



Simpler Times

Monica Potter recaptures
the magic of her childhood.

by Sandra Bienkowski
photographs by Jeff Lipsky/CPI Syndication

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Monica Potter recently bought her childhood home in Cleveland. She was just 16 when her family moved, and she told herself she'd buy it one day. The Hollywood actress, now 44, would fly to Cleveland from Los Angeles for the holidays and nostalgically drive down her old street. The house sat on the market for eight years. She knows it sounds weird, but she started having dreams where her late father told her to buy the house. Her mom thought she was nuts, and her three sisters asked why she was doing this, but now that she did, they all think it's the best idea ever. Buying back her home on the magical street where she grew up is all about paying tribute to her parents by recapturing the joy of her childhood, and taking her life full circle.

The big-screen actress started from modest beginnings. In breakout roles, she co-starred alongside Nicolas Cage in the movie *Con Air*, Robin Williams in *Patch Adams* and Morgan Freeman in *Along Came a Spider*. She's also known for her work in the TV series *Boston Legal*, the daytime soap *The Young and the Restless* and perhaps most famously, NBC's critically acclaimed drama, *Parenthood*. Despite her stardom and success, though, humble is still who Monica is today.

Her father was an inventor and her mother a homemaker who always took great pride in making their house a home. "I grew up in a world that was always making, doing and creating," Monica says. "We had a very simple life, living paycheck to paycheck, but it also was very exciting." She would go to work with her dad as a kid and watch

how he'd dream and build things. She witnessed him struggle while still helping people.

"Buying my house back is really a time to go back and reflect because this is where it all began: with my dad in the basement with his inventions, blowing up things and making things. We are going to restore it and make it how it used to be," she says. Walking through her house is like a time capsule. She found her old yo-yo, her glow-in-the-dark stickers in her bedroom closet and the initials of "the four of us sisters" still in the basement.

She's in the planning stages for a docu-series to record the home's restoration. "It's going to be cathartic because we walked in there, and we were laughing and crying and it brought back a lot of memories, but not having my father there...he will definitely be guiding us every day. My mom will help decorate it and do things she couldn't afford before."

Monica will be flying back and forth from her home in L.A., where she lives with her husband, Daniel, an orthopedic oncologist, and their daughter Molly, 9. She wants to pass on family traditions and relive childhood memories with Molly and her two sons from her previous marriage, Liam and Danny, now in their 20s.

Despite the glamour of Hollywood, she misses the simpler times spent on her tiny, magical street. "I loved the heart of everyone. It felt like one big family," Monica says. "You could borrow a stick of butter from your neighbor. People sat on their front porches, had parties or were always in the lake. People were hardworking but knew how to enjoy life. It didn't matter that we didn't have a lot of money; what mattered was spending time together and making memories."

Turning Houses into Homes

To complete her dream of carrying on her parents' legacies, she started Monica Potter Home, a natural home and beauty business. By creating jobs for local artisans and craftspeople, she is honoring her father, and by helping people of all income levels **enrich** and beautify their homes, she is honoring her mother. Initially launched online at mrspotter.com, her first storefront opened in Garrettsville, Ohio, on Valentine's Day.

"Coming out to Cleveland in mid-February, people were like, 'What the hell are you thinking? Why didn't you save your grand opening for the summer?' We had 700 people show up in the snow. I get so emotional when I think about it. People drove in from Florida, New York and Kentucky. It was so much fun. We had food and music, and I wanted it to feel like a family party."

Her voice cracks and she cries when she talks about it. "There was a guy and he had four daughters (and I'm one of four girls) and you could tell they didn't have any money. No one leaves without anything, so I pulled some things together, and my sister is like, 'Monica, you are going to end up bankrupt because you are just like dad.' But that's how my family is. They are very giving and want to embrace the community."





Monica jokes that her accountant isn't happy with her, but she doesn't care. "The business comes from the heart. It's about family and community and making things simple again. It's about coming full circle and being able to explore that with the people you love."

Her mom is the store's official greeter on Saturdays, and people come out to get their photo taken with her. Eventually Monica plans to offer an apprenticeship program to train artisans who don't want to go to college.

Parenthood

Describing herself as old school and simple, Monica says her parents instilled in her a love of hard work and creativity. She maintains scrapbooks and sketchbooks and keeps a secret pink journal next to her desk to capture her ideas and thoughts. "I love being creative; it's an outlet for me." She also loves acting.

Monica's portrayal of *Parenthood*'s Kristina Braverman, who in the course of the show's six seasons struggled raising three kids (one with autism) and battled breast cancer, helped the Critic's Choice Award winner think about the challenge of managing it all. "She (the character) taught me to slow down a bit, although I still need reminders. Everything she went through definitely made me take more chances in doing things in my own life."

Monica says she can preach slowing down, but to live it is something she works on daily. She usually gets up before 6 a.m. in L.A. and gets on phone calls before Molly wakes up. After they have breakfast and she takes her daughter to school, Monica hits the ground running. Her day is usually a blend of acting, producing and business.

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—Monica Potter

"Life was not this challenging before technology. It's the simplicity that we are missing."

She believes in making a rule not to bring your phone to dinner. "I remember last summer, my husband and I went on a very special trip and we saved for it and it was fun, but we worked the whole time. We went in the water once, and I was like, 'Never again.' It's a constant struggle because we are human doings and not human beings." Monica calls herself a work in progress. "I am learning how to let go of more things and delegate, but it's really tough to do sometimes."

And, just like Kristina, she enjoys relating to other parents. "If you are real, open and honest with people, it's almost like, 'Ahhh, I can be real with you.'" She believes in finding a common thread with people as parents, wives, sisters and friends by realizing none of us are perfect.

But sometimes she has to follow her instincts. "I just finished *Parenthood*, and everyone is like, 'What are you going to do next? You aren't on TV anymore, what are you going to do?' If you start to listen to that, you are like... 'I need to get a job.' But I think, 'No, it's OK. God will provide like he always has and I will keep working and putting one foot in front of the other.' If you listen to all the, 'What are you going to do now?' you will go nuts."

As she looks toward the future, Monica plans to retire to the town where it all began. Molly has her own little kid's corner in the store, loves Cleveland and wants to live there. Laughing, Monica says, "She's like, 'Mom, you had a better childhood than I did.'" 