AUGUST 2009

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WHAT MAKES A ROOM GREAT

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

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THIS ROOM IS GREAT BECAUSE IT'S BY BUNNY WILLIAMS

American decorating at its best, by a master. It's a room we didn't want you to miss

Interior design by
BUNNY WILLIAMS

Interview by
DOUGLAS BRENNER

Photographs by
THOMAS LOOF

At this year's Kips Bay showhouse, Bunny Williams mixed furnishings from her Bee Line Home collection with a dashing re Egg chair from Design Within Reach. It curves glow against walls painted Ben jamin Moore's California Breeze, a blu echoed in the Quadrille Veneto fronts an seats of armchairs. Chairbacks are cov ered in vintage silk ikat. The decorativ painting on the sisal rug is by Artgroove The ceiling is Benjamin Moore's Cliffsid Gray, cut with 75 percent white.

MEN WOMEN AND DOGS
B.W.

EVERY SO OFTEN A DESIGNER DOES A ROOM THAT JUST TAKES OUR BREATH AWAY—AND WE KNOW WE'VE SEEN SOMETHING REALLY IMPORTANT IN DECORATING. AT THIS YEAR'S KIPS BAY SHOWHOUSE, THE GREAT **BUNNY WILLIAMS** TOOK TRADITION AND PUSHED IT FORWARD. HER ROOM IS GONE NOW, BUT IT'S NOT GOING TO BE FORGOTTEN.

OPPOSITE: Leather edges and a lift-out tray let the Tray Chic Ottoman multitask as table, bench, and footstool. The Nailhead Sofa is in solid velvet, so patterned throws and pillows can easily change its look. All textiles by BeeLine Home. Curtains made of Indian bedspreads frame an urn from John Rosselli Antiques & Decorations. The metal art panel is 1950s Danish. RIGHT: Sarah Graham's ravishing painting *Artichoke I* takes botanical art to a bold new level. Robert Russell sculpture, Luna lamps, Parish Cachepots (based on ceramic birds owned by Williams's mentor, Sister Parish).

WHAT MAKES THIS ROOM GREAT

- THOSE DARING TURQUOISE WALLS WITH A LIGHT GRAY CEILING
- A SINGLE BRIGHT RED EGG CHAIR IN A MOSTLY TRADITIONAL ROOM (THAT'S CONFIDENCE)
- THE DRAMA OF THE BOTANICALS
- THE LAMPSHADE DETAILS
- THE GOLDEN ACCENTS THROUGHOUT THE ROOM
- THE USE OF OLIVE GREEN TO KNOCK DOWN THE BRIGHT COLORS

DOUGLAS BRENNER: *I feel as if I'm inhaling these blues! Such fresh colors.*

BUNNY WILLIAMS: I just wanted to be happy—and color makes you happy. Turquoise is intense and exciting. But you have to balance strong colors with neutrals. I always stand in a room and think about the balance—you've got to get your proportions right. I say, 'Okay, where's the furniture going to go?' I had the fireplace and the big strong botanicals, so I wanted the other end to have the big strong bookcase. But I didn't want it obviously balanced. I broke the symmetry so it doesn't get boring. You have to throw it off a bit.

That red chair throws it off, doesn't it?

Somebody asked me why I put it in there, and I said, 'Because I just felt like it.' The eye is connected to the heart and soul. Rooms should have spontaneity. Nothing quite matches, but it blends.

The spirit of this room reminds me of Nancy Lancaster's legendary yellow 'bedsit' in London.

She had me over for tea one afternoon. There were comfy, slouchy chairs by the fireplace, books, a table where she was writing cards. It was totally used. That's the feeling I wanted—you have the big seating group so you can entertain friends, with an ottoman that has a lift-out tray and tufted sides where you can sit or put your feet up. At the other end there's a long table, which can be used as a desk or for dining. >>

RIGHT: An English Regency bookcase also serves as sideboard and entertainment center. OPPOSITE: Metal sawhorses support a dining table/game table/desk. Twin Wallace chairs, slipcovered in Threads' Panama Cream, face trays casually set with dinnerware and linens from Treillage. Eclipse side chairs are covered in Création Baumann Curry 37 and Alan Campbell Petite Zig Zag in Inca Gold. Italian gilt and mirror panels from the 1950s were hinged to create the folding screen.

FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

WHAT MAKES THIS ROOM GREAT

- A TABLE THAT'S A DESK AT ONE END AND DINING FOR TWO AT THE OTHER
- TALL TOPIARIES EMPHASIZE THE HIGH CEILINGS
- THE MIX-MATCH PLAY OF ALL THE CHAIRS
- THE TV SEEMS PERFECTLY NATURAL
- IT'S TIMELESS

And a TV in the bookcase.
I always say, if you want to use your living room, put the television in it. Put a computer in it. But make it attractive!

How else do you adapt classicism to contemporary reality?
Classicism, for me, is a floor plan that works. If you've got a chair sitting all by itself with no light or a place to set down a drink, it may make a pretty picture, but nobody's going to be happy there. If you have a pair of sofas with a six-foot-square coffee table in between, people are too far apart to talk. My coffee table–ottoman is about four feet, which is as big as it should be. A sisal rug anchors the area. Its stenciled graphic pattern is modern, and yet it uses an old technique that's affordable and fun.

And you scaled the pattern to hold its own.
I learned all about scale in my 22 years working with Albert Hadley. In a high-ceilinged room, it's exciting to feel the height. You also want intimacy, but if you keep everything low, you throw the excitement away. That's why I used those big, tall planters on the table and the pedestals with the urns in the windows—it makes you notice the height of the window. And the folding screen takes your eye upward. But I tilted the mirror over the mantel downward to reflect the room and the people—not the ceiling.

Why did you paint the ceiling gray?
White ceilings are boring. This one is not just gray, but shiny, which gives it a lift. It makes it ethereal, airy, almost skylike.

PRODUCED BY ROBERT RUFINO