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The Big PICTURE

With a focus on historical authenticity and storied antiques, designer Matthew Patrick Smyth brings classic style and intriguing character to this Westport, Connecticut home

By CATHY STILL MCGOWIN Photography by JOHN GRUEN



The contemporary art is by Emilia Dubicki. OPPOSITE: Starting with the bold red wallpaper from Carleton V in the entrance hall, Matthew chose a complementary palette of warm jewel tones to add richness and depth to the interiors.

A large, elegant living room with a fireplace, a large painting, a sofa, and a coffee table. The room features a coffered ceiling, a French mantel, and a wall with a large painting. The furniture includes a leather sofa, a patterned armchair, and a wooden coffee table. The room is decorated with various items, including a vase of flowers, a lamp, and a small table with books.

“We started working on this house about nine years ago when there was all this pressure in the design world to go white and new. Now, everything is colorful again. Design has come full circle.”

—MATTHEW PATRICK SMYTH

With 12-foot ceilings and vast square footage, the living room was cavernous. Matthew added the coffered ceiling, French mantel, and wall trim. He painted the ceiling a pale blue to temper its hard white edge. Two seating areas help delineate the space. Cut velvets, silks, oil paintings, and antiques add patina.

MATTHEW PATRICK SMYTH'S NEW BOOK, *Through a Designer's Eye*, features beloved design projects along with some of his favorite Instagram shots. “The book is a combination of rooms and spaces I’ve designed along with photos and details that have inspired me,” he says. His Instagram highlight reel includes travel destinations, stunning landscapes, and snippets of architectural details. While these little vignettes inspire textures, palettes, and moods in his work, he adamantly stresses that good—really good—interior design is bigger and more powerful than any photo or rising number of followers on social media.

When Matthew began working on this Westport, Connecticut, home almost nine years ago, Instagram was only a year old. Pinterest, the virtual bulletin board for traditional magazine tear sheets was also in its infancy, and popular retail brands had (almost) everyone convinced that clean lines, white upholstery, and bleached finishes were the pinnacle of high design. “There’s no doubt that social media is a powerful tool for designers who want to showcase their work, and if it falls into place, great, but you can’t get caught up in a corner of a room or a little moment. You have to think big picture,” Matthew says.

His big picture view shines throughout this Georgian Revival home, a place where he thoughtfully considered scale, color, the movement of light, mood, and both visual and tactile textures. “The house was built 30 years ago. It had great bones and the architecture was fine, but the interior proportions were off,” Matthew says. “We needed to reset the spaces with classic moldings and delineate rooms to scale it back to a more intimate level.”

To do that, Matthew traveled to Colonial Williamsburg, a place he knew well thanks to his experience as a guest lecturer with the Colonial Williamsburg

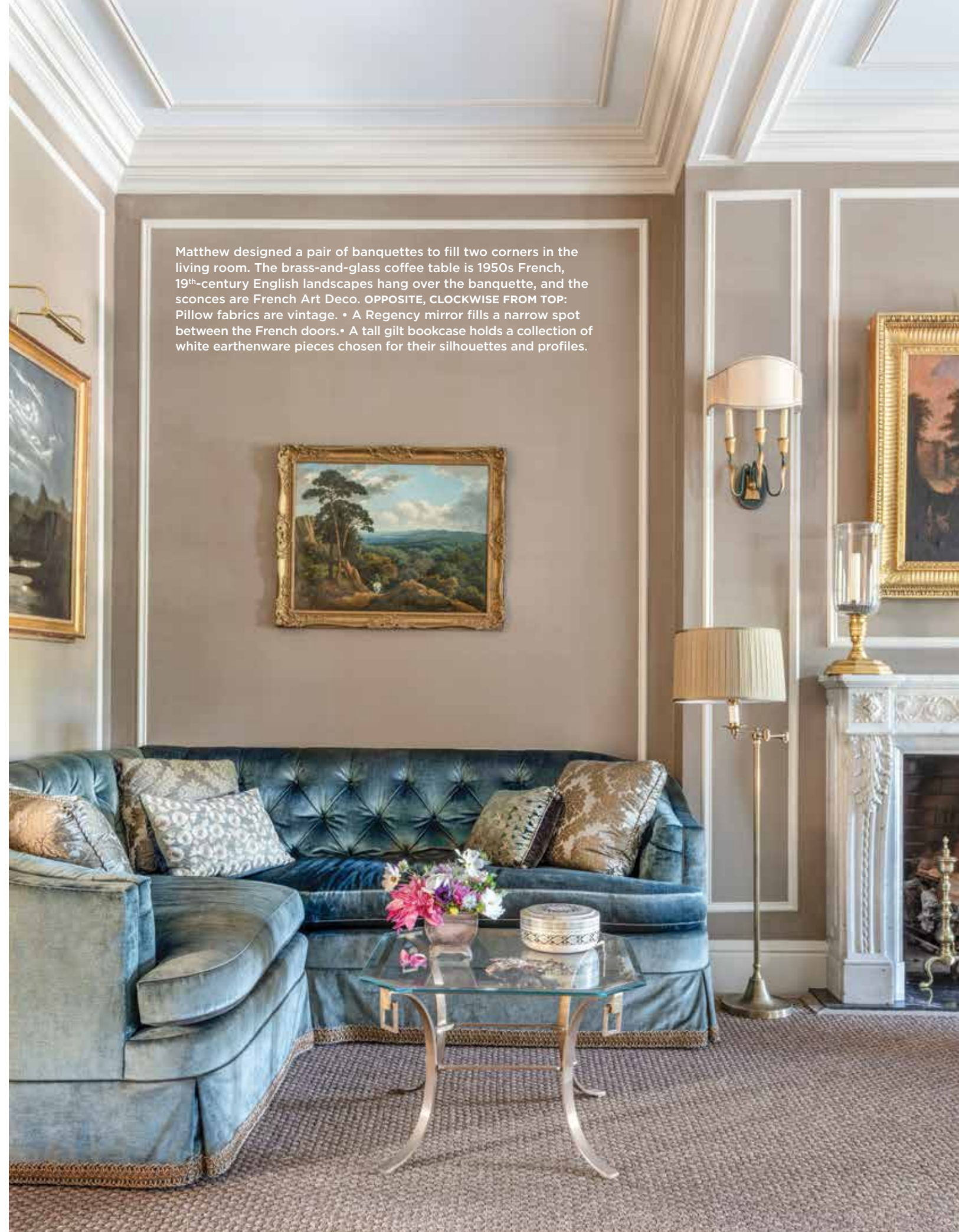


Foundation. “When you are building or renovating a new home, you should always go to the most authentic source of the design you can find,” he says. “Otherwise, you are picking and pulling ideas from here and there, and it can end up being chaotic.

“Travel is one of the most important experiences you can have if you want to be a good designer,” he adds. “When you see something in person, you get a sense of the place’s volume and whether it feels intimate or massive. I advise young designers to travel—and travel often. Save your money and get out there. Go to Europe. But if you can’t travel, there’s plenty you can find locally. Visit museums and historic buildings. You’re not going to decorate that way, but you’ll get a sense of history and appropriateness. The more you see, the more you build up your repertoire.”

Returning to Connecticut with loads of images and precise measurements, Matthew stripped out the existing interior moldings so he could start fresh. “There were a lot of subtle things that needed to be done before we could start with furniture selection,” he says.

A coffered ceiling and arched openings visually scaled down rooms. New trim replaced wall paneling. Antique mantels from France and England were retrofitted for



Matthew designed a pair of banquettes to fill two corners in the living room. The brass-and-glass coffee table is 1950s French, 19th-century English landscapes hang over the banquette, and the sconces are French Art Deco. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Pillow fabrics are vintage. • A Regency mirror fills a narrow spot between the French doors. • A tall gilt bookcase holds a collection of white earthenware pieces chosen for their silhouettes and profiles.

“We weren’t trying to fool anyone into thinking this was an old house. We just wanted it to have historic character.”

—MATTHEW PATRICK SMYTH



ABOVE: The library is Matthew’s interpretation of a modern yet traditional men’s club. The walls and molding are painted Benjamin Moore’s *Notre Dame*. **BELOW:** A room off the dining room features a cabinet filled with Frances Palmer pottery against a Zoffany wallpaper. **OPPOSITE:** An assortment of seating surrounds a 19th-century English dining table on a birdcage pedestal base. A green glass vase holds allium and delphinium. Matthew designed the wingback settee.

period style, and in the library, Matthew refreshed tired paneling with paint. With the hardscape in place, the red wallpaper in the foyer set the tone for the interior colors and decorating. “It’s a simple damask,” Matthew says of the pattern, by Carleton V. “It doesn’t have that heavy European feel. It’s stylized but modern, and it’s crisp. It’s cheerful in the daytime and glamorous at night. Once you start with something like that, it has a domino effect.”

Seeking antiques to accompany the traditional bones, Matthew scoured shops and worked with dealers to source a mix of periods and styles to get a custom blend. “When I do modern, I know exactly what the house is going to look like,” he says. “But when I am designing with antiques, it’s always an evolution and a surprise. You just don’t know what is out there or what you are going to find until you start looking.”

There are Swedish chairs, French settees, Irish tables, English paintings, and Scottish clocks. “I love antiques, but you do have to balance them with upholstery, wallpaper, and some painted pieces here and there,” says the designer. “Everything has to work together as a whole.”

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THIS PAGE: Sanderson wallpaper makes a pretty statement while offering a serene backdrop in the master bedroom. Mismatched end tables—an antique English writing table and a new white piece from Mecox Gardens—offer contrast while remaining open and airy. Matthew added pillows by B. Viz on the seating and bed. **OPPOSITE, LEFT TO RIGHT:** A 19th-century wing chair anchors a corner in the gallery that leads from the front door to the living room. Late 18th-century English paintings depict Shakespearean characters.



FLORIST AND STYLIST MIEKE TEN HAVE

WHEN IT COMES TO FLORAL DESIGN for his interiors, Matthew Smyth defers to Mieke ten Have. We talked to the interiors stylist and design writer to garner her insights.

How do you approach floral design in general? I have a romantic and loose approach with floral design. I am not a trained florist, so I work in a way that is more intuitive and focused on composition as opposed to rules. I am not fond of a tight, constricted arrangement. I anthropomorphize flowers to a certain degree, and I think each stem's personality should shine through, while establishing both tension and harmony with the others in the arrangement. I always go for an asymmetrical composition and a variety of flower styles.

How did you approach the florals for this house in particular? Before styling any project, I always look at the colors in the home and determine hues that complement and contrast the color scheme. The flowers I bring are always predicated on the mood of the home, the color story, and, of course, what's in season. This home has a serene palette, punctuated by some vivid reds. In the living room, I chose scabiosa and cosmos to reflect that, while one crimson anemone punctuates, and nods to, the red elsewhere.

What is your favorite flower and season to work in? Do you focus on seasonal appropriateness, or do you just like to go with what works? If it is for a magazine and slated for a particular month, I try to anchor the florals to that season. Otherwise, my mantra is always to have it look of the region, as though the homeowner stepped out the door with a pair of shears. I am always looking for a regional flower farm in summertime (like Cedar Farm in Ghent, New York). If I am on location somewhere remote, I love to forage (which I do anytime the season allows!). My favorite flower is technically a weed—Queen Anne's lace, the most humble and elegant beauty in my eyes! I also have a serious weak spot for lilac, chocolate cosmos, and flame parrot tulips.

What are some of your favorite kind of containers? Ceramicist Frances Palmer makes my favorite vessels for arranging, but I believe having a large variety of shapes on hand is a must for any job. 🌸

Mieke is an interiors stylist and a design writer. She was a longtime editor for magazines like Elle Decor and Vogue and now contributes to Architectural Digest and House & Garden. Find her on Instagram @mieketenhave.

