

MEDITATIONS ON DESIGN



Reinventing
Your Home with Style
and Simplicity

JOHN WHEATMAN

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Reinventing Your Home with Style and Simplicity

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Photography by David Wakely

Produced by Sharon Smith and Barbara Stevenson



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*To my wife, Mary,
who won't let me
bring another chair
into our house!*

I would like to thank Sharon Smith and David Wakely for their unending enthusiasm in taking this book from a dream to a reality. Thank you also to Barbara Stevenson for capturing my voice.

I would also like to thank my students, customers, and clients. It has been my pleasure to serve you, learn from you, and to build with you creative spaces within which to house your memories. I would especially like to thank Pat and Rodney Baker, Louise Burns, Judy and Mel Croner, John Demergasso, Joyce and George DeMott, George Doubleday II, Barbara and James Fetherston, Betty and Jim Kelso, Ellen and Joerg Michelfelder, Dr. and Mrs. Richard Moomjian, Anne and Victor Parachini, Katherine and Robert Renfield, David and Yvonne Rich, Spaulding Taylor, and Brent Wallis for generously allowing us to photograph their homes.

Thank you also to all the talented designers, craftsmen, and professionals I have had the privilege of working with over the years. Thank you to my dedicated office staff for smoothing out the rough edges and a special thank you to Bill Weir for his lifelong friendship and counsel.

—JOHN WHEATMAN

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REINVENTING YOUR HOME

It Takes an Open Mind and an Adventurous Heart

If I were asked to say what is at once the most important production of Art and the thing most to be longed for, I should answer, "a beautiful house."

—WILLIAM MORRIS

One of my favorite teachers in college, Ed Rossbach, taught me the single most important lesson I've ever learned about design. "Cultivate the mind of a three-year-old," he commanded. To a three-year-old, everything is new, and every day is an adventure. Young children don't spend a lot of time thinking about what other people expect of them; they don't enter into situations with preformed ideas of what's going on and what should happen. They have open minds and adventurous hearts. And they know how to have fun! Ever since that day many years ago, I have tried to wake up every morning as a three-year-old. I encourage you to try it yourself.

An open mind is essential to good home design. Yet I often find that people come to the project of designing or redecorating their homes with their minds full of ideas about what they should do or not do. When I have persuaded them to clear their minds of these preconceptions, my clients begin to find our work together much more creative and fulfilling. So I would ask every reader of this book—as a favor to yourself—to reject the common myths about interior design.

For instance, many people believe that no one but a design professional can decorate a house. They feel that they must either copy schemes they see in magazines or hire an interior designer to make their homes look "tasteful." The truth is, just as no two people are alike, no two houses are alike. If you point to a picture in a magazine and say, "I want this for my home," you have skipped over the most important phase of the design process. You must go beyond how your room looks and begin to analyze who you are and how you use that room. Only when you've figured out how to be comfortable doing the things you do in that space can you move on to the question of how it should look.

Similarly, I have often encountered the notion that interior design consists of essentially casting out what you have and buying everything new. In fact, some of my most satisfying projects have not involved the purchase of any additional furnishings. I always begin by editing what is already in place. I help people discard the items that don't work and organize the ones that remain so that everything comes together and makes sense—functionally, visually, and financially. Sometimes that's all that's necessary.

Many people also believe that you must always keep resale value in mind when remodeling or furnishing your home. (No wonder they approach the task full of insecurity and dread!) If you arrange your space for someone else—a nameless, faceless prospective buyer—you are cheating yourself out of the comfort of a home that meets your needs now. You may also be creating something that is bland and boring. Consider the difference between appointing a space that won't offend anyone and composing a room as a reflection of who you are and what you love. I think the latter is more exciting.

Another common mistake is to think of a house or apartment as only an interior space. I believe in stepping back and starting with what leads up to a home. If you have a house, then you need to look at not only the interior space, but also the trees and shrubbery, and your neighbor's property. If you have an apartment or a flat, you need to start with the hallway outside your front door: What do you want it to do and how do you want it to look, as an approach to your home? If you have a garden, how are you going to bring the outside in? Your home is your shelter, and that protection begins with the transition from the outside world.

Finally, people often come to me with the expectation that we will “do” their homes together and then the job will be “done.” But who you are and what you want to say about yourself is continually changing. How you live and what you can afford also changes over time: You start a family, or your children grow up and leave to live on their own; you take up a new hobby or develop a new collecting interest. A good home changes and evolves with you—a good home is never done.





I was fortunate to grow up with parents who were masters at the arts of living well and entertaining generously. When my family built a new house, my room—which I helped to plan—became a popular meeting place for my high school circle. The joy of entertaining friends in my own space at an early age inspired me to observe my parents closely and discern the secrets of a good life. In every place I've lived since then, it has been my deep delight to re-create the generosity and grace of my boyhood home.

Once I began to study design as a college student, my passion was nurtured by a number of gifted teachers, especially Hope Foote at the University of Washington. Since then, I have owned my own interior design firm and shop in San Francisco for more than thirty years, and I still love the challenge of making spaces work for the people who live in them. Over the years, I've distilled what I've learned into twenty-one simple principles that you can use, whatever size house and budget you have. Fortunately, imagination and daring don't cost anything, and these principles can guide you in creating a beautiful home that reflects who you are—no matter where you live.

In this book you will find pictures of beautiful rooms—from my home and from homes my firm has designed. David Wakely, who has been photographing my work for ten years, has a knack for framing the image that captures the essence of a room, or a moment, or a scene. I have also included a number of David's nature photographs. Let them inspire you to open up to the wonders of the world outside your door and to reproduce that beauty in your home.

Your home is your corner of the world. It should both enrich your life and enable you to share your gifts with others. Designing your space is all about who you are and what you enjoy. My hope, in writing this book, is to inspire you to use home design—something we all must do in one fashion or another—as a means of creative self-expression.

Be bold. Think like a three-year-old. Enjoy, have fun.