

# MICHAEL TAYLOR

## INTERIOR DESIGN

STEPHEN M. SALNY

Foreword by ROSE TARLOW

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W. W. NORTON & COMPANY  
New York • London

To

JUNE AND ALAN SALNY

*My loving and supportive parents who always see to it  
that I have everything I need to accomplish my goals.*

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*Page 1* Portrait of Michael Taylor by Pedro Leitaó, pencil  
and colored pencil on paper, Lisbon, Portugal, 1964.

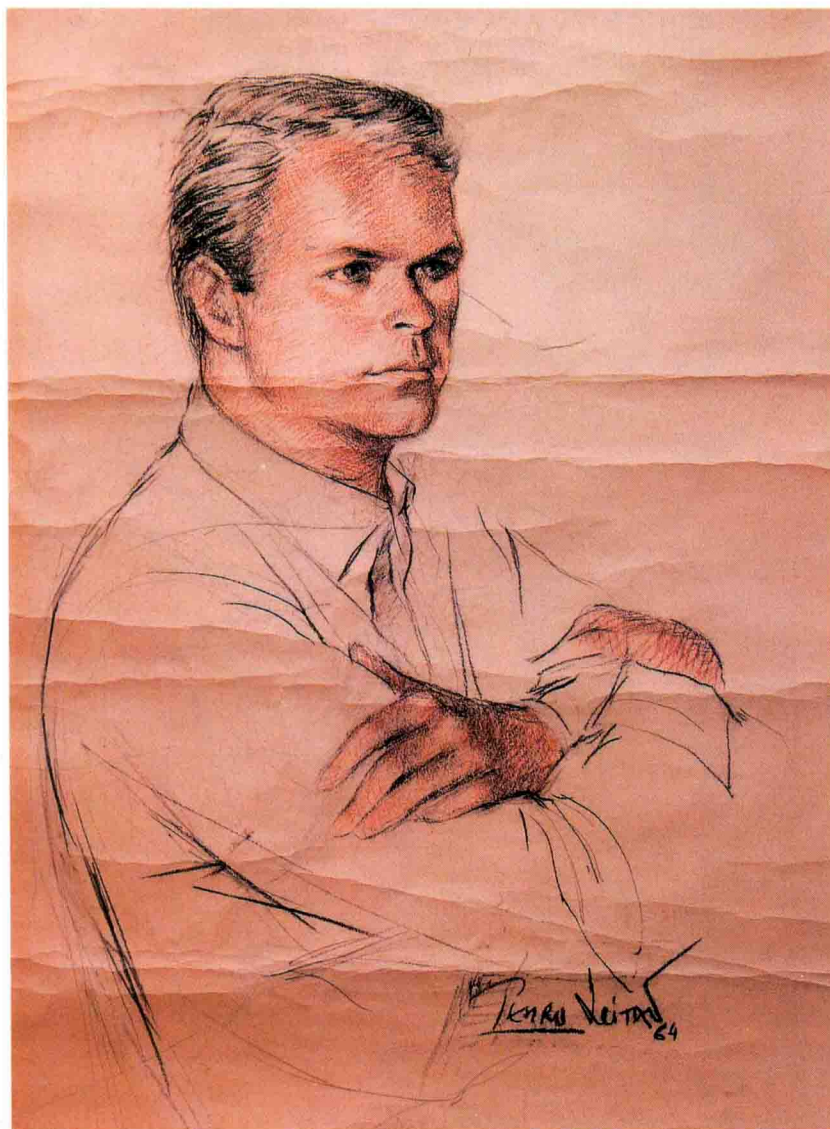


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Michael Taylor



Michael Taylor in his office at Sea Cliff, 1984.

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JUNE AND ALAN SALNY

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## FOREWORD



ROSE TARLOW

**W**e met in January 1976, in the middle of the street, on Melrose Place. I was crossing over to inspect the new shop directly across from me, and Michael Taylor was on his way over to introduce himself to me, the only other newcomer on the block. It was then that we discovered we both were celebrating our individual birthdays as well as opening new shops. From that day forward, we continually compared the many astrological similarities that influenced our daily lives and began a friendship that would enrich my life and affect my design aesthetic for all time.

It was the mid-1970s, when Melrose Place was lined on both sides by shops that had built impressive reputations over many years. Each one was filled with the finest antique furniture and objects. I was thrilled to have the privilege of having an antique shop on Melrose Place. People came from all over to shop on our street. Because it was such a hot spot, the location would attract the larger-than-life magic man from San Francisco.

Michael Taylor brought with him a completely new vision; I doubt that there were twenty objects in his sparkling, light-filled space. In complete contrast to my “chock-full of everything under the sun” shop, Taylor, Wilson and House had rough stone floors, tall palms, white powdery plaster walls, bleached wood furniture, huge raw crystals, and primitive Mayan art brought back from Peru, where Michael had just spent many months searching for treasures. The objects and the furniture, like Michael himself, were gorgeous and gigantic. The exceptional, overscaled furniture—which we now take for granted as uniquely Californian—was then extremely unusual. I like to think that, whatever Michael was doing in San Francisco at the time, the “California Look” was born in that shop on Melrose Place. This genius of a man gave us an extraordinary gift: an identity we could call our very own.

I have always compared Michael’s impact on design to Jackson Pollock’s on art. Pollock, with his childlike splashes of paint on canvas in such a seemingly simplistic form, created a new way of seeing. With such naïve innovations, he made a profound statement and marked a turning point in American art. Michael Taylor made just such a contribution to the world of interiors. He incorporated into his work the most common and primitive elements of nature: straw carpets, ancient clay pottery, Indian baskets and artifacts, tree stump tables and beds, rocks and trees—an inexhaustible store-

house of ready-made creations that had been exclusive to tribal living for centuries.

I believe the eye is educated by everything it sees. Once, when Michael and I were standing in a garden outdoors, I pointed to a tree and said, in an effort to impress him with my discerning eye, “That is truly an ugly tree!” He turned, stared down at me with that lofty imperial look of his, and announced, “There are no ugly trees.” As he had in his shop, he brought into our living rooms the outdoors, nature, and everything under the sun. He brought in the sun, as well, through skylights and open spaces. Simple natural treasures, available to everybody, became the essential elements of Michael Taylor’s design, which changed California’s, and the world’s, approach to interior space.

Michael had two very different expressions of decorating, both totally unique—as you will see in this comprehensive study of his work. One was his “traditional rooms” style; the other was what I have named his “sticks-and-stones” style, of which he was the pioneer.

I have been enormously influenced by these traditional rooms throughout the years, and viewing them again in this excellent historical retrospective, they still have the power to stir my emotions. It is not only the juxtaposition of furniture and special objects but also the sum of all his magic: his controlled use of color, light, and multiple textures and surfaces that combine to create an experience of irreproachable beauty that to this day reminds me of just how influential his body of work really was.

Michael’s interiors were as bold as they were brilliant. Rules never applied to Michael in design or in life. He created the way he wanted to live and he created his own design vocabulary. In one of our many long phone conversations, he described to me a Victorian house in San Francisco he was working on. I pleaded with him to let me see it. It was an unbelievable experience. Who but Michael would dare to cover all the walls of a living room in white Chinese wallpaper and then fill the room with white painted Victorian furniture covered in English country chintz? Never mind that antique Chinese paper never had a white background and that heavy, dark, classic Victorian furniture was never painted white. Then, to top off this confection, he covered all the furniture in the room in fabric with pink cabbage roses! Every rule of design was torn to shreds. I still wonder at the colossal confidence it took to even conceive of such a preposterous combination.



**MICHAEL TAYLOR**

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I treasured Michael's friendship; he was enormous fun to be with. However, when he visited my shop I was both thrilled and terrified. He was extremely opinionated. He loved giving me ideas about what I should be doing or buying . . . or how I could improve my sales staff . . . or how I could win lovers and influence clients. He was full of advice and criticism, and of course all these helpful hints were delivered in his often-grandiose condescending manner. Once I had an antique screen in my shop in which he showed some vague interest but dismissed it; some weeks later he remembered and desired it. When I told him it was sold, he did not speak to me for six months. To apologize, I sent him a chartreuse cable-knit cashmere sweater from one of his favorite sweater designers, Andre Oliver. He forgave me but mentioned that he already had several in that color. Another time I sent him a gold Tiffany pen. He already had ten. On the rare occasion when he wanted to make up with me, he sent me a sterling silver 9-by-12-inch picture frame holding a big black-and-white glossy photo of himself.

Michael knew he was a star and was superbly confident in this persona. Humility was not a gene he possessed. He had a difficult time denying himself anything. As a modern Louis XIV incarnate, he entertained and lived majestically. Michael was grander than any of his clients, which was both his weakness and uniqueness. Dinner was served formally on wonderful agate plates with magnificent silver and the most glorious table accessories. He adored good food and beautiful clothes, and he always rented a Rolls Royce even if he was just in town for the day. He took great pride in his wardrobe and would point out what great new purchase he was sporting. It could be his new alligator Bennisson loafers, of which he had shelves full. Or his new leather jacket, one of hundreds. He was notorious for having little control or even a slight show of healthy remorse over his excessive acquisitiveness. One day he came into my shop with his client and great friend Jimmie Wilson. When Michael could not cajole Jimmie into buying an outrageously costly rock-crystal chandelier, he turned and said, "Jimmie, if you don't buy it, then lend me the money to buy it for myself!"

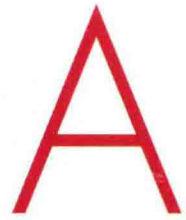
Often Michael would telephone me just before dinner and keep me on the phone for ages. I remember exhaustingly trying to entertain him with some amusing tale of the day. I would dread these calls; the pressure was daunting trying to keep this intimidating person, who

Michael Taylor, Inc. business card, Sea Cliff; letterhead, Sutter Street.

was easily bored, sufficiently amused that he would keep calling. One day I became fed up with hearing myself talk without any feedback, and I decided to see just how long it would take for him to notice I had not uttered a word. I timed 14 minutes without either of us even breathing loudly! Years later, when a few of his friends and I were reminiscing about our friendships with Michael, I relayed the history of these weird one-sided conversations and was laughingly informed that Michael called all his friends at that time of day while watching his favorite television show, "Jeopardy."

The last time Michael and I visited together was on one of his few trips to Los Angeles. It was a very special evening because I had him all to myself, which was a rare occurrence as he usually traveled in the company of others. Just before dinner, we drove in his convertible Rolls to look at the new house I had recently purchased and was planning to renovate for myself. I was excited to show him my first real project. We walked around, and I explained what I intended to do. He listened, said nothing, then at dinner looked me in the eye and said, "tear it down." I gasped, argued, and declined to accept his suggestion. This was sadly our last visit. The next Michael moment I had was when I attended his funeral in San Francisco. After the funeral, I returned to Los Angeles with a feeling of monumental loss. The next day I went to my job site, which was by then in full-swing renovation. I took my contractor aside and said, "Tear it down." I know it sounds a bit dramatic, but I guess in my heart I always knew that, as usual, Michael was right. I love my house as it is now, and I only wish he were here to criticize it. I don't have my friend anymore, but I do have many bittersweet memories, some lovely mementos, and, best of all, his handsome, movie-star, black-and-white, glossy photograph in its sterling-silver frame, looking at me. I am quite sure he is probably agreeing with me that he was and still is the very best of the best.

## AN OVERVIEW



At six-foot-four and 240 pounds, interior decorator/designer Michael Taylor resembled a football player (which he had been briefly) or, with his rugged handsomeness, a movie actor (a career that he had considered). His parents, Earnest and Grace Taylor, had wanted him to study medicine, and he served as a paramedic in the U.S. Navy during World War II. The experience soured him on becoming a physician, and when the war was over he focused on his childhood passion: design and the discovery and collecting of beautiful objects. Taylor's maternal grandmother, Nelly Peck, had instilled in him a love of natural beauty. Together, he and his grandmother regularly explored beaches and redwood forests and "looked at the beauty of shells, tree stumps, rocks, and flowers—into the beauty of things that cost nothing." His ascent in the world of design was rapid: within a decade of leaving the navy he became internationally known. By the time of his death, he would be revered as one of the most innovative, imitated, and internationally respected design icons of the twentieth century.

Taylor's most notable contribution to interior design was the "California Look," the revolutionary design aesthetic that he pioneered during the early 1970s. Taylor brought the outdoors inside with neutral palettes, natural light, large-scale furniture, and organic elements, especially stone, slate, wicker, and plants. His interiors expressed his love and appreciation of California and the outdoors. They were casual, comfortable, uncomplicated, and free of clutter.

Earnest Charles Taylor (he later changed his name to Michael because it was sexy and youthful) was born in Modesto, California, in 1927. In 1933 his family moved to Santa Rosa. In 1944 he dropped out of high school to enter the navy, serving in southern California and in Brooklyn, New York. After receiving his discharge in 1946, Taylor moved to San Francisco where, in 1947, he began study at the internationally acclaimed Rudolph Schaeffer School of Design. Schaeffer "was in the forefront of art education in the perception and use of colors." Taylor recalled in a 1973 *California Living* magazine article that Schaeffer was a gifted instructor who "enlightened" me, "opening my eyes to vistas I wasn't aware of. He made me conscious of possibilities." Taylor absorbed from Schaeffer what Schaeffer called "the secrets of color." Taylor's amazing sense of light and how it could be used were among his greatest talents. Schaeffer's instruction would trigger Taylor's fascination with white, which Taylor believed was "the most efficient

color for capturing both natural and man-made light." The use of white, which was unfashionable at the time, would become one of Taylor's most recognizable signatures.

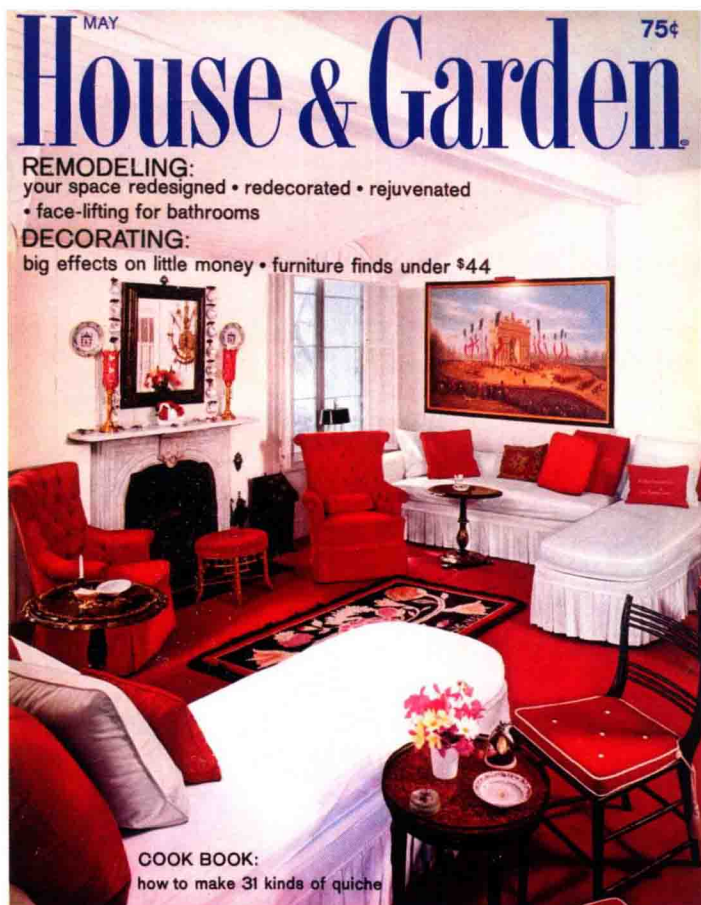
Taylor's respect and appreciation for his mentor was returned. Schaeffer referred to Taylor as "his dear Michael," whose work was "wild, but extremely creative" and as exciting as "fireworks" that were "going off all the time." Schaeffer influenced the course of Taylor's career by recommending him to a respected San Francisco fabric dealer, Frederick Bruns, who hired Taylor as a showroom assistant in mid-1947. Taylor never looked back. Over the next five years, he moved from Bruns's showroom to work as an assistant to Archibald Taylor (no relation), the leading San Francisco interior designer. From Archibald Taylor's office, where Taylor was employed for three years—primarily as an errand boy, which exposed him to a plenitude of beautiful houses decorated by his employer—he moved to the respected decorating department at the Oakland, California branch of Breuner's, the largest chain of home furnishings stores in the country. Robert and Vale Kasper, owners of a prominent San Francisco furniture–interior design firm and design pioneers themselves, heard about Taylor's revolutionary and unorthodox taste, which simplified interiors and combined contemporary and traditional furniture. Based on his successful initiation and execution of custom designs at Breuner's—which was rare at the time—the Kaspers invited Taylor to join their employ.

At the Kasper firm Taylor nurtured his relationships with women who were to become pivotal to his career. Taylor already knew Irma Schlesinger slightly, as he was a good friend of her daughter, Nan Schlesinger. Through Nan, Taylor orchestrated a visit to the Schlesingers' modernist Gardner Dailey house in Pacific Heights, where he scrutinized the work of another woman who would dramatically influence his career: the renowned decorator Frances Elkins (1888–1953). Elkins was in the process of fine-tuning the Schlesingers' interiors that she had decorated for an April 1952 *Vogue* magazine feature shoot entitled "San Francisco House." Taylor came to idolize Elkins, and the legendary interior designer greatly influenced his work. Taylor saw himself as Elkins's greatest disciple, and he believed completely in her genius: "She certainly was one of the guiding forces in the whole development of what is the American style today." His adoration would be repaid. One day Elkins sought Taylor out in the Kaspers' store to tell him personally how impressed she was with









House & Garden magazine, May 1968. Benoist Commission, Los Gatos, California.

the design work that he had done in the storefront windows. It was an early triumph.

Another admirer of Taylor's from this period at the Kaspers was Kay Benoist, whose husband Louis owned Almaden Vineyards in northern California. Attracted by Taylor's work, the couple eventually hired him. Over the next thirty-five years Taylor would decorate nine houses, two yachts, and an airplane for them. The Benoists and Taylor eventually became close personal friends.

While working at the Kasper firm, Taylor also met Frances Mihailoff, a woman twenty-six years his senior who was also an interior designer in the firm. Mihailoff recognized in Taylor visionary taste, and she suggested that they go out on their own. In 1952 they established their own interior design firm, Taylor and Mihailoff, at 453 Post Street, on the ground floor of the St. Francis Hotel.

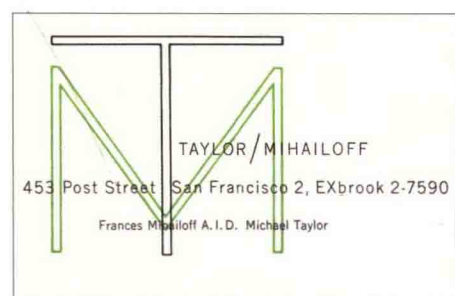
Taylor and Mihailoff was an immediate success. The firm received numerous commissions from the San Francisco elite. In 1953 alone, *House Beautiful* magazine featured Taylor and Mihailoff's work on its covers three separate times: in February, July, and October. The October cover featured a living room with a sleek low-set armless sofa upholstered in crisp white hand-woven Italian linen. The editors proclaimed that the sofa represented "a new look in furniture." The two decorators were the epitome of "the new, rich look now entering our homes." This recognition only intensified the firm's acclaim. Their work represented the "graceful merging of design influence," ending the battle between modern and traditional styles.

By 1954, the success and rapid growth of Taylor and Mihailoff had enabled the two partners to separate and establish businesses on their own. Mihailoff moved to 540 Sutter Street. Taylor purchased Mihailoff's interest in the business with a loan from San Francisco industrialist Ralph K. Davies and remained at the Post Street shop for two years until he found a new space that would signal his extraordinary talent and swift success. It would both showcase his soon-to-be signature overscaled designs and reflect his intimidating and intensely driven persona.

Taylor's new shop was located at 556 Sutter Street in an L-shaped, white stucco building owned by Elizabeth Arden. The building also housed Arden's salon, whose contemporary and understated design was justifiably famous. Arden enthusiastically embraced Taylor because they shared the same clientele. Arden also became Taylor's client. One day she walked into his shop and purchased all his major room designs of furniture and accessories, which she then had flown to Florida. She also hired Taylor to design and decorate the octagonal pavilion that crowned her four-story spa and salon on Sutter Street. This was the place where Arden's patrons completed their coiffure under a uniformly lined bank of hair dryers. Taylor created an interior gazebo with walls of creamy-white treillage interspersed with tall

Right: Taylor & Mihailoff storefront, 453 Post Street.

Below: Taylor & Mihailoff business card.





arched windows. An umbrella of brightly striped fabric draped the pavilion ceiling.

The entrance to Elizabeth Arden was located on the east side of the building, set back from Sutter Street by an iron-gated courtyard with a manicured lawn and a profusion of white rose standards. The imposing gate, which was always attended by a pair of liveried door-men in custom khaki uniforms and flat-topped bill hats, opened onto a brick walkway that led to Arden's signature brilliant-red lacquered front door.

In addition to Elizabeth Arden's "institution," the 500 block of Sutter Street was lined with specialty shops that catered to San Francisco's carriage trade. Nelly Gaffney, a fashionable women's dress shop, was located nearby on the corner of Sutter and Mason Streets. Women also gathered at the Francisca Club, an exclusive women's organization located across the street from the dress shop. The Medico-Dental building, which was nearby on Post Street, drew a perpetual corps of women bringing their children for doctors' appointments. Michael Taylor, Inc., was located on the west side of Arden's building, on the ground floor. It quickly became a regular and eagerly anticipated destination for this elite and au courant circle of women, their families, and their friends.

Another notable neighbor on the block, next door to Nelly Gaffney, was Williams-Sonoma. Chuck Williams, who founded the specialty kitchenware store in 1956 in the Napa Valley and moved to San Francisco in 1958 to be nearer his principal clientele, was at the forefront of retailing in the United States. He introduced quality French cookware to Americans, changing the way they cooked at home. Taylor frequented Williams's store and, like the rest of America, was drawn to its unique look. He was especially taken with Williams's imported oyster baskets. The graduated baskets, shipped at great expense to San Francisco in nests of five, were originally used to transport oysters from the coast of France to Paris. Their heavy natural weave appealed to Taylor.

Taylor believed that nature was man's best friend, and his liberal and progressive use of organic elements in his refreshingly relaxed, comfortable, and unconventional interiors substantiated this philosophy. Taylor found Williams's oyster baskets at once completely new and yet deeply familiar. They had a profound effect on him. He began to use them as vessels for towering plants and trees—fishtail palms, ficus, and Zimmer linden—creating a look that became fundamental to Michael Taylor interiors. Taylor, who believed that plants prevent "a room from feeling over-decorated," "soften the light," and "help a room breathe and feel alive," initiated "the plant in a basket craze" with Williams's baskets. Taylor continued to popularize this trend by zealously cornering the steady supply of woven-rattan Philippine market baskets imported by the New Manila Importing Company in San Francisco. Thus Chuck Williams's baskets helped to launch the "California Look."

Michael Taylor, Inc., fronted Sutter Street and was colossal. Although Taylor only had eight hundred dollars in the bank at the time that he committed himself to the new space, he spent extravagant amounts of money (assisted by more loans from clients) on the renovation, especially of the new storefront, whose charismatic design was intended to both mesmerize and intimidate the passersby.

Taylor's shop was dazzling and dramatically revolutionary. He opened up the space considerably, installing a pair of twenty-foot-tall windows that were the largest single pieces of plate glass in San Francisco at the time. They balanced a set of white wooden double doors,



Michael Taylor Inc. storefront, 556 Sutter Street.

twelve feet tall, three feet wide, and four inches thick, that opened and closed effortlessly. Taylor, with his penchant for exacting precision and perfection, would not have accepted them any other way. The interior glowed with Taylor's specially formulated "Michael Taylor White" on the walls and ceiling. (Never pure white, "Michael Taylor White" was a mixture of warm colors with a beige tone.) The flooring was pure-white, twelve-inch-square, Corlon vinyl tile. He partitioned the shop into four equal-sized compartments that opened to a center aisle running from the front door to a bare twelve-foot-tall oak tree anchored in a bed of gray river rock at the back of the shop. Three of the compartments were used for rotating room setups. The fourth contained a shelf-lined boutique stocked with accessories for sale. Taylor aligned the principal setups with the storefront windows, allowing his trailblazing designs full-time exposure.

One of Taylor's first setups was prominently underscored in *Vogue's* 1956 "Fashions in Living" feature advising its readership on a "fresh way to keep a white bedroom fresh." Taylor's memorable room, which remains legendary to this day, used a pickled-pine and painted Syrie Maugham Regency canopy bed, which served to anchor the all-white room. Taylor greatly admired Maugham (1879–1955), the prominent English interior designer who pioneered white interiors and popularized the design of these beds (along with Frances Elkins). Typically, their front posts were carved and painted to resemble clustered bamboo. Taylor also liked the scalloped wood crown cornice, which injected a touch of the Far East into the decor. The opaque Fortisan bedspread, skirt, and hangings also contributed an ethereal quality to the setup.

Taylor accented the all-white bedroom with varied shades of green. The pickled-pine English chinoiserie bench fronting the bed was cushioned with a green bird-and-leaf jacquard weave, and the pair of skirted spun-rayon Syrie Maugham fireside armchairs had medium-green buttons and bowties. He also arranged the bedroom with lush plants and fresh flowers. The plaster lamps in the style of Alberto Giacometti (1902–1985) flanking the fireplace echoed Frances Elkins's avant-garde style of decorating.

Although Taylor's rooms were known for their neutral palette, Taylor always "advocated a strong secondary color and repetitive use of printed fabrics for 'a certain purity' and a bold unified effect." He also clarified that "There is a tremendous amount of color in my rooms, but there are not *many* colors."

Taylor's shop contained a spacious loft upstairs and a set of back quarters that were concealed from public view. An open flight of steps,

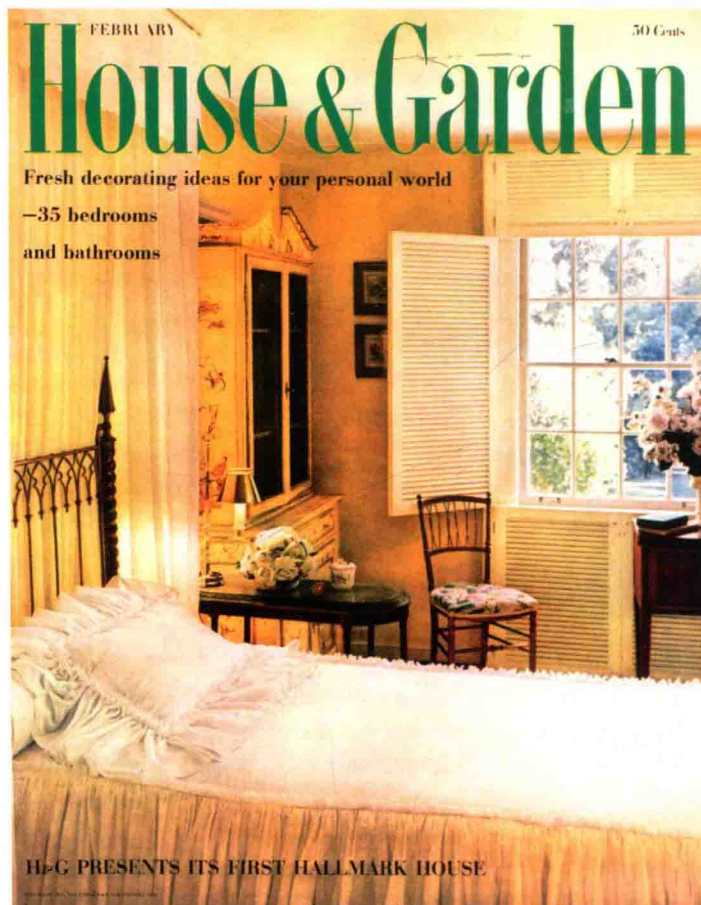




"Syrie Maugham" bedroom, Michael Taylor Inc, Sutter Street, 1956.

paved in white Corlon vinyl, led from the right rear corner of the ground floor upstairs to the loft. Although Taylor occasionally arranged setups in the loft, he used this mezzanine level primarily for storage. More often than not, it would be packed with the treasures, furniture, accessories, and endless bolts of fabric he obtained on his extravagant shopping marathons. These shopping marathons were legendary. When Taylor entered a shop, he always paused at its threshold and scanned the entire showroom. He had the reputation of being able to home in quickly and precisely on the finest pieces of inventory. In junkyards and in shops filled with priceless antiques alike, that which was beautiful or the best example of its kind drew his infallible eye. Taylor "never forgot beautiful things. He constantly absorbed everything he saw and banked it, to be a source of reference." Taylor imparted this depth of sensitivity to his clients. He made them aware that "it's got to sing and talk back to you, and be A plus, plus if it crosses the threshold" of your house.

One of Taylor's first vignettes in the loft was a small bedroom that featured a French brass bed with porcelain finials and a pale-yellow Venetian cabinet. Taylor recalled in *California Living* that "Nini Martin came in and bought it, lock, stock, and barrel, for her oldest daughter." The bedroom also caught the attention of the editors at *House & Garden* magazine. They photographed it at the Martins' Hillsborough, California, home for the February 1957 cover of the magazine. This was Taylor's first cover with *House & Garden*, and the coveted endorsement of his work was a significant achievement. The magazine's fascination with him, and the Martin commission, continued in the next two issues. The magazine showcased the Martins' luxurious all-white living room, accented with cornflower blue and the mellow patina of



*House & Garden* magazine, February 1957.

antique pine, on its March 1957 cover. The April 1957 issue ran an article entitled "Preview of Leisure Furniture" that featured the Martins' garden terrace. The *House & Garden* editors seriously considered featuring a third interior from the Martin home on the cover of that same April issue. However, they decided, reluctantly, that three consecutive covers of one interior designer's work, although it was "lively, fresh, and very different," would not be politic. The *House & Garden* attentiveness to the Martin commission foreshadowed a fruitful and long-standing relationship between Taylor and the magazine. *House & Garden* devoted a record eighteen covers and more than one hundred articles to his work over a period of thirty years. The editors of "Madison Avenue's slick magazines" were always asking, "What's new of Michael's work? His rooms, full of flowers and light, sold more copies for them than any designer in the world."

*House & Garden* again featured one of Taylor's sunny and white-washed rooms on its August 1960 cover. The shop vignette, his interpretation of a great room in a mill house in Provence, was accented with lush greenery and touches of milk- and deep blues. Glazed white quarry floor tiling and custom-fabricated pine beams painted white gave the vignette the Taylor quality. A cast-plaster coffee table and desk, two new signature pieces of Taylor's, also contributed to the textured or tactile dimension of this famous vignette. To ensure that it received the attention he thought it deserved, he staged it in the storefront window abutting Elizabeth Arden's courtyard.

And Arden's clientele responded. They flocked to Taylor's shop, where three key employees attempted to keep their fearless, challenging, and highly spirited employer grounded. Bill Johnson was Taylor's expeditor. He was a stocky no-nonsense man who navigated the me-



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House & Garden magazine, March 1957.

chanics of the business effectively for many years. Deirdre de Gay Fortman was a very proper British matron. She served as the punctilious gatekeeper and tended to the showroom customers. Geneva Hawkins, an early investor in Taylor's business, was his office manager and project estimator. A sweet and refined small woman, she fended off Taylor's creditors and juggled his chaotic finances to get the bills paid. Hawkins often used her own money to keep the business solvent. Taylor's unparalleled taste and talent were surpassed only by his undisciplined and self-indulgent extravagances. He bought whatever he wanted, whether he could afford it or not.

Taylor lived as grandly as he designed. In his frequent travels, he always stayed in palatial suites at the finest hotels. Every Christmas without exception he enjoyed a luxurious month-long sojourn at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, staying in his favorite corner suite overlooking Waikiki Beach. He was accompanied until just after the New Year by his twice-widowed mother, Grace Paxton. Taylor's annual hotel bill, which also included one of his many Christmas presents to Paxton—treating her to the Hawaiian vacation—was at least seventy thousand dollars during the 1970s and the 1980s. At the Royal Hawaiian, Taylor claimed, he felt at home because Frances Elkins had decorated the hotel. He liked to walk through the lobby and make sure that people knew him.

Taylor's annual trips abroad might last two to three months at a time, and once he traveled for practically an entire year. On one occasion, while visiting Paris, he insisted that the staff at his hotel neatly pack and airmail his soiled laundry to Hawkins in San Francisco. She in turn sent it to Taylor's preferred laundry and dry cleaner in Chicago. There it was laundered or cleaned and then promptly returned to Tay-



House & Garden magazine, August 1960.

lor in Paris. Although Taylor's liberal behavior and unmanageable spending habits exasperated Hawkins, she was devoted to him. Taylor had a big heart. He could be irresistible and endearing, even when he was frank and critical. However, even the normally devoted Hawkins could lose her patience with him. She once threw a telephone at him in a fit of anger.

Taylor could also become extremely agitated and irreverent. His quick wit, characteristic charm, and wicked, slightly naughty sense of humor could turn to biting rage when he did not get his way. He often exploded when a client did not buy into an idea of his or a vendor did not follow through with a commitment or an employee or contractor did not perform up to Taylor's own Herculean standards. The larger-than-life Taylor was not to be toyed with. He took his work, his opinions, and his responsibility to his clients very seriously. Creating and designing were Taylor's lifeblood. "He worked terribly, terribly hard. In the midst of a party, he'd sit down and work on sketches." Taylor's cardinal goal was to engage his clients, "to get them totally immersed and passionate about their collaboration with him." He wanted them to react and commit to what he was proposing for them. In the process, Taylor challenged many of his clients about their design choices, prompting him to realize that, in the end, "the worst bitches got the best houses!"

In San Francisco, Taylor met with clients either at their homes or occasionally in his private office, which was situated, along with Hawkins's office, in the shop's back quarters. He rarely appeared in the showroom. Taylor's office was very basic and oddly subdued given his prominence and titanic ego. The office, a field of "Michael Taylor White," was small, merely fourteen feet by sixteen feet, and dominated