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MODERN ENGLISH

lightened up



CLASSIC ENGLISH STYLE MINGLES WITH
MODERN DÉCOR ELEMENTS IN A FRESH SEASIDE HOME

BY ALLISON WILDERMUTH | PHOTOS BY FRITZ VON DER SCHULENBURG



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For interior designer Brian McCarthy, an appreciation for and understanding of art, honed by his years at famed interior design firm Parish-Hadley, inspires many of his projects, including an eastern Long Island home he designed for a couple relocating from upstate New York.

“My roots are in Parish-Hadley, a classic transitional school of decorating,” said McCarthy, who served as Albert Hadley’s assistant for nine years and became a partner of the firm for about four years before founding Manhattan-based BJM Inc. 25 years ago. The beauty of working for the renowned designers, who decorated the White House during the Kennedy administration and worked for many other socially-prominent and wealthy people, was the chance to absorb the combination of Albert Hadley’s modernistic bent and Sister Parish’s more traditional, European-influenced style. “I was very lucky to have the blending of their two unique styles,” McCarthy said. “At that time, it was an amazing roster of clients” he said, “who did not aspire to a particular lifestyle but who lived it every day. Many of them were major collectors of furniture and art who purchased pieces based on their artistic merit and the emotional response they evoked. It was a different era; today many homeowners look at art primarily for its investment value”, McCarthy said.

For this house, McCarthy embraced the challenge of complementing the more traditional artwork his clients had from their previous home with modern pieces. The owners were open to his guidance in choosing artwork, and he selected a mix of paintings, works on paper and photography for the home.

The couple, who has very traditional English taste according to McCarthy, lives in the house year-round (when not spending significant time in a second home in the islands) and wanted a place that was more formal than your typical Hamptons beach house. McCarthy re-

placed fireplaces, reduced the amount of wainscoting and created a master suite of rooms in a reconfigured space in the approximately 8,000 square foot house. He provided a lighter decorating hand that makes reference to the home’s proximity to the ocean and matches what he called the “voice of the house.” “This house has a crispness to it, with linear, definite lines. Everything needed to be fresh.”

The couple wanted an all-white kitchen and McCarthy obliged with white cabinetry, platinum gray walls, statutory marble countertops and white ceramic subway tile on the backsplash, offset by wide-board flooring in a dark finish. Not wanting the room to be completely devoid of color, McCarthy chose wrought iron dining chairs with gilded elements upholstered in a bright orange fabric. The chairs are inspired by Gilbert Poillerat, a French furniture designer of the 1930s and 40s known for his Art Deco-inspired metalwork. They were actually constructed by an iron worker in Paris whose father did work for Poillerat, McCarthy said, and feature a significant amount of surface detail. The backs of the chairs, which are visible from the adjoining family room, feature an X-stretcher for added visual interest. Wrought iron is more formal than wood or other materials that are typically used in kitchens, and the chairs, with their orange upholstery, add a bold element to the space. “Color became the shape,” McCarthy said.

In the entry hall there is a large George II-style mirror that McCarthy stripped of its ornamentation and refinished with gesso and shells, a reference to its beach location. Nearby side chairs are upholstered in an ikat fabric, offsetting a classically English look with exotic flair. The living room is outfitted with upholstered furniture in lush fabrics with brightly-colored accent pieces. Above the sofa hangs a painting by German artist Sophie von Hellermann from 2011 entitled “Please Don’t Tip the Waiter.” The living room also features an expanse of wavy plaster walls that Mc-



OVERALL, THE HOME IS A BALANCED MIX OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN TASTE, AN ECHO OF MCCARTHY'S LONG-AGO MENTORS, ALBERT HADLEY AND SISTER PARISH.

Carthy had finished wet onsite, raking a comb through the surface to create the undulating design. “I wanted something modern and textured that would play with the light and wouldn’t require art everywhere. It became a break, so to speak,” he said.

A downstairs media room has a large flat-screen TV for watching movies and includes an abstract piece by artist Jacqueline Humphries, whose works hang in most major museum collections. The untitled work from 2011 is oil and enamel on linen. “We wanted this to have more of a masculine feel to it,” McCarthy said of the room, noting the art and the Art Deco flourishes, such as the wall sconces on either side of the painting.

Although McCarthy relishes the art-hanging experience, in the dining room of this home he opted for decorative background art that was painted on canvas and applied to the walls. Done in shades of lilac, amethyst, blue and ivory, it was inspired by Monet’s Water Lilies. All of the other pieces in the room were designed to complement those walls, including the deep purple window treatments and the custom-made rug that resembles a Spanish tile floor. The dining table was made to scale in clay, realized in wood and cast in resin with a plastic finish. The tabletop is faux parchment. The dining chairs are inspired by the Swedish Jonas workshop and covered in a striped fabric.

Overall, the home is a balanced mix of traditional and modern taste, an echo of McCarthy’s long-ago mentors, Albert Hadley and Sister Parish. It was a bold step for the homeowners, as well.

“This was a big departure for them—a stripped down, much lighter approach than what they would have done,” McCarthy said. “In the end, I think it’s beautiful.” ■



ARTWORK

Choosing artwork for your home is a personal endeavor, but McCarthy had a few pieces of advice: Buy what you love. But before you buy, look around. Go to galleries. The more you see, the more your eye begins to naturally edit. Educate yourself by striking up conversations with the people who work in the galleries and stick with those with whom you feel a bond. “Art is such a personal thing,” McCarthy said. “You want to trust the people you work with.” Buy the best piece you can afford in your price range. And how do you know when to make the plunge? After seriously considering a piece, walk away from it. Go home. If you can’t get it out of your mind, then it’s the piece for you.

