

ELLE DECOR

Living
Outdoors

Exotic Rooms
Palm Beach Cool
Party Tips

Summer
Romance



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This page: In the entrance gallery, a French Deco brass-and-crystal chandelier and circa-1935 mirrored iron doors designed by René Prou. Inset: Bunny Williams. Facing page: Among the living-room furnishings are a Russian side chair and a pair of Louis XVI bergères upholstered in Fortuny fabric. See Resources.



panache onpark

Decorator
Bunny Williams
liven's up
an Upper East
Side prewar

The wing chair is upholstered in a Christopher Norman silk fabric that Williams had embroidered. The antique pine mirror is from John Russell International. Facing page, left to right: Williams and architect Nasser Nakib designed the library's mahogany, ebony, and brass cabinet. A 1930s French brass wall clock hangs above the mantel. See Resources.



“The style looks as if it could have been here soon after the building was built without seeming old-fashioned”



Has the decorating bloom fallen off the old-fashioned cabbage rose? Pose the question to decorator Bunny Williams and she'll come back with an unexpected answer: "Of course, I can do a traditional English room in my sleep, but why should a room be stifled by tradition? Many decorators are too obsessed with schemes; I think a look comes alive when there's a spontaneous mix of different periods, raw materials, and high-quality design. If something's really beautiful, I'll buy it and find a home for it."

An apartment she recently decorated

in a fabled Park Avenue prewar is proof positive of her versatile design approach. Williams had previously worked with the owners on a house in Connecticut, so a rapport and confidence had already been established. The clients' vision of what they wanted ("Nothing too new or too shiny, definitely something lived-in") and many lifestyle concerns for the 21st century—like how to hide a 100-inch projection screen and surround-sound theater in an elegant living room—were handily met, incorporated into a comfortable, eye-catching space. "I'm in a service business," Williams says matter-of-factly. "I analyze what clients want to accomplish and the associated costs, and then it's a question

of, Where do you pick your moments?"

Moments are important to Williams, a veteran designer who began her career at Parish-Hadley Associates 31 years ago and formed her own business in 1988. (She is also a co-owner, with John Rosselli, of the New York garden-antiques shop Treillage.) If experience serves her well, so does constant travel. This job found her roving the likes of London's Pimlico Road, touring English country houses for inspiration, and discovering a design motif to copy from Pavlovsk palace in Russia. Williams's philosophy is that each room should contain a few good pieces, which allows for the occasional, more unusual find. In other words, it's not all about grandeur and provenance: a slightly



The dining-room mirror is based on a William Kent design at Badminton House. The kilim is by Allegra Hicks. Facing page, left to right: The walls of the master bedroom are covered in Roger Airlington's Chinese Pewter wallpaper; the 1930s fantasy-garden motif was painted by Chuck Frisler. The Venetian-style headboard is upholstered in an embroidered fabric from Brunschwig & Fils. See Resources.

“I can do a traditional English room in my sleep, but why should a room be stifled by tradition?”



distressed folding screen for the living room was found at Manhattan's Triple Pier Expo, the rug in the dining room is a contemporary kilim by Allegra Hicks, and the extension dining table is a modern reproduction (albeit of a Jansen design for Babe Paley).

The apartment took nine months to design and another year to complete, a formidable team effort between Williams, the architect Nasser Nakib (with whom she often collaborates), and her design assistant on the project, Miles Redd. A sophisticated tone is immediately apparent just inside the apartment's front door. At one end of the rectangular gallery, coats

hang behind a pair of mirrored iron doors designed around 1935 by René Prou. A pair of English Regency silvered-copper and gilt-bronze console tables with porphyry tops flank the doors to the living room; above them, an Art Deco three-tiered brass-and-crystal ceiling fixture casts a metallic Jazz Age glow. Straight ahead, an enfilade—library, living room, and dining room—stretches 90 feet long. The muted palette (burnt-orange, beige, silvered-blue, and brown), variety of materials (polished wood, lacquer, silvered-metal, brass, and bronze), and eclectic furnishings hark back to

the 1930s, a time Williams describes as “a bridge to contemporary design. The modern style we've chosen looks as if it could have been here soon after the building was built [1924] without seeming old-fashioned.”

Architectural details, such as the living room's chunky chimney breast and chiseled dentil molding (both designed by Nakib) derive from an earlier, more classical period. They function not only to unify the expanse but to conceal the state-of-the-art entertainment center that descends from the ceiling to deliver New York Knicks games, life-size and in Technicolor. In the adjacent



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library, six-foot-tall modules of audiovisual technology are hidden behind woven bronze-mesh cupboard doors, letting the subdued nailhead-trim leather paneling, Art Deco brass clock above the mantel, and upholstered armchairs attributed to Jean-Michel Frank have their day. A convex over-mantel mirror inspired by a William Kent design at Badminton House anchors the classically influenced dining room, which is presided over by four marble busts set in corner niches, an Iberian gilt-wood chandelier, and a set of faux-rosewood Regency dining chairs.

Despite these luxe environs, a stainless-steel and ebonized-oak kitchen is where most family meals take place (the owners had protested against the idea of eating in a black kitchen until they saw the one Williams cooked up). Right off the kitchen is something of an anomaly: a room without a stick of furniture in it. "This is a tricky space," says the decorator, standing in the 10-foot-square area and pointing to its four doors on three sides. "I deliberately made the walls come alive by installing these very graphic, enlarged sepia maps and called it a day."

Just as lively are the walls in the master bedroom, which reflect the apartment's most glamorous light. The chic pewter wallpaper painted by Chuck Fischer also serves as a backdrop for a Venetian-style headboard, mirrored valances, and an exquisite shell-and-steel-inlay chest of drawers designed in the '30s by Frances Elkins. The iridescent, mother-of-pearl-like veneer resembles flattened oysters on the half shell. "We didn't exactly need to buy this piece," Williams confesses, at a loss to explain. It must have been one of those moments. ●



The striped cotton in a child's bedroom is from Cowtan & Tout. Williams designed the tented campaign-style bed. Facing page, left to right: Chinese characters were painted on rice paper for the powder room. The kitchen's iron chandelier is based on a Jean Royère design; the antique marble and stone table is from Michael Trapp Antiques. See Resources.