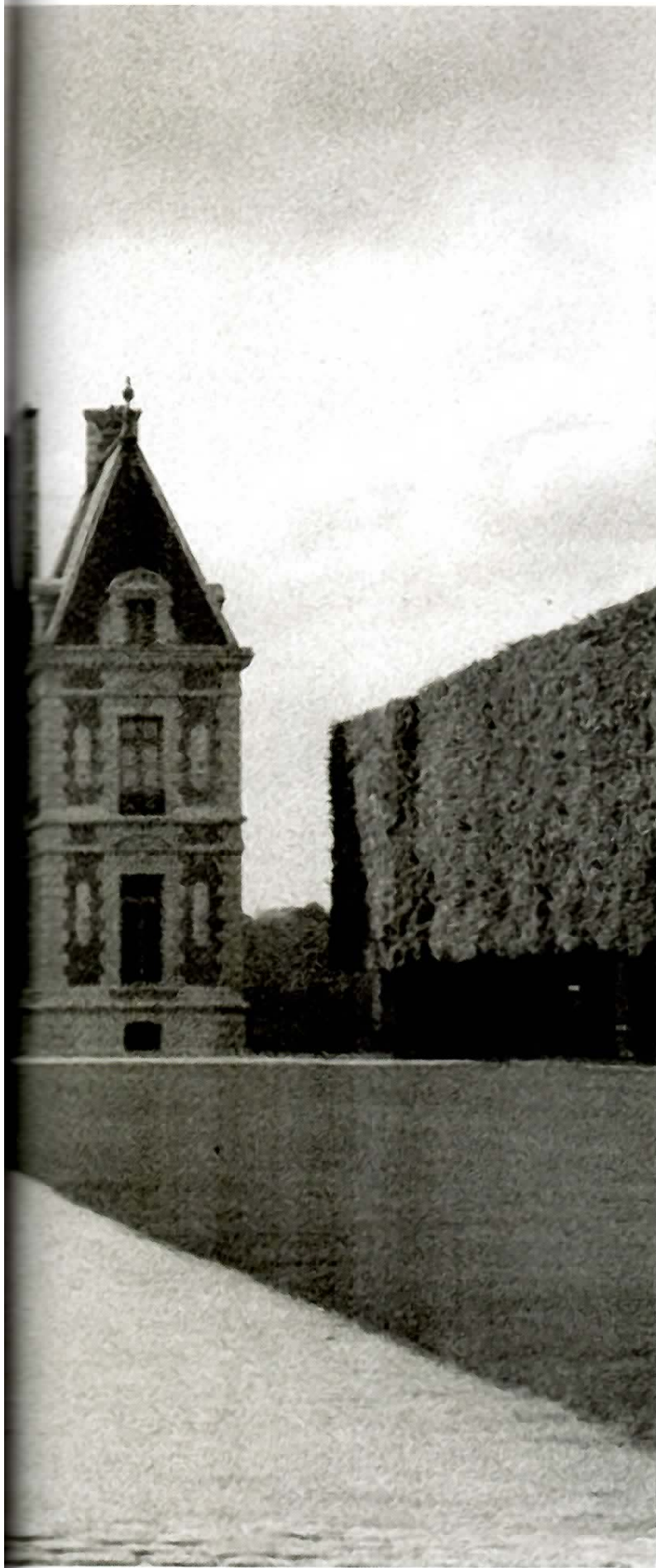
Yes. I’m kind of a technological guy and learned how to take pictures and how to develop photographs by myself. It was years of learning through my mistakes. Most photographers learn through assisting other photographers, but I didn’t; I took the harder route. I took two years off and immersed myself.

Did you have any mentors?

I was extremely lucky in the beginning of my career when I was introduced to some very important people in design, like Lee Mindel, a New York







architect. We just connected, and I started shooting a lot for him. He's my mentor, and his design aesthetic, merged with his strong dynamic, definitely influenced my direction of style.

Which photographers inspire you?

Usually they are photographers that have nothing to do with design or fashion, like Sheila Metzner and Sarah Moon, whose work is romantic, soft, blurry, grainy — as opposed to what I do.

How would you describe your style?

I have a very graphic eye, and when I look into the camera, I start reducing the composition into a square. The atmosphere comes from my lighting, but it has to lead to crisp and clean even though my aesthetic and influence are very modern. I get assignments for country cottages to beach bungalows, but I approach each project with the same graphic elements, this graphic design sensibility. I don't change my look to accommodate an interior space at all. Mine is a modern approach.

What are you grateful for?

I consider myself to be very lucky, as I had the opportunity to work with a lot of great people, like Tom Ford, and many designers like Maya Lin, Michael Smith, Alexandra and Michael Misczynski, two wonderful designers from Atelier AM who have a huge list of clients.

Is there any particular assignment you recall most vividly?

Years ago I was assigned a story for Maya Lin. I was chosen to shoot for her Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. I was thrilled to get to meet her and be in her company for one day. I also had the opportunity to shoot Tom Ford, and personally he's assigned me to shoot some of his homes. Although people had me a little scared of him, he was very supportive. While shooting one of his townhomes, I was captured by his amazing art collection, including a huge Andy Warhol painting sold a few years later at Christie's. I also have a long history with Kelly Wearstler. I met her many years ago on an assignment for *House Beautiful*. We have built a friendship and working relationship, and I have ended up shooting many of her projects.

What are your plans for the future?

In the last three years I got into pottery, so I'm a ceramicist too. I am also working on a fine art photography exhibit in June here in LA in a very high-end furniture design store. I will show case a series of photos of the Utah desert. I have a printer in Paris, the only one in the world that develops using fresson, a process of printing that has passed on generation after generation. It's all done by hand and it's based on the process of photography at the turn of the century. They are very unique photographs and I consider this to be a nice marriage between two people, printer and photographer. *