

Antiques then and now

What has made Bunny Williams a permanent beacon in the design world is somehow deeper than her well-publicized flair for joining elegance to comfort. Her designs satisfy because they arise from an awareness that ours is a culture in permanent flux; a Williams room will accommodate the current zeitgeist but it will do so while vastly improving on prevailing taste and contemporary wishes. Hers is a subtle but winning approach.

From her beginnings in the horse country of Virginia to her first job at Stair and Company when English antiques were in the ascendant, to her apprenticeship at the legendary decorating firm of Parish-Hadley Associates, and now to Bunny Williams Incorporated, she has paid close attention to shifts in the American temperament. When she says in conversation about antiques that “collecting in the old sense is gone,” she knows why: patience and scholarship, two requisites of pure collecting, are not part of the current vocabulary

part of clients otherwise uninterested in history or provenance by inserting a great antique piece here or there in a room, where it will raise the level of everything else. Antiques dealers, she thinks, might consider this approach and broaden their audience to include the sorts of people who might want only that one great mirror or high chest of drawers.

Of course, there are also Bunny Williams projects like the New York dining room shown opposite where antiques occupy center stage. Although it has not even a hint of period style, the room is in its own way just as respectful of its objects, and possibly more attuned to their individual dramatic attributes, than any assemblage of a single style could be. The massive early nineteenth-century Irish bookcases (there are several in the room), the formal eighteenth-century Russian chairs, the unusual oak library table each stands out and more than holds its own with the Francis Bacon painting. It would be a mistake to assign the cliché of eclecticism to this

of living. To be a serious collector, she says, “you have to invest time without thinking of it as an investment.”

Fifteen or more years ago she had serious collectors as clients and designed houses for them. Now she satisfies a desire for authenticity on the

room. That word, which encapsulates a current fear of commitment, a hedging of bets lest one somehow be on the wrong side of contemporary taste, has nothing to do with what Bunny Williams has brought together or brings together in virtually any of her designs.

The living room of a Virginia house, below, although quite different in style from the New York dining room, has a similar coherence even though its elements are also as disparate in origin: a Regency mantel, eighteenth-century English chairs, an eighteenth-century Venetian mirror, a pair of nineteenth-century painted French consoles, a mid-century modern table. The design diffuses, as Williams’s designs generally do, the feeling of intimidation that can accompany rooms full of antiques. There is a sense of proportion and perspective here.

Perspective, or a sense of what decorating is about and not about, is Williams’s hallmark at work and in life and may account for some of her impressive success. While she has branched out in many directions, doing designs for venerable firms like J. Pocker (frames) and Doris Leslie Blau (rugs), she has always been attuned to the bigger issues in life aided by an impressive degree of candor and a healthy sense of humor. The Connecticut house she shares with her husband, antiques dealer John Rosselli, has been the starting point for fundraisers for Women’s Support Services, an organization that raises money for victims of domestic violence in the tri-state area. Their New York apartment has welcomed a long succession of rescue dogs and her benefits for quadrupeds in need and other causes are many and well known. There is nothing surprising about these commitments. They arise from the same place as Williams’s approach to interiors—from her instinctive sense that good manners, if they are really good, will not be confined to houses and gardens; if good taste and good manners mean anything at all, they will find their way into the world at large.

—Elizabeth Pochoda



BUNNY WILLIAMS

Facing page: Despite the elegance of its furnishings and architecture, Bunny Williams says, this Virginia house “lets you know you are in the country.” For a couple interested in collecting who also wanted a home where comfort comes first, Williams designed a room of unobtrusively impressive furnishings: a Regency mantel, Tabriz carpet, eighteenth-century English chairs, and painted French consoles are joined by a mid-century modern table.

This page: “When you live with something great it should hit your soul,” Williams says, “after all, you look at it all the time.” She designed this Manhattan dining room for clients who wanted beautiful things in an arrangement that would allow each object to stand out. The formal eighteenth-century Russian chairs, mammoth early nineteenth-century Irish bookcases (only one is shown), and massive oak library table are each distinctive enough to accomplish this, and none of them is upstaged by the Francis Bacon (1909–1992) painting.

“We always start with the architecture. People call us when they have a period building. It could be 1730 or 1930, but it is architecture that draws people to this firm. If the client is a collector, even better,” says Ralph O. Harvard III, a Manhattan designer specializing in historic interiors and structures.

In and out of old houses since childhood, this transplanted Virginian approaches each project with forensic vigor and the conviction that well-judged proportions are fundamental. The antiquarian—Harvard embraces the appellation—has a twofold mission: preserve the past and accommodate the present. Harvard is in the business of making people comfortable, which means everything from supplying the intangibles of warmth and atmosphere to attending to the quotidian details of where to set a drink, read a book, or locate a kitchen.

The portfolio of the traditionalist, whose interiors, cozy to grand, suggest discerning lives well-lived tells the story. The emphasis is on architectural detail—moldings, mantels, paneling, flooring—accompanied by fine art and antiques and a minimum of superfluous detail. “We can supply antique or reproduction building materials, recruit craftsmen and supervise their work. Or we may act as consultants,” says Harvard, who frequently calls in specialists, among them paint analyst Susan L.

Buck and historic textiles expert Natalie F. Larson. For a project in Lyford Cay in the Bahamas, Harvard built a British colonial style main house (assembled in North Carolina, then broken down and shipped to the site) and an accompanying guest house, the latter composed mostly of architectural salvage.

When the firm shops for furnishings and accessories, it is often at auction. What Harvard cannot find, he designs or reproduces: wallpapers, carpets, custom-mixed paints, paneling, even furniture. For a house in Maine, he created a marble-topped slab table inspired by an early eighteenth-century example designed by the Englishman William Kent, a miniature portrait of whom sits on Harvard’s desk.

Beyond line and proportion, Harvard is attentive to surface—“old surfaces add warmth”—and color. “Most of our rooms employ five to eight shades of paint. We rarely use them in the expected way but do follow traditional principles, such as pairing complementary colors,” says Harvard, a fan of Benjamin Moore’s new Colonial Williamsburg line.

A discreet brass plaque marks the East Sixty-Fifth Street premises of Ralph Harvard Inc., which thrives on referrals from the close-knit American arts community. Within the field Harvard is a familiar presence whose gregarious manner (the designer collects silver mint julep cups and is partial to Maker’s Mark bourbon)

cloaks a studious bent. A governor of the Decorative Arts Trust and past chairman of the American Friends of the Georgian Group, he is known for his spirited architectural tours of Virginia’s Tidewater counties, a popular feature of Colonial Williamsburg’s annual Antiques Forum, where Harvard will speak in 2014.

Two projects exemplify the kind of work he most enjoys. For Charleston’s Miles Brewton House, built in the 1760s and regarded as a supreme example of American Georgian architecture, the firm redesigned four informal rooms where the current residents of the house, still in the original family, can relax. For collectors of eighteenth-century American furniture, Harvard is currently updating a Georgian revival mansion in Lake Forest, Illinois, that Howard Van Doren Shaw designed in 1911.

Shown below is the parlor of a 1780s house in a southern port city. Harvard overcame decades of neglect and 1930s revisions to restore the residence to its past grandeur. “The client knew that crimson was the preferred color of the third quarter of the eighteenth century and wanted to observe precedent,” says the designer, who drew inspiration for the curtains from period engravings, followed eighteenth-century upholstery techniques to emphasize the curves of the Philadelphia sofa, and restored the woodwork to its original creamy color.

For New York collectors of eighteenth-century furniture and contemporary art, Harvard created a plush, understated backdrop (opposite). “This prewar apartment had wonderful architectural details such as crown moldings and raised paneling. We added a George II period mantel, chose a Khorassan carpet to fill the room, and covered the upholstered furniture with a Georgian style damask from Scalaman-dré. Two sofas were bench-made for us,” he says.

In a design world buffeted by change, Harvard unapologetically hews to the past. “A small, tasteful group of people who want to live with antiques finds us. Our work is extremely diverse in a very narrow framework,” he says.

—Laura Beach



Facing page: “We took this 1780s house in a southern port city back to its original Georgian grandeur,” says Ralph Harvard, who restored the woodwork to its original creamy color, followed eighteenth-century upholstery techniques, and drew inspiration from period sources for the design and color of the curtains.

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RALPH O. HARVARD III



THOMAS JAYNE

No decorator, as Thomas Jayne prefers to be called, working today has more thoroughly assimilated a broader range of historical American design or is reinterpreting it with such contemporary verve. His two books, *The Finest Rooms in America* and *American Decoration: A Sense of Place*, published in 2010 and 2012, convey as much. The first surveys Jayne's influences, from Beauport, Bassett Hall, and Vizcaya to Hollyhock House by Frank Lloyd Wright. The second trumpets a fresh, new American style that embraces the traditional without a hint of period-room fustiness.

Jayne is six foot, seven and grew up in Pacific Palisades, California, among people who worked for UCLA and the Rand Corporation. His lanky frame, cropped hair, and mildly retro style of dress can bring to mind the 1960s fixer and fellow Angelino H. R. Haldeman, though we suspect that the designer feels greater affinity for the breezily broadminded Californian Julia Child. "Oh, a tall man," the statuesque cooking authority murmured approvingly on meeting Jayne.

The West Coast's longstanding willingness to adopt and adapt historical styles perhaps explains Jayne's freedom from tired formulas. His introduction to art and architecture began at home and developed at the University of Oregon under the tutelage of historians Marian C. Donnelly and Philip H. Dole. As a Winterthur fellow, Jayne nurtured an abiding admiration for Henry Francis du Pont. With stops at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Historic Deerfield, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and Christie's along the way, Jayne eventually landed

at the decorating firm founded by Sister Parish and Albert Hadley, who, unlike most of their illustrious counterparts, "appreciated rather than discounted American decoration," he says.

Past and present, theory and practice merge in the work of Jayne Design Studio, launched in 1990. A staff of five toils in a late nineteenth-century mercantile building on East Twelfth Street near Manhattan's Union Square, in a compact office furnished with durable Eero Saarinen table and chairs, a 1940s portrait of Jayne's mother by Philip Guston, and other assorted objects of fancy. "Mr. du Pont understood in a way that many collectors do not that objects are improved and enhanced by having a context. Collectors hire us to make backgrounds," says Jayne, who likes to describe what he does as collage. A collector himself, he admires antiques for their sculptural quality and narrative force but tends to mix objects of different styles and periods, forging, as he puts it, "abstract relationships that create or enhance texture, richness, and depth." Two commissions shown here—one traditional, the other more eclectic—suggest something of his breadth.

For a woman who collects nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American art and design, Jayne created a formal drawing room in the neoclassical taste at Drumlin Hall, a villa erected by architect Peter Pennoyer, a frequent Jayne collaborator, on 150 acres in the Hudson Valley. "I immediately thought of rooms at Winterthur and the houses of her fellow collector and friend Richard Hampton Jenrette," says Jayne, who, inspired by great American and English country estates, sought to

evoke a period, not mimic it. Avoiding familiar jewel tones, Jayne and his client instead selected a palette of coral and cream. The silk upholstery is based on fabric supplied by Duncan Phyfe in 1841, from a sample found on furniture at Millford Plantation in South Carolina. The broadloom carpet derives from an 1810 document in the archives of the English manufacturer Woodward Grosvenor. Jayne purposefully picked a later nineteenth-century design for the curtains as a way of bridging the dates between the earlier furniture and the later art and to avoid being monotonously pure.

Hudson River views also feature in Manhattan's West Village in a building designed by Richard Meier. Asked to decorate an apartment there (below), Jayne preserved the architect's signature white walls but injected color with *Objects*, a wall collage by Robert Warner, and a Tabriz style rug of sympathetic hues. Mid-century modern touches include furniture and lighting by Osvaldo Borsani, Just Andersen, and Maison Jansen. Papier-mâché vases flank *Weekend with Oscar Niemeyer*, a painted pedestal by Robert Loughlin, who died in 2011. Sectional furniture was softened with pillows covered in Pinwheel velvet designed by Jayne and produced by Brunswick et Fils.

Jayne's sure sense of historical continuum makes him a natural partner for institutions looking for a makeover. For the October 11 to February 9, 2014, exhibition *Making It in America*, the Rhode Island School of Design's Museum of Art asked Jayne to help them "liberate" more than a hundred exceptional American paintings, sculptures, and objects from their traditional period rooms and galleries, installing them in a temporary space enlivened by unexpected, if historical, colors and patterns. For Yale University, he is redecorating the President's House, erected in 1871 and remodeled in 1937, using updated upholstery and art from Yale's collections.

—Laura Beach



Facing page: Thomas Jayne describes his approach to decorating as collage. In a building on New York's West Side designed by Richard Meier (1934-), mid-century modern furniture and lighting join *Objects* of 2005, a wall collage by Robert Warner (1956-), and *Weekend with Oscar Niemeyer*, a painted pedestal by Robert Loughlin (1949-2011). Throw pillows are covered with Pinwheel, a velvet designed by Jayne and produced by Brunswick et Fils.

This page: For a collector of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American art and design, Jayne created a formal drawing room in the neoclassical taste at Drumlin Hall in the Hudson River Valley. He patterned upholstery, carpet, and curtains on surviving documents. Supplied by Carswell Rush Berlin, the center table was made in New York City c. 1825-1830. The bronze figure of Pan is by Frederick William MacMonnies (1863-1937).