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LUXURY PROFILES

SINGULAR SENSATION

TO PURSUE A
LIFELONG PASSION,
IT HELPS TO HAVE THE PROPER
TOOLS—SOMETHING
(OR A FEW SOMETHINGS)
MADE JUST FOR YOU.
THESE THREE AFICIONADOS
COULDN'T AGREE MORE.

BY LEILANI LABONG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK GAGLIONE



SITTING PRETTY

Laurie Thomas makes no excuses for the high cost of her obsession. In fact, the owner and CEO of Nice Ventures—the San Francisco restaurant-management company that owns Rose Pistola, Rose's Café and Terzo—freely admits that her chosen discipline, competitive show jumping, is, as she says, “traditionally a hobby for people with a lot of money.” It's a truth we won't try to dispute: In addition to owning two horses and paying boarding fees for them at Willow Tree Farm in Portola Valley (where she trains three mornings a week), the Wisconsin native also orders custom leather saddles—to the tune of \$3,900 each—from Antarès, a *sellier* (saddler) in Saintes, France. “It's less about comfort and more about performance,” says Thomas, 41, who competes in up to 20 shows a year in the US and Canada. “My saddles are specifically for jumping. You don't want them sliding around, so they're custom fit for both me and the horses.” Last August, Thomas won a \$10,000 purse at the Menlo Charity Horse Show in Atherton and, suffice it to say, her 30 percent cut didn't do much to absorb the expense of the sport. “It's not that I have a lot of money, but I do make sacrifices in other areas of my life: I rent a flat in Pac Heights; I don't have kids. It's a trade-off. I wish it wasn't. I wish I could own a house and have a whole stable of horses. But I do show jumping for the competitive outlet and for the love of the animals. It's my passion.”