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# Litchfield

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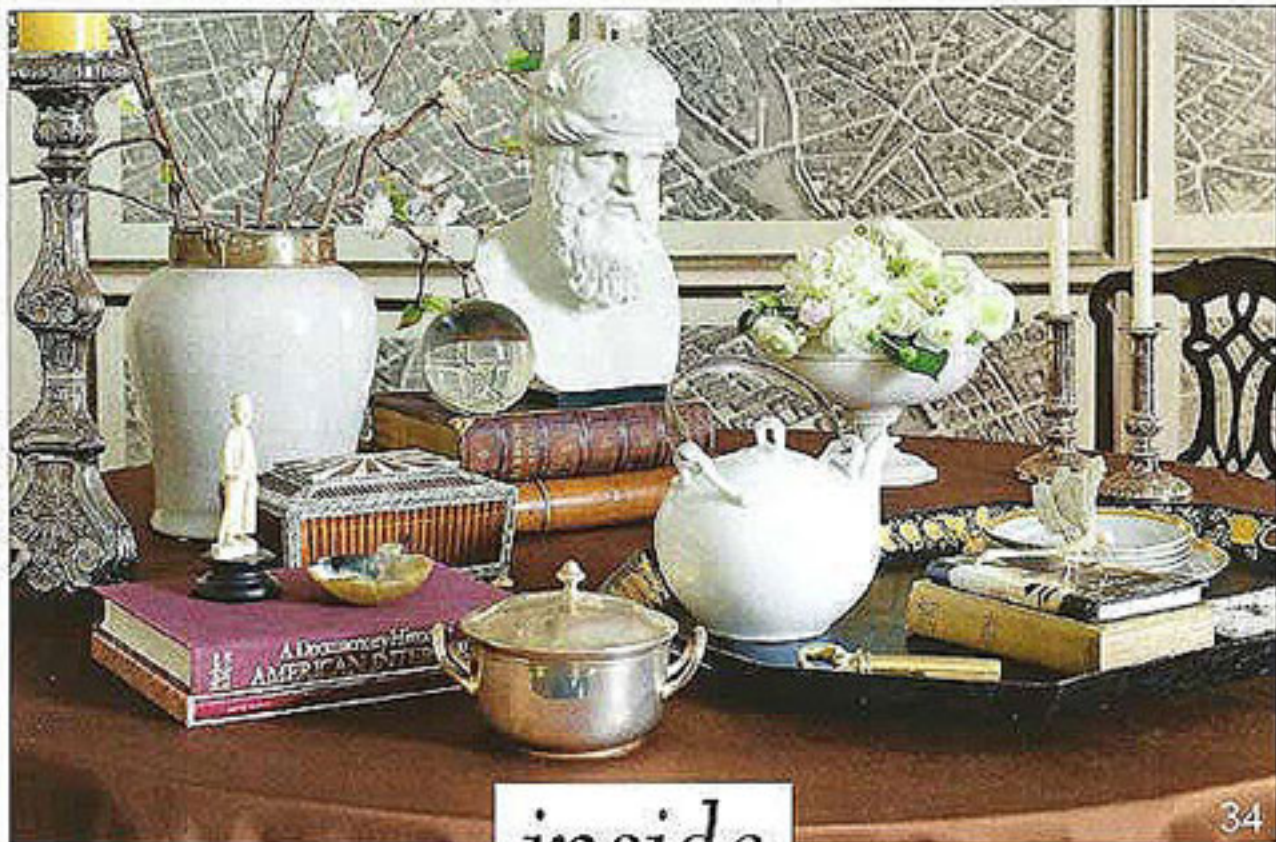
**GREEN  
HOME**



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MARCH / APRIL 2012

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It is fortuitous to find Matthew Patrick Smyth at home in Sharon, considering his schedule. As high-powered New York interior designer, Smyth travels to some of the most fashionable places in the world: Palm Beach, Aspen, Nantucket, Manhattan, and the Hamptons. Come take the tour of his Sharon home. —By Wendy Carlson

## 19 | Paper Magic

Banal floral patterns may come to mind when you think wallpaper, but the collection by the design team Kyra and Robertson Hartnett is anything but conventional. The 30-something duo create bold, colorful, and retro-modern graphics for wallpaper at Twenty2, their multi-discipline design studio in Litchfield.

—By Wendy Carlson

## 21 | Perfect Vision

Thomas McKnight has arrived at a time in life when he knows who he is. His new work is filled with visions of an Arcadia that pays homage to classic civilizations. Calming and colorful, his paintings are concerned with creating harmonies of beauty halfway between sadness and ecstasy.

—By Peggy Tagliarino

## 44 | Plan to Grow

Last year was epic: a devastating hurricane, catastrophic flooding, a deadly fall blizzard. Now winter. Makes you wonder how the garden could possibly survive. But lo, it's back—and a little planning can ease the pain. Herewith, a month-to-month guide on what to do and when to do it over the growing season, starting this minute.

—By Victoria Secunda

# A World of Designs

*Bringing it all back home* | BY WENDY CARLSON



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN GRUEN AND WENDY CARLSON

**THE FULL VIEW** In Sharon, interior designer Matthew Patrick Smyth transformed a vintage Colonial into a weekend retreat. The light-filled living room is decorated with leftover showhouse pieces, including a banquette and log box used at the Kips Bay Decorator Show House in 2001.





**WARM SPOTS** Smyth at home in his extended kitchen. Smyth's circa 1790s Colonial on Main Street in Sharon once served as an inn for schoolteachers. A well-composed desk nook near the hearth is part of the more expansive family room that joins the kitchen, and features a Dutch door, original beamed ceiling, and a stone surround fireplace.





C

onsidering his hectic schedule, it is fortuitous to find Matthew Patrick Smyth at home in Sharon, let alone relaxing. As a high-powered New York interior designer, Smyth travels to some of the most fashionable places in the world: Palm Beach, Aspen, Nantucket, Manhattan, the Hamptons. Even when he's not working, he's jet-setting. He spent Christmas touring India. His idea of a perfect weekend is a Thursday flight to Paris, where he owns an 18th-century apartment near the Louvre, which he shares with Jean Vallier, his partner for more than 23 years. A London flat is next on his decorating to-do list, and in the future perhaps an Irish manor house.

For someone with such an enviable lifestyle and prodigious career, Smyth seems remarkably down-to-earth as we chat in the light-flooded family room of his Colonial farmhouse in Sharon. With its beamed

ceiling, Dutch doors, stone fireplace, and hutch filled with antique English pottery, this setting feels a world away from Paris, and the Upper East Side, where Smyth operates Matthew Patrick Smyth, Inc.

Last April, his first book, *Living Traditions*, was published, which features his interior work, including a pied à terre on Fifth Avenue, a Madison Avenue Duplex, a Park Avenue apartment, and his own New York and Paris apartments. In December, he was honored as an industry leader in the fifth annual Stars of Design Awards 2011 in New York. So what drew him to the northwest hills of Connecticut? >



COMPOSED A vignette of some of Smyth's favorite objects occupy center stage on an extended table in the dining room with vintage maps of Paris as a backdrop. Smyth often works from his laptop in his favorite spot in a sunny family room.



"I'm a real New Yorker," he says, "but I also love getting out here. I love the way the whole county takes care of its historic properties, and I love the drive up." While looking at real estate in 2004, he stumbled upon a circa 1790s farmhouse for sale north of Sharon's Currier and Ives town center. For years, he had been converting spaces, which led to his desire to restore a place of his own.

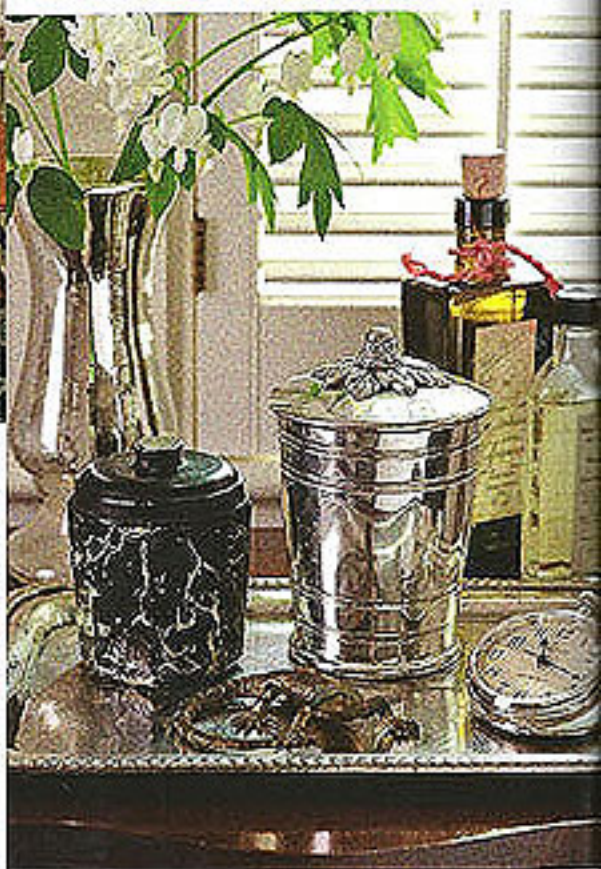
Structurally, the Sharon house had been well maintained, although like many vintage homes previous owners had altered it. During the early 1900s, it had served as a boarding house for schoolteachers, and was ominously named The Iron Caldron. To accommodate guests, the house was reconfigured to form five very small bedrooms. Numerous additions and renovations obscured some of its best architectural features. "Restorations are always puzzles," says Smyth. "Often, if you follow the floorboards they'll show you what happened: paint and nails reveal what went up, what came down, and in what order. My Sharon home revealed itself each day as we peeled years of renovation and decorating back to find the original core."

A previous owner had built a wall against the main staircase, closing it off from the rest of the house. Smyth removed the wall, and hidden behind it was a well-preserved tiger-maple railing with an ivory inlay. Reopening the upstairs land-





**IN THE DETAILS** Smyth's five bedrooms, once cramped, were restored into a spacious master suite and guest room. Objects placed on bedside table are reminders of places traveled, and of places yet to visit.



ing, he uncovered a Palladian window with its original glass intact that had been concealed by a built-in closet. He also renovated the five bedrooms into a master bedroom and a guest room. "When you buy an old house, you really become its steward; what I like about having restored this house is that I've secured it for the next 50 years," he says. "Often, the previous owners have done their own renovations, and so when it comes to your turn to take over, the restoration becomes a bit like the telephone game: the message gets garbled over time. Every 50 years you've got to stop, and make sure you've got the message right again."

The house is furnished practically with a mix of traditional and classic. "I love classic French décor from Louis XIV to Maison-Jansen. I never get bored looking at beautiful French rooms," he notes. Earlier in his career, after graduating from the Fashion Institute of America, Smyth worked for his mentor, David Easton, before starting his own firm. With Easton, he traveled to Madeira to design needlepoint carpets, to Venice to create vestments for a private chapel, to London to shop for antiques, and to Paris, where he developed a lifelong love of classic French interiors, and a penchant for flea markets.

Smyth designed the house décor around pieces he already owned, including furnishings from his previous home in Hudson, New York, and items from former showhouses.





**MASTER STROKES** During renovation, the second floor once comprised of smaller rooms was opened up making the space more inviting. The landing was opened up, revealing a palladian window with the original glass windows intact.



The palette of the house, bold white walls and the black-painted floorboards tying everything together, acts like a canvas featuring objects he loves. The dining room, which doubles as a central hall, is a masterful blend of modern pieces and antiques: 17th-century vintage Paris maps cover one wall while 1950s French chairs surround the table. An Irish Gothic chair in the living room was a gift from a friend who introduced him to interior design. One of Smyth's favorite pieces, a study by American modernist Robert Coutright, rests on a 1940s Argentine table. "I have a lot of vintage items or antiques, which I couldn't resist buying because I found them amusing, like the old handmade Danish butter mold, which serves no purpose whatsoever."

Smyth shops regional antique and consignment stores, always on the hunt for hidden treasures. "Just one item can make the whole journey worthwhile," he says. "But often, the best finds, like this house, are pure luck." ■