

MATTHEW PATRICK SMYTH

STYLE IS THE METHOD OF DEFINING WHO WE ARE
AND HOW WE LIVE.

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Matthew Patrick Smyth lives an enviable life. During the week, he resides on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and on the weekends he shares a home in Sharon, Connecticut, with his longtime partner, French author Jean Vallier. The couple also keep apartments in Paris and Palm Beach. However, it is their late eighteenth-century colonial farmhouse, in the peaceful hamlet of Litchfield County, where they escape most often. Matthew first discovered the property while searching the Internet for a rural retreat within easy reach of New York. The main part of the house, built in 1790, endured many “bad” additions and renovations over the years. For a spell, it was an inn for lady schoolteachers before coming into Matthew’s care.

While the house was in need of repair, as with any renovation, there are always surprises and frustrations. Matthew even questioned his own judgment at one point during the chaotic process. A few discoveries that brought delight were a concealed Palladian window and a hidden tiger-maple staircase with ivory inlay, features that had been closed off by previous owners. What gave him further pleasure was an engraved brass chime on the door dated September 8, 1884, the same day as his birthday (minus a hundred-plus years).

After a five-month-long structural renovation, Matthew turned his attention to the interior spaces. Furniture from a former home was moved in, along with collections and objects from the many showhouse rooms he created over the years. Floorboards were painted black to create a unified look and mirrors artfully placed to reflect light and amplify space. A mirror

CREATURE COMFORTS Coming home to comfortable seating with a good reading light, a table at hand for books, glasses (both reading and drinking), and a good stereo is heaven. And the days that I have no set schedule, when I am free to read, nap, putter, and just enjoy my home, are pure bliss.



per room is one of his favorite design rules; it not only directs his thinking but also forces consideration from every angle. "Of course, you can have more than just one mirror in a room," he notes. "Practically speaking, it's imperative to consider what the first mirror will do before even contemplating adding a second."

It is the same intense focus that drives his every decision. The interior designer originally thought he would be a photographer. "I didn't know I could be a decorator. In my tiny hometown of Florida, New York, there were no decorators." It was *only* after meeting a designer and watching Dick Cavett interview Katharine Hepburn that Matthew changed his path. The famous actress declared that you could have anything you want in life if you narrowed your focus; if not you would never

DECORATIVE DETAILS Never underestimate the power of flowers. Rooms move into another realm when you introduce real flowers and plants. Any item or object that you take care in finding, regardless of cost, adds uniqueness and soul. I always search out things that both amuse and delight. I hate it when music is missing from my home, and I will never forgo light-bulb control. Dimmers are essential.





go anywhere. Soon after he narrowed his focus and pursued a career in design, attending the Fashion Institute of Technology, he then worked for David Easton, his chosen mentor. Much like Mr. Easton, Matthew's work is grounded in tradition, but he has loosened up over the years, now freely mixing twentieth-century pieces with antiques. He doesn't like rooms that are too studied. Nor does he care for gimmicks. Moreover, he credits travel with widening his design views and ideas. "I can work seven days a week for months if I know a trip is coming up to renew my senses. Travel turns me on creatively, spiritually, and emotionally."

MAKING AN ENTRANCE It all begins and ends at the front door. Therefore, it's important to spend some time and care in thinking about not only beautiful decoration, but also the functional design of the space. A place to sit and remove winter boots is a must in our home. A forgiving carpet, sturdy umbrella stand, and easy access to a coat closet are also important. Naturally, the imperative details vary greatly depending on the home and locale.

FLOWERS AND FRAGRANCES The fresh scent of Antica Farmacista's Green Fig is one of my favorites. In the winter, I sometimes use their Pomegranate & Currant, a warm, spicy aroma blended with citrus. Of course, I am always open to new scents, especially when given as a gift. White tulips are simple and elegant flowers for the home, and in my garden everything is white or blue. I like the clean, crisp look of those colors mixed with green; it's visually less confusing.

A BEAUTIFUL BED A fairly simple bed, with four pillows stacked two by two, a top sheet, and a folded duvet, works for me. Pressed linens are wonderful, but the reality of servicing them is an issue. I am always on the lookout for the finest no-iron sheets and pillowcases. The best I have found are Land's End 400-count embroidered sateen sheets. They have a pressed appearance right from the dryer. The linens in our house are not necessarily changed out with the seasons, but the duvet cover, quilts, and blankets do reflect the time of year.

ENTERTAINING THOUGHTS When I am in the city, I like to take small groups of friends to Off Broadway shows at the Irish Repertory Theatre or Classic Stage Company; we always have drinks and light food beforehand at a nearby restaurant. I find that December is the easiest month for entertaining at home. Everyone is in a festive mood, decorations are more creative, and anything seems to go. When pressed for time, I buy dessert and order appetizers from a Turkish restaurant.

