

BLACK & WHITE

(and a bit in between)

Timeless Interiors, Dramatic Accents, and Stylish Collections



Celerie Kemble

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(and a bit in between)

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Celebrate Remembrance



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NEW YORK

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This book is dedicated to those who let me
think out loud . . . most especially my husband, Boykin,
who is usually sitting the closest.



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introduction

"If everything isn't black and white, I say

'Why the hell not?'"

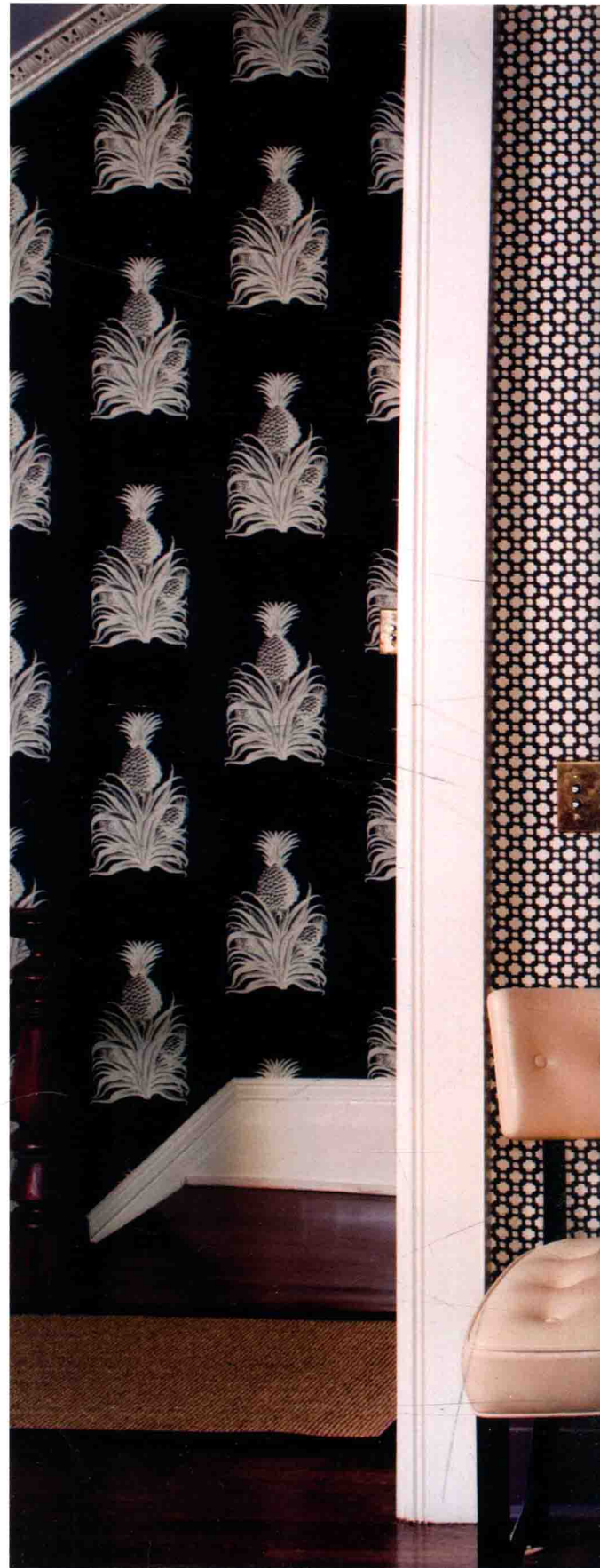
—John Wayne

I CAN'T PRETEND I've ever led my life in black and white. Growing up in Palm Beach, Florida—a bougainvillea-fringed playground where sunsets bathe the roofs and treetops in ruby red and tangerine; where the aqua blue of swimming pools glimmers against the bright pinks and yellows of Lilly Pulitzer dresses and Lacoste shirts; and where even the cars are candy-colored—I was surrounded by every hue in the Technicolor paint kit.

When I headed north for high school and college to the more subdued New England landscape, and later, as I began my adult life in Manhattan, my memory's color index traveled with me. In the fifteen years I've worked as an interior decorator in New York, I've functioned as a kind of human kaleidoscope, someone who walks into a house and unfurls a spectrum of color choices. I present a quince-green, indigo, or hibiscus-pink world to clients who want to escape their beige-on-beige, taupe, brown, or cream-and-tan boxes but who lack the vocabulary or can't quite picture the possibilities.

Not long ago, I noticed that with some clients, paring down the color schemes produced dramatic results. I always find my job exciting because designing interiors is a process of starting afresh, taking risks, and giving shape to the imagination. But I hadn't experimented much with the idea of constraint. Of course, I've always worked within the constraints of budget and my clients' tastes, but as far as color selection, I'd drawn from a riotous abundance of options. Overabundance, really. I wanted to find some parameters, and to try out some black and white truths, to see if they would invigorate my work, and my clients' homes.

It may seem as if my life brims with contentment: I am married to the man I love; I am enraptured by my three children; I work in a field that brings me great joy; I adore my coworkers and not so infrequently my cli-





ents. And yet lately, I'd begun to feel like it was time to leave my comfort zone.

I decided to put aside the crutch of the sixty-four-pack of Crayola crayons (and eight neon colors) and try my hand at the unfamiliar territory of black and white. I'll admit, I was afraid that limiting myself this way would limit my creativity, producing spaces that felt too drab, too stark, too old-fashioned, and too joyless. But instead, as I visited the black and white work of my peers, the grand historic and contemporary black and white residences, and the work of great artists in black and white—the decorator Dorothy Draper, the photographer Cecil Beaton, and the filmmaker Preston Sturges, for example—I realized that a simplified palette can unlock a rich world.

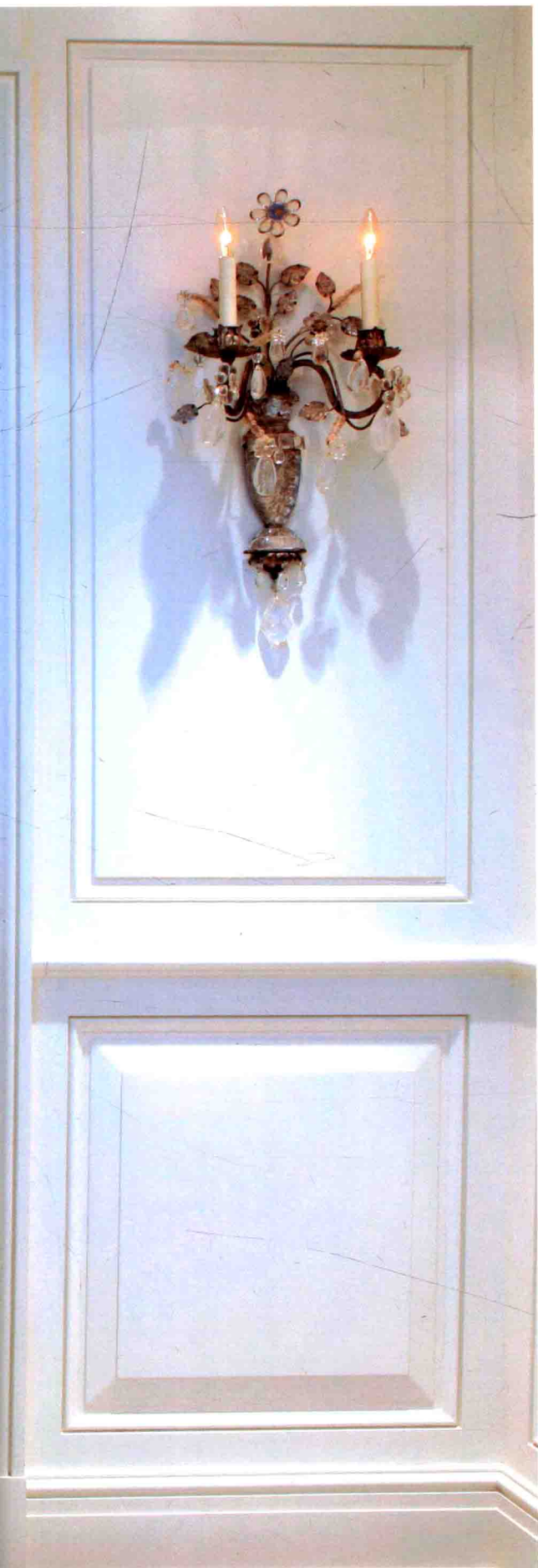
Once I started looking, I saw signs of the expressive power of this minimalist color scheme everywhere around me, whether in nature's dramatic chiaroscuro—dark mountains and pale snow, black rocks and whitecaps, the moon and the night sky—or in the arresting accoutrements of our culture that we don't necessarily register day to day, like pianos and chessboards, white shirts and dark suits, books, newspapers, and crossword puzzles. The language of the two colors I'd neglected was speaking to me, and I listened.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, after Dorothy falls asleep in black-and-white Kansas and wakes in the multicolor fairyland of Oz, she exults, "We must be over the rainbow!" In writing this book, I found that same spirit of exultation by traveling in the reverse direction, from profusion to simplicity—away from the rainbow. *Black and White (and a Bit in Between)* invites you to see that this palette can be freeing instead of limiting. Like a black velvet cloth under diamonds or a white sail against a dark sea, those strong shades not only set each other off and intensify the colors and spaces around them, they also heighten the drama.

Investigating how black and white can be used to create inspiring, tasteful, and beautiful spaces has been a fascinating and difficult process for me, and also invigorating and rewarding, both intellectually and artistically. It's led me—and I hope will guide you—in exciting new creative directions. I couldn't take the liberty of foisting my newfound theories on my clients; nor could I throw my family, household, and bank account into an uproar by attempting a massive redo of my own walls and rooms. Instead, my laboratory has been this book: a gathering place for other peoples' excellent designs, a few of my own, and inspiration for experiments to come.







1 COLOR IN PRACTICE

so what is black,
and what is
white anyway?

"We think that grass is green, that stones are hard, and that snow is cold. But physics assures us that the greenness of grass, the hardness of stones, and the coldness of snow are not the greenness, hardness, and coldness that we know in our own experience, but something very different."

—Albert Einstein, on Bertrand Russell's *Theory of Knowledge*