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In a bookcase, white shells on small wood stands, plus creamware and marble. OPPOSITE: The hanging behind the dazzling mirrored bed—dressed in Pratesi sheets—was embroidered in India. A silvery blue-gray silk carpet was found at Beauvais, and the antique bench from Evergreen is covered in antique needlepoint.

In the breakfast room, Régence-style chairs in a Cowtan & Tout weave surround the English reproduction table. The terra-cotta wall fountain is from Paris. OPPOSITE: The grand stair landing. Bunny Williams is one of HB's Giants of Design; read more about her on page 106.

American style is timeless

INTERIOR DESIGN BY BUNNY WILLIAMS, INC.
INTERVIEW BY CAROL PRISANT
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DON FREEMAN

The design of the upstairs family sitting room began with a Sotheby's find—a fabulous Chinese rug. Next came curtains, in a Christopher Norman fabric. Bookshelves were lit by brass lights from Acorn Morris Antiques and the porcelain-flowered tole urns on the mantel came from Bunny Williams's garden and home store, Trailiage.

[CAROL PRISANT] So how does one go about making a brand-new house look like it's been here forever? [DESIGNER BUNNY WILLIAMS] Well, first, by putting a huge amount of effort into things like hand-scraping floors, aging stone, and doing hand finishes.

Aging stone? That's interesting. How do you do that?
You just play around. I always say it's easy to do anything three feet square. I'll use black waxes or water stains to get the look I want—a sort of softness, sort of dirt. And then I give it to some poor, unsuspecting workman and say, 'Here, you do the rest.' And he pulls it off.

It's pretty convincing. And you've actually made that oak-paneled breakfast room look J.P. Morganesque.
Much of that is thanks to architect Andy Giambertone, but we—that's me and Todd Gribben from my office—added things like those 17th-century-style chairs, and we painted them dark, dark green. Sometimes when you're shopping, you can find something from 1910 or so with good lines, and paint or refinish it to look better than new. We also put that tapestry-like fabric on the chairs because it's incredibly forgiving for children.

You've used fabrics thoughtfully throughout the house.
I do love to use old fabrics and unusual textiles, because they keep a room from looking like you just walked into some fabric place and ordered it. Of course you *have* to have the new things, because you have to have that 30 yards for the sofa. But then the needlepoint or embroidered things give it all a depth, a layered look.

I was sort of astonished, though, to see that you hung that completely naked TV over the fireplace in the family sitting room.
I don't mind seeing the television. It's such a part of our lives today. Of course it *could* be hidden, but then you've always got to open the doors, or leave them standing open all the time. And frankly, when that TV's on, it kind of looks like a painting hanging over the mantel. It may be a 'painting' of *Desperate Housewives* or *American Idol*, but it's still sort of modern art over the fireplace, and part of what makes a period house seem current, not stodgy.

Even your wing chairs manage not to be stodgy.
That's because they're kind of 'modern' wing chairs; they have a clean, almost sculptural shape to them. But without reading lamps and tables, chairs are completely useless! I always say you can never have enough of both.

And do you ever take your clients shopping with you?
With these clients, we had a wonderful trip to the flea market in Paris. Naturally, we got there early in the morning, when it's pitch black dark and freezing cold, and the husband's face just dropped, because the dealers are opening up the stalls and there are all these piles of junk and he's saying, 'What are we doing here? It looks like grandmother's attic.' I told him we could certainly go back to Paris to all the fancy shops where everything is in good condition. And then he thought about that for a few minutes, and as cold and miserable as he was, he decided to stay. Now I'm doing an apartment for this couple, and they can't wait to go back!

Antiques do predominate, but there are certainly several unexpected touches here—like that rug in the library, and the dressing room mirror.
Yes. Sometimes I just decide I'm not going to do something—like not putting an Oriental rug in the library—because it's too easy. That rug makes it youthful; makes it today. And in the dressing room, I didn't want just to mirror the wall. The triptych mirror looks like an armoire when its doors are closed, but open, you have the three-way views.

And speaking of mirrors, what about that drop-dead mirrored bed in the master bedroom?
My client saw a picture of it (it's my own bed—designed by the famous French firm Jansen) and loved it, and the mirror man said he could copy it. By the time he finished it, he swore he'd *never* do that again.

You put shelves full of shells in there too. Why shells?
Books, I decided, would really be too heavy for the room, and I *just loved* the idea of all those creamy whites and silvers.

You seem to love your work, period. Do you lie awake at night, decorating?
That's the way I fall asleep, thinking about what to do with this job or that. So there I am. My dogs are sound asleep, and I'm wide awake filling bookshelves. It's better than counting sheep.

PRODUCED BY SENGA MORTIMER

On a splendid antique rug from Christie's in the living room, a needlepoint ottoman from Colefax and Fowler. Curtains are Lee Jofa's Chesney moiré. The green fabric on the Victorian chairs is from Travers. On the pair of antique bergères, Grey Watkins's Velutis Faucigny velvet. OPPOSITE: In the library, the lively window shade fabric is Robert Kime's Algiers, and on the pair of antique Regency chairs, a Clarence House linen velvet.

OPPOSITE: In the master bedroom's sitting room, desk chairs are covered in Bergamo fabric. LEFT: A guest room with Travers Lynford wallpaper in Lettuce. BELOW: The dressing room is papered in Claremont's taupe and blue Palmstripe; the carpet is from Scalamandré, and pictures come from John Rosselli. In the center, a whimsical Victorian rondele is upholstered in Travers fabric.