



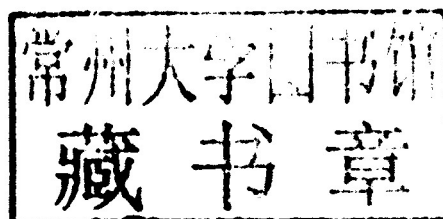
VICTORIA HAGAN

INTERIOR PORTRAITS

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

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WRITTEN BY

MARIANNE HAGAN

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

New York · Paris · London · Milan

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To my husband, Michael,
and our sons, Alexander and Harrison,
who bring endless sunshine into our lives



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PREFACE

I had been presented with the idea to do a book on my interiors on several occasions throughout my career, but had never thought the time was quite right. Then I realized that 2010 would mark the twentieth anniversary of my design firm, and the timing seemed perfect.

Every day I make a point to keep my eyes and ears open. I glean inspiration from all areas of my life: people, film, theater, fashion, travel. If something catches my eye or my imagination, I make a mental note and file it away to use in my work. And it can come from anywhere—maybe a color in a sunset I’ve never seen before, the weathered cobblestone of an ancient Italian street, or a faded vintage textile. If something stirs an idea or emotion in me, chances are it might show up in my work in some form. I never stop learning and being happily surprised. And I listen. I hear the subtleties of daily living and try to capture those voices in my interiors. I love solving puzzles and discovering how all the different pieces fall into place. Even after twenty years, I feel the opportunities to grow in my work are endless. And in many ways, I feel like I haven’t even *begun* to design.

While working on this book I had the amazing opportunity to press the pause button and look at all of my interiors throughout the years. I remember the show houses I designed in my early career, which no one actually had to live in. My goals were that they look good, tell a story, and have a point of view. My greatest hope today is that my interiors combine that point of view with an understanding of how my clients live. What works for one family’s life doesn’t necessarily work for another’s. Ultimately, a home needs to be personal and comfortable.

When I was considering a title for the book that could, in just a few words, sum up my feelings about interior design, many possibilities came to mind. *Interior Portraits* felt right because in fact, these images are not about me, but about the families who call them home. Every project I undertake is an ongoing collaboration with my clients, who have graciously welcomed me into their lives. Since I believe interiors are ultimately a reflection of the people who inhabit them, it is they who bring these portraits to life. While the book could only accommodate a few, I am deeply grateful to every one of my clients for inspiring me over the years and inviting me to share this fascinating journey with them.

—Victoria Hagan



PORTRAIT OF THE DESIGNER

Victoria Hagan knew from a young age that she would become a designer. In fact, the nascent seeds of her interior design career were planted in her earliest days. Growing up in Pocantico Hills, a hamlet perched high above the Hudson River, north of New York City, she was surrounded by the breathtaking beauty of the seemingly endless acres of nature preserve owned by the Rockefeller Estate. What is today a state park was in myriad ways the playground of her childhood. It was in the divine design of these early natural surroundings that Victoria found her first inspiration. She was struck by the organized chaos ever-present in nature. She marveled at the innate order found in both its grand complexities and almost-whispered subtleties. Vast landscapes and quiet still-life moments were all around her to behold. Long hours were spent walking on trails through wooded cathedrals and open fields, along streams and around lakes, where swans skated among lily pads. She was an Alice in a sort of Wonderland. When she raised her eyes upward she would take note of how the uppermost branches of a tree splayed in relief to the sky. Peering down through her looking glass, she would spend hours meticulously searching for a four-leaf clover in the tight weave of a carpet of green.

The changing of the seasons, with their shifts in color, texture, and light, provided Victoria with added fascination and joy. Up close she witnessed autumn's leaves explode in kaleidoscopic colors and noted the many variations of gray in the complexion of a bruised November sky. Autumn would inevitably make way for winter and the wonder of snow. She loved the composure that came over the landscape when covered in the serenity of white. One February blizzard brought almost two feet of snow to Pocantico Hills. Captured by her father on an 8 mm camera is evidence of Victoria's early instinct for design and architecture. The home movie shows a young girl, assisted by her three little sisters, building an elaborate shelter out of the copious amounts of white, moldable matter. Part igloo, part snow castle, it was a source of delight for days to come after its construction.

The arrival of spring would see the last vestiges of snow's earthbound crust yield to the force of the first green spears of crocuses. The way nature's beauty resonated in juxtaposition—the seeming incongruity of the metallic, white snow coexisting with the warm, green shoots from the earth—left a lasting impression on Victoria. The fresh green of early spring would later become a signature color for her as a designer. Much as the waning winter landscape is punctuated with the green buds of spring, so too are Victoria's interior portraits punctuated with the exclamation marks of color. Each spring she would delight in the halcyon yellow of forsythia forced in a vase, the perfect pinks dappling the branches of dogwoods, and the explosion of purple from the century-old lilac bushes in her own backyard. Victoria's mother remembers one such evening in late spring when she was readying for a last-minute dinner party and hadn't a moment to think about flowers for the table. Victoria assured her she would take care of it. Out to the garden she went and clipped pale pink blossoms from a rhododendron bush. Doing the unexpected was her natural instinct. Instead of placing them in a vase, she opted to float them on water in a crystal bowl, creating a stunning centerpiece for her mother's table. "Problem solved!" as Diana Vreeland liked to declare.



Born on the first day of July, Victoria was quite literally a child of summer. The season of warmth, freedom, and the longest days of sunlight was and still remains her favorite. Victoria relished long days spent at the beach, taking in the texture of the sand and water, feeling the sunshine, and collecting seashells and stones. But when the sun dropped in the sky to the west, and the shadows grew long, she also loved the return, through the swinging screen door, to the comforts of home. The arrival of Labor Day, the shortening of days, and the song of cicadas would herald autumn's return, the year coming full circle and the cycle beginning again. (It is no coincidence that Victoria later designed a fabric called Four Seasons—an explosion of leaves, flowers, fruits, and even some clovers—which would come in four different color palettes: Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer.)

This natural proclivity to see the beauty and balance around her led Victoria to Parsons School of Design in New York City, where she received her BFA. It was a perfect fit. While there, she met a woman whom she credits with changing her life—the late interior designer Simone Feldman. Victoria remembers interviewing with Simone for a part-time job. “Simone was so impressive. Here was this woman balancing, with grace and elegance, a family and a business. It was truly inspiring.” Simone was taken with a watercolor of a purple iris Victoria had painted and hired her to help with some of the sketching. In no time, Victoria became immersed in the day-to-day details of the profession—and loved it. Within two years, this apprenticeship became the partnership of Feldman-Hagan Interiors. In 1988 the designing duo landed a room in the Southampton Show House. As inspiration for the design of the space, they invented their ideal client: Alice in Wonderland, but all grown up and confident. Art was imitating life. A bas-relief inscription that ran beneath the crown molding of the room was a quote from *Through the Looking Glass* (page 4). *New York* magazine not only showcased the room in its annual design issue, but also chose an image of the room to grace its cover. The photograph of an original 1950s fiberglass-molded Eames chair sitting in juxtaposition to a gilded nineteenth-century framed portrait of a little girl—their “mythical Alice”—proved to be a showstopper (opposite). Soon after, Victoria and Simone designed a room for Manhattan's Kips Bay Show House that would cement their reputation as a design force to be reckoned with. The year was 1990, the dawn of a new decade. And the design team created a space that was about “taking responsibility”—for our past, for our present, and for the future of our children. Inscribed on one of the room's walls was a quote from one of Victoria's favorite childhood books, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*: “You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.” An unexpected detail in the room that could have gone unnoticed, but that now seems stunning in its prescience, was a stack of newspapers bound in twinning placed at the door, ready for recycling. In a featured piece about the show house, the *New York Times* singled out the Feldman-Hagan room, calling it “a salon of social consciousness,” “the most cerebral room,” and “the one bound to be influential.” It was a cruel twist of fate that just as the design team was getting its wings and receiving hard-earned recognition and praise, Simone suddenly passed away. It was a devastating blow. Victoria had to gather her strength and regain her equilibrium. And later that year, in 1991, she established her own firm, Victoria Hagan Interiors.

One of the firm's first assignments was a coveted promotional project for George Washington's ancestral Virginia home, Mount Vernon. A question that had long interested Victoria since her days as a student was how a structure built in and for another time could have a contemporary spirit—and, in effect, become timeless. Is a space timeless because those who initially designed it saw it as perfect at conception, or is it timeless because they had the foresight to see how it would be reincarnated in the future? “It's taking the past and reinterpreting it for today that inspires me,” she remarked at the time. One of the rooms she was asked to reinterpret was Mount Vernon's greenhouse, an open-air space that had originally been built in 1785 and was reconstructed after a fire in 1835. She dressed the chairs in simple off-white slipcovers, similar to how they would have been during an eighteenth-century summer. She didn't touch the exquisite stone floors and left the floor-to-ceiling windows without dressing to allow in, unfettered, the sun and the air (pages 6–7). The space that conjoins outside and inside living has long resonated with Victoria. She imagined Mount Vernon's greenhouse as a place where people would meet on their way in or out, but instead of passing each other by would feel compelled to stop and gather around. This cornerstone of Victoria's design philosophy echoes throughout her work today.