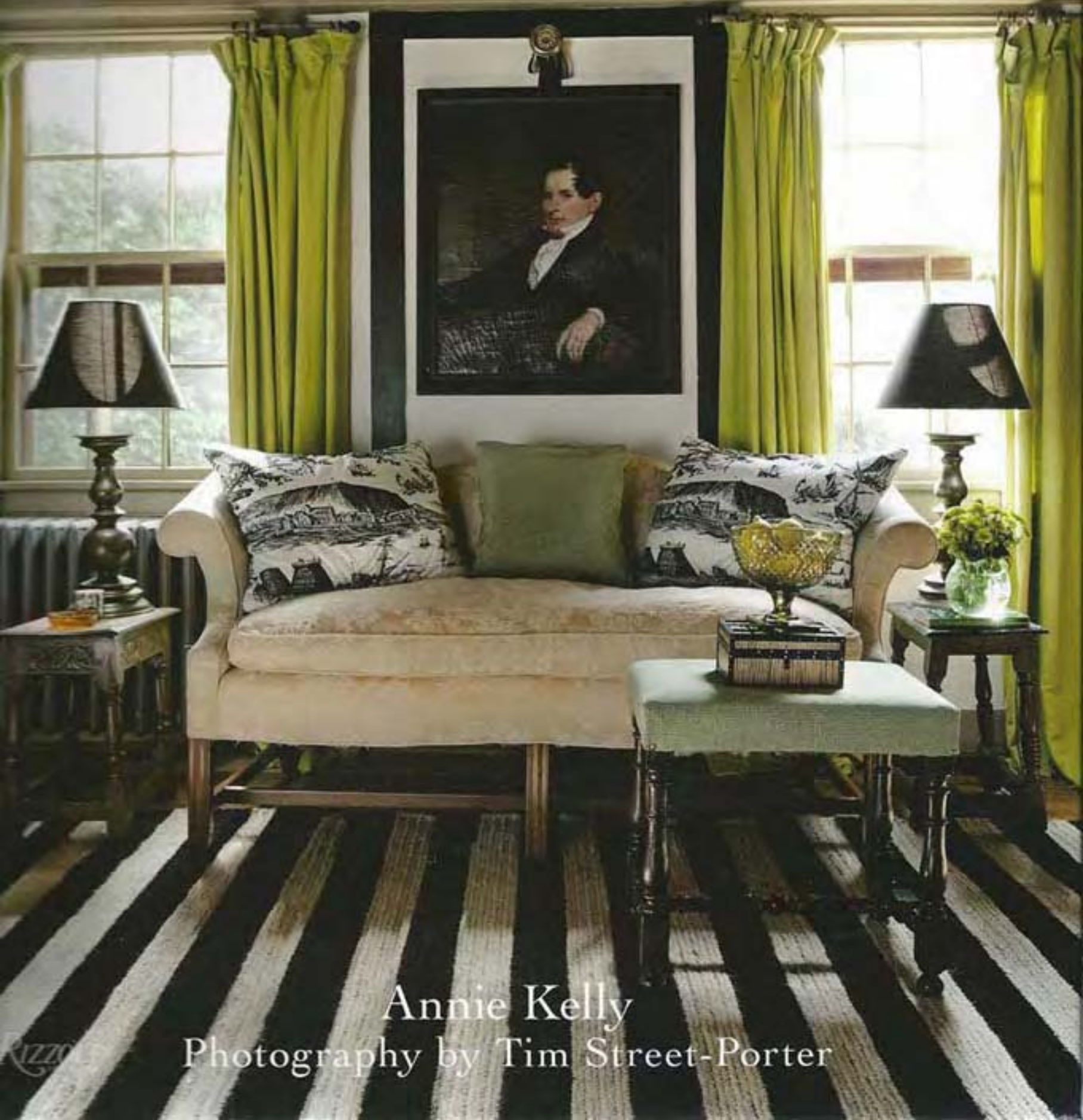


Litchfield Style

CLASSIC COUNTRY HOUSES OF CONNECTICUT



Annie Kelly

Photography by Tim Street-Porter

Style and Substance

MATTHEW PATRICK SMYTH'S LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HOUSE IN SHARON

Like many busy New York decorators, Matthew Patrick Smyth enjoys leaving the stresses of the city and driving out to peaceful Litchfield County. With his partner, author Jean Vallier, he also has apartments in Paris and Palm Beach, but they are too far away for quick weekend escapes. If he is lucky, he can add an extra night or two, as he often has clients en route in Greenwich and Westport.

Nearly eight years ago, Smyth discovered his house in Sharon on the Internet, where he was searching properties near the train stations for an easy commute to New York. Unlike many Connecticut towns, Sharon was named after the Plain of Sharon, mentioned in the Bible, rather than a part of England. The main street has many well-kept eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses on either side of a small green, and Smyth's "find" was set back a little on this road as it continues through the town. It was probably a good thing that he saw the house in winter, as its run-down appearance was not hidden by summer foliage, and had an unvarnished look at the actual work involved. As there was a long waiting period before the property could be bought, Smyth was able to get all his plans and the necessary quotes in place and start at once as soon as the house belonged to him. Luckily it only took a short five months to renovate.

Smyth learned that his late eighteenth-century house was once the Iron Cauldron Inn—a hotel for teachers from the school next door. Since 1790, when the house was built, the upstairs has been cut up into many different rooms. After a hundred years as an inn, the Iron Cauldron became home to families with lots of children. Smyth feels

Matthew Smyth restored this 1790s Colonial in Sharon. He re-exposed the top left Palladian-style window, which had been closed up by a previous owner.





that he is giving the house a rest, as it is only occupied most weekends by the couple, who enjoy it for its peace and quiet. Vallier likes to write here, and they can stroll into town and enjoy the small village atmosphere without using their car.

During the restoration there were surprises. A beautiful, tiger maple stair rail was discovered under a later-period wall, and the Palladian-style front window, found hidden away on the stair landing, was reopened to the interior. This mezzanine space then became large enough to use as a small, informal sitting room. Smyth converted the upstairs into three useful bedrooms and put some of the spare rooms to work as adjoining bathrooms. Downstairs he gave the house a new kitchen and reworked the back into a comfortable living-and-dining space.

Above: A pair of mirrors flanking the sitting room window not only adds light but also gives proportion to the room. Smyth designed the upholstered, tailored sofa and chairs. *Right:* The original tiger maple stair rail was discovered under a wall added in a later period.





The first thing you see when you walk into the house is the dining room, which does double duty as an entrance, and its wall of antique maps of Paris that remind the couple of their home in France. The living room, to the left, has been created from several small rooms and is furnished with an eclectic collection of furniture, making it seem traditional and modern at the same time. Smyth loves being in the country, especially here in Litchfield County. He can't name a favorite place, and feels "it's hard to say what the prettiest town is!"

Above: Eighteenth-century engravings of Paris's street plan hang on the dining room wall, reminding Matthew Smyth and Jean Vallier of their apartment in Paris. This room also serves as the formal entry to the house. *Right:* An antique Asian ivory dragonfly is perched on a book surrounded by a collection of decorative objects on the dining table.



Above: A mirror made from an old gear mold hangs on the wall of an informal dining area next to the kitchen. Smyth designed the sofa using a Brunswick & Fils stripe and added the antique wine-tasting table as a dining table. *Right:* The dresser in the same room holds a collection of objects found all over the world, including German tankards and a "tip box" found in New York State.

