



WEB-EXCLUSIVE HOME TOUR

Discover an Inspired Mix of Styles in This Connecticut Country House

Interior designer Matthew Patrick Smyth breathes new life into his own 1970s prefab

By Alyssa Bird
Photography by Simon Upton
September 2, 2020

One might find it rather curious that a classically minded interior designer like Matthew Patrick Smyth would leave his beloved 18th-century weekend retreat in Sharon, Connecticut, for a neglected 1970s prefab in the woods. But when he was notified of a price reduction on the listing he had been tracking in nearby Salisbury (Smyth is a self-proclaimed real estate junkie), he didn't think twice. "I immediately went to see the property and ended up buying it that same day," says the Manhattan-based Smyth, who also keeps an apartment in Paris. "My friends thought I was crazy, but I needed a change and I wanted the challenge of tackling a ranch house like this." The 2,200-square-foot residence, originally constructed for a Pan Am pilot by the custom prefab company Deck House (now Acorn Deck House Company), fell into disrepair after having been rented out for years. "The home was a mess, with layers of linoleum, avocado green appliances, a hot tub, a steam room, and a dated stone fireplace," recalls Smyth, "although I'm sure it was quite the jazzy bachelor pad when it was first built. It still had a good energy about it that I felt right away."

In order to see what he was working with, the designer—whose new book, *Through a Designer's Eye: A Focus on Interiors* (Monacelli Press), comes out this month—began by taking down every last bit of drywall to expose the framework. "There were so many walls and I needed to find out where the support beams were," explains Smyth. Upon opening up the floor plan, he created a more substantial entry area and converted the attached garage into an office that doubles as a guest room. The latter is now Smyth's favorite room in the house, thanks to "the best view of the mountains" and the addition of a treasured English armchair. A close second might be the new main bath, the pièce de résistance of which is a large soaking tub that looks out onto yet another picturesque pastoral vista.

In choosing the furnishings, the designer flexed his editing muscles more than he's used to. "I could pile on the antiques in the Sharon house, but I had to be more careful here," says Smyth. "Decor needs to be appropriate for its environment and architecture, but I also couldn't abandon my love of antiques just because I moved to a midcentury-modern house. I didn't want it to feel stereotypical of that era, either." With that in mind, he decided on a mix of his most prized antique and vintage finds alongside custom upholstery, focusing his eye on pieces that were overall "visually lighter than the ones I had been living with in my previous home."

He started by choosing three key items: A South African captain's trunk that welcomes guests in the entry, and a circa-1850 Irish console and a gilded Regency mirror, both of which grace the living area. "After that, everything else fell into place," explains Smyth. "It's simple, light, and comfortable, yet it's still elegant. And there's nothing too precious, enabling guests to feel completely relaxed." The art lining the walls consists mostly of works by friends that Smyth holds near and dear. "Acting as your own client can be difficult because the choices are endless," he says. "But this house sums up exactly how I want to design at this stage of my career. It's a true reflection of who I am right now."

Smyth's 1970s ranch, built by the custom prefab company Deck House, is painted in Benjamin Moore's Wrought Iron. The designer had previously owned an 18th-century Colonial in the nearby town of Sharon. "I wanted something different," says Smyth, "and I saw this property as a challenge."

