Connecticut COTTAGES & GARDENS

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INNOVATION IN DESIGN AWARDS 2011

+ INNOVATOR BUNNY WILLIAMS

YALE BUILDING PROJECT

AWARD-WINNING PROJECTS IN LANDSCAPE | KITCHEN | INTERIOR DESIGN BATH | ARCHITECTURE

INNOVATOR

Chatting with Bunny

by Maria LaPiana

CREATIVE, INSPIRING, PERPETUALLY ENERGIZED: BUNNY WILLIAMS IS OUR INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR

Happy Homes (THIS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT) Bunny's conservatory, where she loves to entertain; a gilded dining room features a sunburst mirror of Bunny's design; a floral arrangement from her garden. **Divine Design** (OPPOSITE) Traditional, multidimensional, refined (and yet fresh!) define this classic Bunny Williams interior.

C&G: You sensed from a very young age that design would define your life. What is your earliest memory of being surrounded by beautiful things?
Bunny Williams: When I was very young my brother and I were roughhousing in the living room and I broke a beautiful Russian porcelain ram my mother adored. Seeing her in tears, I tried to put the thing back together but it was impossible. I realized then that I lived in a house filled with treasures and that I needed to respect my surroundings.

C&G: Your keen eye and practiced sense of design are legendary; how much of it would you say is nature, how much nurture?
BW: I think my design sense is almost 50-50 nurture/nature. I have had so many amazing teachers and mentors. My mother was a huge influence and not only created a wonderful house for our family to live in but was also a fabulous hostess and gardener. Many of my relatives had great style and their houses and their parties are certainly part of my DNA.

C&G: You spent 22 years working at Parish-Hadley, where you received an uncommon education in design. Can you name three things you learned that remain with you to this day?
BW: Three things that will always stay with me from my years at Parish-Hadley are scale, scale and scale! I learned how to select furnishings that complement architecture, how to develop a good furniture plan and how to understand the use and space of a room.

C&G: Cottages & Gardens named you Innovator of the Year. It has always been important to you to marry classic design with what's new. How do you (and your work) stay fresh?
BW: By staying on top of what's happening in the design world and working with an amazing group of talented young people who come to the office filled with new ideas. I love to experiment with different materials and products, and I embrace technology.

C&G: What are some new/old combinations that surprise and delight?
BW: I adore contrast in a space: A traditional Park Avenue living room with a sculptural steel-and-glass staircase that rises to the floor above, or a flat-screen TV in a rare, early 19th-century bookcase. The juxtaposition of old and new gives a room tension and makes it exciting.

C&G: Your book, *An Affair with a House (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2005)*, conveyed the idea that one should always love where they live. What makes a home lovable?
BW: One must always give a house personality and soul—even if it's a shoebox apartment. Add a fabulous paint color, a collection of favorite artwork, a sofa filled with colorful pillows or a favorite comfy chair. Create a space that makes you feel happy. If your room is so perfect that you need to stand behind a rope and look at it, you may admire it but you will not love it. A home is lovable when it reflects you.

C&G: You're a role model for so many young people; what advice can you give aspiring designers?
BW: Absorb all the training and technology proposed in design school, and then step away from the screen, and get out of the classroom. Visit museums, great houses and extraordinary gardens. Learn to draw and paint, read books on the decorative arts, listen to music and watch classic films. Work for a few designers; there's nothing like experience.

C&G: You are often referred to as the Energizer Bunny. Will you ever slow down?
BW: I laugh when I hear that. Yes, I do have tons of energy and work on lots of projects simultaneously. I love to travel and entertain, and have managed to keep my wonderful husband and dogs by my side. But I do run out of breath. My secret is to get a good night's sleep. I make my to-do list before I close my eyes to eliminate worrying.

BRUCE NAUMAN
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