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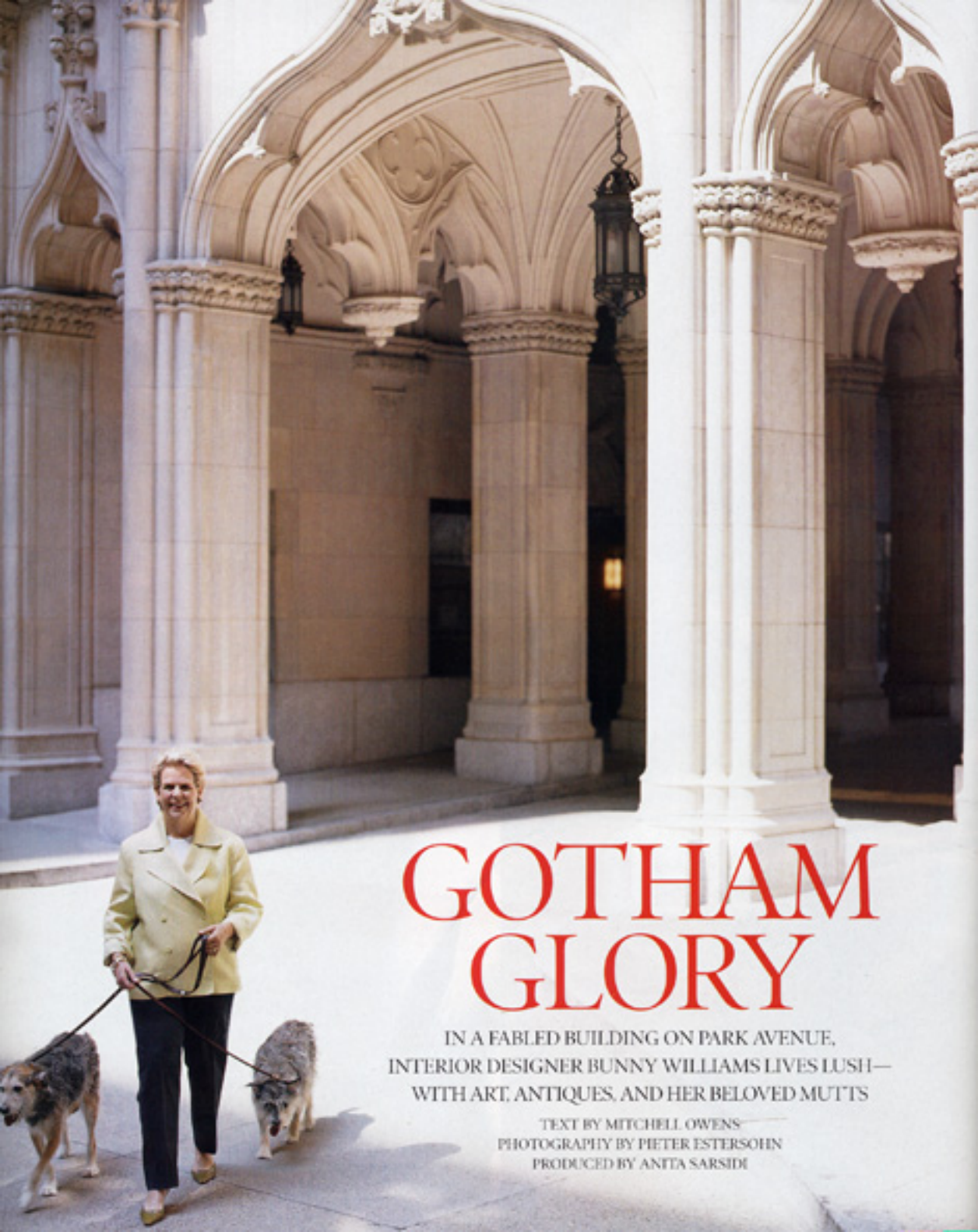

GOTHAM GLORY

IN A FABLED BUILDING ON PARK AVENUE, INTERIOR DESIGNER BUNNY WILLIAMS LIVES LUSH—WITH ART, ANTIQUES, AND HER BELOVED MUTTS

TEXT BY MITCHELL OWENS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PIETER ESTERSOHN
PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSIDI

Facing page: Bunny Williams and her dogs, Charlie and Lucy. This page: An 18th-century French mirror hangs above the living room mantel. The gilt-gesso sconces are French antiques, as are the plaster chinoiserie figures. The antique faux-bamboo stools came from New York dealer Gerald Bland. See Resources.

A mirrored wall provides a smoky reflection of the living room. Recalling a deep-dish original owned by Coco Chanel, the sofa is covered in olive-green velvet; the yellow needlework cushions were stitched in the 1920s. Williams based the design of the silver-leaf cocktail table on a Chinese antique. Facing page, from top: An Italian neoclassical table anchors the entrance hall. Williams's prize is a clock emblazoned with Bonaparte bees. See Resources.

Bunny Williams collects, among many other things, needlework pictures.

And we're not talking cross-stitch samplers. Nothing so cutesy as that. Instead, the handwrought images dappling the walls of her bedroom are couture-quality stitchery, artful portraits of exuberant bouquets meticulously reinterpreted in tiny strands of colorful silk. They are relics of an era when ladies were expected to do little more than make pretty things in between attacks of neurasthenia, and Williams—arguably America's tip-top decorator, trained at the knees of Sister Parish and Albert Hadley—is well aware of the irony.

"Here they are in the bedroom of a woman who goes to work every day," she says with a wry laugh. "What's wrong with this picture?"

Frankly, the picture's perfect. So's the frame. "I loved the floor plan the minute I saw it," Williams says of the two-bedroom apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side that she and ace antiquaire John Rosselli call home. One of the city's blue-chip buildings for more than 70 years, the structure's Gothic-flavored architecture is "an intentional echo of the mighty cathedrals of Europe," according to the writer Anne Roiphe, who grew up there. Inside, however, the medieval mien gives way to something more comfy-cozy. "It doesn't have a lot of rooms," Williams says of her place, "but they are all sunny, pretty much square, and good sized."

The square footage is an obvious benefit: Bunny Williams likes stuff. Lots of stuff. Gilt frames. Orientalist art. Odd old fabrics that she turns

The living room is a shortlist of Williams's passions, from garden-themed objects to worldly antiques. The 19th-century Swedish chairs are upholstered in modern tan suede. The tufted armchair by the fireplace is upholstered in a linen blend from Rogers & Goffigon. Curtains of chartreuse silk taffeta by the Silk Trading Co. hang from an antique French spiderweb-motif curtain rod from Maimaison Antiques. See Resources.

From left: A Vuillard-style painting hangs in the library-cum-dining room above an antique Knole sofa. The walls are glazed in what Williams calls "sludge green." The Chinese red-lacquer table is banked by an elaborately carved armchair, an ivory-inlaid Art Deco tub chair, and an 18th-century French fauteuil. William IV rosewood chairs make one end of the room dining-ready. The Orientalist bust is from the estate of Malcolm Forbes. See Resources.

into exotic cushions. Garden-themed objects, like a gilded twig-form mirror and a 19th-century mantel clock in the form of a Versailles tub swarming with Bonaparte bees and bearing a gold-and-enamel hydrangea (it may have been made for Napoleon's stepdaughter, Hortense, whose name echoes the French word for the flower, *hortensia*). "I've collected a lot of things since my last apartment," says Williams, who has a thing for exotic Polish chickens, too (that's another story). Most of all, she loves books—about gardening, society, history, decorating. There are probably thousands scattered throughout the apartment. Stored in custom-made bookcases in the entrance hall. Piled on the floor. Books proliferate under tables, on tables, even stacked in a tower in the living room atop the seat of a worn Napoleon III velvet slipper chair.

"It's a great mixture of things I like," the designer says, dismissing any idea that the apartment's decor is all that special. But just go ahead and admire the bust of a desert sheik or an oil painting that looks like a Vuillard but isn't, and the lady of the house's engagingly casual demeanor snaps to attention.

In the master bedroom, for instance, stands a neo-Baroque mirror-clad bed. "It's possible that it might be by Jansen, but that will require some more research," says Williams, who concedes that the glittering

From left: The centerpiece of the master bedroom is a 1930s mirrored bed once owned by café-society beauty Dorothy Hart Hirshon. Williams underscored its exoticism by lining it with embroidered Indian silk; she also designed the bamboo-and-lacquer table. The bed linens are by Léron. See Resources.

diamanté confection could have been made by 1930s French designer Serge Roche. She does know that it was previously owned by the well-wed American glamour girl Dorothy Hart Hearst Paley Hirshon, and for the time being, that's enough, maker be damned. "If you love something, it will work. That's the only real rule."

Simple backgrounds help. Look past the carefully arranged litter of objets d'art and charming furniture spanning multiple eras—and, of course, all those books—and it's obvious that Williams believes in a foundation of trustworthy basics. Painted finishes are clean and uncomplicated, the walls smoothly plastered, the hardware polished to perfection. Underpinning it all are acres of sisal, which not only provide a seamless plane of no-color color underfoot but also a claw-friendly surface for the engaging resident mutts, Lucy and Charlie (Williams, who is also a columnist for ELLE DECOR, and fellow Kitty Hawks are co-founders of Tails in Need, a mixed-breed awareness organization whose canine crusade is just a click tailsinneed.com). Also, sisal matting is more affordable than t period rugs she dreams of. "I'd rather put my money into up to a better table or buying a better picture than spending a lo complicating the background of a room," says Williams.

That sensible approach doesn't mean she hasn't incorporate of fancy. One wall of the living room is paved with antiqued mir heightens the available light, adds a note of transatlantic swa reflects a space that appears timeless but is actually constantl ing. "Minimalist rooms can be so beautiful, but I can't live in designer says with a laugh. "I love objects too much." ■