

52 Leading Voices in American Interiors\*

# ELEMENTS *of* LIVING

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Bunny Williams, Thomas Jayne,  
David Easton, Albert Hadley, Matthew Patrick Smyth

## Albert Hadley

ON A LIST of influential twentieth-century designers, Albert Hadley sits at the top, with the likes of Elsie de Wolfe, Dorothy Draper and Billy Baldwin. And like them, Hadley is arguably in a class by himself. No doubt, his decades-long partnership with Sister Parish and unerring eye for suitability in design have made him the darling of generations of style makers, including Jack and Jackie Kennedy, Brooke Astor, Al and Tipper Gore, and Carly Simon. Yet his protégés may be the contribution that clearly places Hadley in a class by himself—not just current EOL Insiders Bunny Williams, David Easton and Thomas Jayne but also design elites Mario Buatta and Mariette Himes Gomez. After 65 years of practicing and teaching, Hadley now has fourth-generation disciples, including employees of Matthew Patrick Smyth, who traces his Hadley lineage through his former mentor, Easton.

Given Hadley's influence, it is a disarming surprise to discover this legend wrapped in unassuming southern charm. At 85, he still refers to clients as Mr. or Mrs. (Duke or Duchess), prefers evenings with students over dinner parties, and reveres Herbert Rodgers, the Nashville mentor who hired him six decades ago. "He was the outstanding decorator in the South," Hadley says, always gracious with a compliment.

Although Parish-Hadley has given way to Albert Hadley, Inc., he designs the crisp, modern homes without artifice that are his signature. "It's amazing how many spaces today are not laid out in the most efficient and attractive way for practical living," he says, counseling designers to begin with the architecture in mind. It might seem axiomatic, perhaps, but those who've studied at his side understand it intuitively: Suitability, simplicity and a lack of ostentation define both the man and his work.—CK

Albert Hadley, Inc.  
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## Bunny Williams

I LOVE A HOUSE TO LOOK as if it evolved over time," says Bunny Williams. "A room comes alive when there's a spontaneous mix of different periods, raw materials and high-quality design. It becomes more interesting the longer you remain in it."

This is obviously a resonant idea, for Williams is one of the world's most sought-after designers. Since she launched her firm in 1988, she has created environments for the good life in New York apartments, Palm Beach villas, Aspen lodges, Texas ranches and French manors.

The lived-in look is deceptive, of course. It requires a careful balancing of objects, fabrics, textures and colors, an art that Williams learned while working with the venerable decorating firm of Parish-Hadley Associates. She calls her years there "a nonpareil education, more far-reaching and realistic than anything taught in school. An eye for design isn't enough," she says. You must know what can and cannot be done, and how it all goes together. Homes are for people and have to be comfortable and functional as well as beautiful."

Williams's passion for design extends into the garden. She co-owns Treillage Ltd., a celebrated garden furniture and ornament shop in New York.—LK

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## Thomas Jayne

THOMAS JAYNE'S "alter-ego best friend" as a child had a mother "who was always doing something creative, like painting her window shades in the style of Picasso." He couldn't know it then, but Mrs. Kahn would turn out to be pivotal to his future career. One day she asked Jayne what he was going to be when I grew up, and he said, "a lawyer." "No," was her reply. "You're going to be a decorator."

The "benefit of living with artistic people"—not just Mrs. Kahn but also his own family—made Jayne the perfect candidate for a two-year course of study at Winterthur, the famous American decorative arts museum and former home of Henry Francis du Pont, to whom Jayne attributes his color sense. His education continued when he moved to New York, where, he says "just being around [mentors] Albert Hadley, Sister Parish and Kevin McNamera was important."

Jayne's clients tend to be Anglophiles, and though he sees himself happiest in eighteenth-century France, when "kings put a lot of resources into the decorative arts," don't try to box him in. "I love to compare historic places built during the same period.

An English castle, a French chateau and a Spanish palace can influence me equally."  
—RBG and KH

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## David Easton

LONG KNOWN AND LOVED for his traditional interiors and timeless furniture designs, David Easton is ready for a change. "Early in life I was set on a traditional path," says the designer, who grew up in his grandmother's "quintessential American" Georgian brick house in Pennsylvania. Studying design and art in Europe bolstered his traditional point of view. But if you consider some of Easton's current influences—the work of Mexican architect Luis Barragán, for example—you can see that he is, in the latter part of his career, paring down and embracing a decidedly modern outlook.

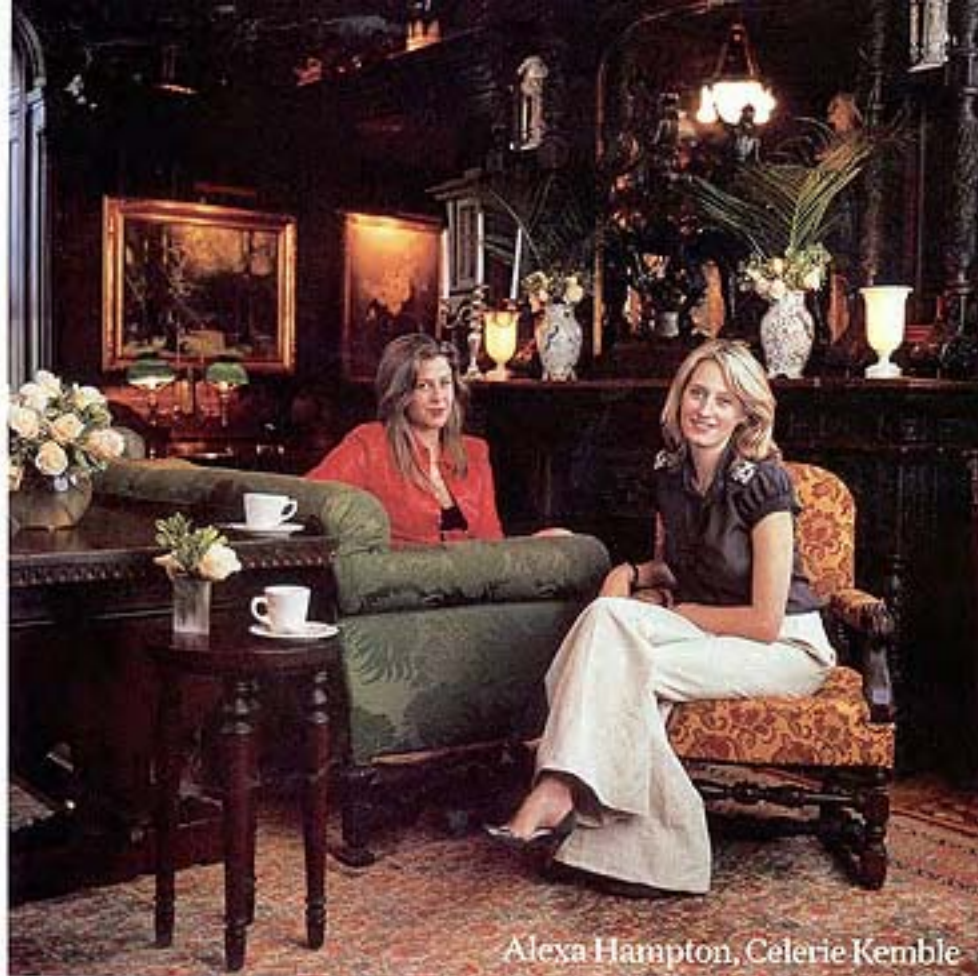
This shouldn't come as a complete surprise. With a respectful bow to Albert Hadley, Easton credits Billy Baldwin as his most influential mentor. "Billy was one of those people who knew how to edit, and that's why his rooms still look good," explains Easton. "I learned an important credo from him: Edit, edit, edit."

Although not obviously related to Baldwin in his aesthetic, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the German proto-modernist of the 1850s and 1860s, is admired by Easton for similar reasons: his simplicity and directness. Perhaps the only way to ride with the twentieth-first century is to lighten one's load. "The world is changing, and I'm very excited about the modern projects that [my firm is] taking on. We're moving forward."—KWG

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## Matthew Patrick Smyth

HE CAME LATE to interior design: Matthew Patrick Smyth enrolled at FIT to become a photographer. His high school pictures of the many beautiful houses near his Hudson Valley home in



Alexa Hampton, Celerie Kemble

Florida, New York, had been exhibited throughout the state, a promising sign. Then Smyth made fast friends with some designers working with clients in Stone Ridge and made a late-breaking decision to switch majors. After graduation, he spent six years working alongside David Easton before starting his own business.

Clients and colleagues alike are impressed by the confidence Smyth has in his taste; they also marvel at his willingness to discuss net prices within a client's earshot. As is evident in his designs for residences from Southwest Harbor, Maine, to Palm Beach, Florida, his understanding of French and English art, architecture and antiques is comprehensive. But his apartment on New York's Upper serves another muse, that of a gentlemanly eclectic: Its appointments and personal objects are reflective of his extensive travels in Europe, Asia and Africa. Conversation starters are everywhere and cocktail parties frequent. "Nothing," he has said, "was bought to fill a spot."—JN

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## Alexa Hampton

**I**N HER OWN ESTIMATION, Alexa Hampton's affinity for interior design was "entirely birth-related." Her father, the celebrated Mark Hampton, was a "complete design encyclopedia," whose unerring taste for formal but accessible furnishings shaped his daughter's aesthetic at every turn. She can't pinpoint when she came to understand, as he professed, that "hardware is like jewelry," but understand it she does.

As a child, Hampton loved to draw and paint while her father oversaw the design of elite residences worldwide, as well as hotels and offices, private clubs and private planes, yachts and railroad cars for clients including Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the Bush family, artist Saul Steinberg and CBS correspondent Mike Wallace.

Not long after her father's untimely death in 1998, Alexa assumed the role of chief designer at Mark Hampton Inc., where she had worked every summer from the age of 13. Her success has been unalloyed: The daughter of the "First Decorator" was recently selected to design the interior of Trowbridge House, the new official Washington, DC, residence for former US presidents. The less lofty but no less beloved institution *This Old House* hired Hampton as

the first woman on its on-camera staff. She has also designed fabrics and trims for Kravet, and designs the Alexa Hampton Collection for Hickory Chair Co., which introduced her eponymous line of chairs this spring.—JN

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## Celerie Kemble

**T**WO YEARS after graduating from Harvard, Celerie Kemble had what she calls a "slap-on-the-head" moment. Working in film production in New York City, she unwound on weekends by poking through flea markets and junk stores, finding great decorative stuff for herself and her friends. Although she was absolutely certain that interior design was the only thing she would never practice, in the end Kemble just couldn't deny her own DNA. Hence, that slap on the head.

She is the daughter of celebrated interior designer Mimi Maddock McMakin of Kemble Interiors, Inc. of Palm Beach, London and New York. (Her "other mother" is McMakin's business partner, Brooke Wendel Huttig.) This meant growing up in a redecorated, deconsecrated church, and under the influence of a woman who noticed everything involving design in a space. "I'm lucky to have a photographic memory of the many beautiful rooms I've seen in my life," Kemble says. What is her own approach to achieving such beauty? "I mix the old and new and use color, shapes and as many different textures as possible to achieve depth of character to a room."—RGB and KH

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## Mary McDonald

**A**MAGAZINE MAVEN, a fashionista, an over-the-top trendsetter—there are many ways to describe Mary McDonald, but when it comes to her interior design, she zeroes in: "If David Hicks and Nancy Lancaster were married—that's my style." She is drawn to Hicks for his mixing of contemporary pieces with eighteenth-century antiques, to Lancaster for her eccentricity. "I have streaks of eccentricity in me," says McDonald, "but it's hard to get