

CHARLOTTE MOSS DECORATES

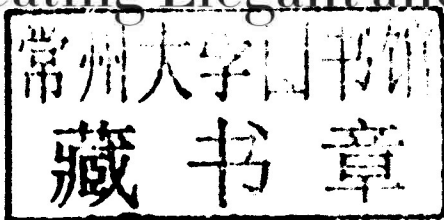


The Art of Creating Elegant and Inspired Rooms

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

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Charlotte Moss with Mitchell Owens

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New York · Paris · London · Milan

Credits

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Edward Addeo: 33, 57, 72, 91, 113, 125, 143, 167, 181, 188 (top left), 201

Boucher, Portrait of Evangeline Bruce: 95

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Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Pauline de Rothschild, 1940. Posthumous digital reproduction from original negative. Louise Dahl-Wolfe Archive, Center for Creative Photography, 1989 Arizona Board of Regents: 17

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Charlotte Moss for Fabricut Fabrics © 2011: endpapers

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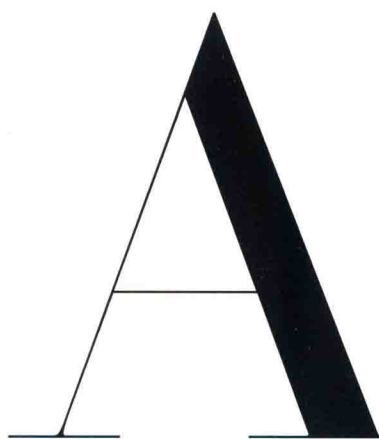


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INTRODUCTION



n empty room is a story waiting to happen, and you are the author. That story must be written to appeal to many people, namely you and your family, a goal that sparks a lot of probing questions that demand smart answers. What purpose will it serve? How will you make it function? How will you make it comfortable and beautiful?

Charlotte Moss Decorates is an opportunity to take many of the questions I have been asked about this subject when I lecture and travel around the country and attempt to answer them between two covers. No matter where you live or whether you are a first-time homeowner redecorating or a student designer, the dilemma is always the same: “Where do I begin?” Is the easiest way to get the ball rolling to buy some sample cans of paint or head to your favorite stores and showrooms, clutching your magazine clippings, in search of a handful of fabric swatches? To be honest, neither is the most effective course of action, and while it may work for some, it is too fragmented an approach for most.

Every decorating situation is different, a combination of personalities, preferences, and styles. I don’t want to give you any rules for decorating because as I have said many times before in other books and will no doubt repeat myself again in the future, there are no rules. And if they did exist, they should be broken or at least put to a very tough test. So how can you winnow down the requirements and the possibilities to a single

alluring vision? I can only tell you what has worked for me time and time again. I review all of my clippings and begin to assemble the images that represent the direction, the look, and the language of the project before me. Eventually they begin to establish a relationship and characterize a mood. This collage is, in effect, my sketch. It is less precise than a sketch, perhaps, but it is atmospheric and that is the intangible element in design that we strive for in the end—a good atmosphere.

Just as a house is a collage of rooms, a room is a collage of objects that give visual and spiritual pleasure and illustrate your personality. When you think about it, many elements of a stylish life, in essence, are collages. At my house in the country, in East Hampton, there is a table dedicated to bearing a garden of miniature flower arrangements and individual blossoms. In the summer its composition changes constantly depending on what's blooming, and choosing and arranging the flowers gives me enormous pleasure. Petals wilt, buds open, and scents perfume the air; the display is a collage of the season brought indoors.

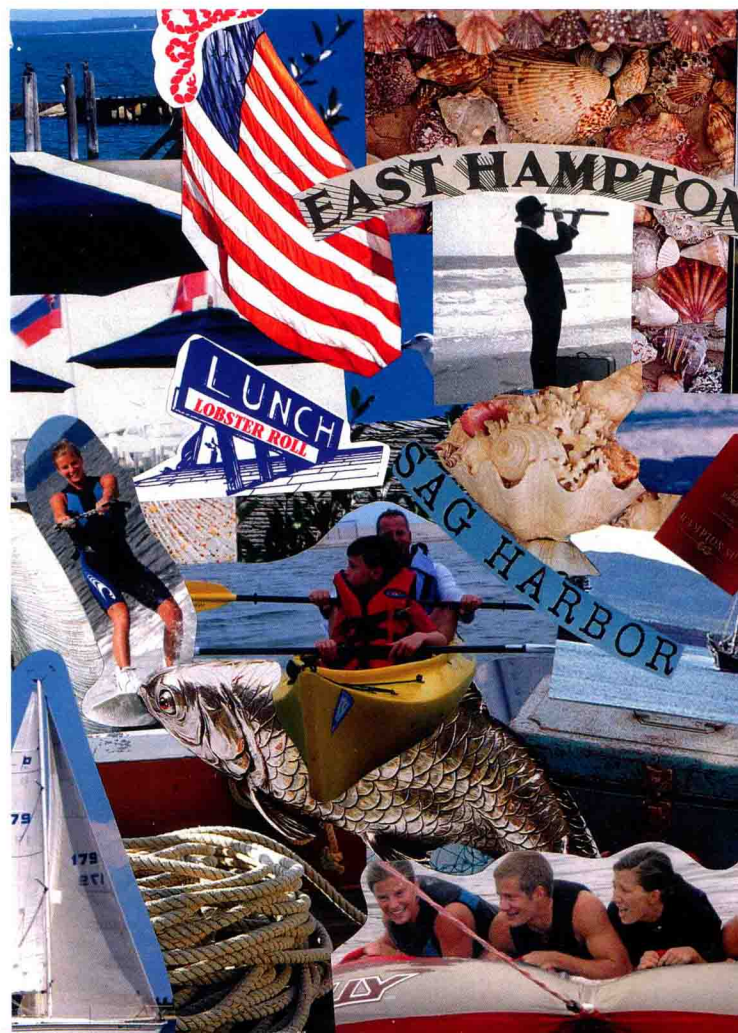
By nature I am a hunter, a collector, a cataloguer, a stylist, and creating collages and keeping scrapbooks is something I've done for years. I've been inspired by those who have done this before me, such as artist, writer, and fashion designer Gloria Vanderbilt, who, at one time, made extraordinary Elizabethan-inspired portraits out of tin foil and gingham scraps. I have given collages as gifts, maniacally cutting images for everything from place cards for a dinner party, to the wrapping of a present, to a picture to be framed, to entire scrapbooks assembled with a theme in mind. All that snipping and pasting is an activity born of a need to express oneself, like painting or poetry. The great French artist Henri Matisse, for instance, scissored scraps of brilliantly colored paper into graphic shapes and layered them into extraordinary works of art admired around the world.

Collage is a medium that invites random ideas, disparate images, and messages. Boxes, notebooks, and files lie in wait full of photographs, paint samples, scraps of fabrics, clippings. Then one day a project comes along—the need to show a room concept to a client or to make a presentation board for a product—and everything I need is there

at my fingertips. My advice is to collect items that delight you, no matter how peculiar or quirky they might seem because they could spark the creation of a tablescape, a table setting, a shadowbox, an entire room, or one day even a work of art.

Which brings us back to the question: Where to begin? Try buying a beautiful scrapbook or a box of file folders. Dedicate one to each room in the house, and start filling it with pages torn from shelter magazines, color schemes you find appealing, and images of furniture, rugs, and objets d'art clipped from an auction catalogue. You might also tuck in a postcard from a museum, a sheet of notepaper in a beautiful hue, or a photo of a richly embroidered evening gown. Scrapbooks are a wonderful way to focus your mind and begin establishing and identifying your taste. Even if you think all you've compiled is a jumble of unrelated pages, the sum total is actually a personal Ouija board. Those scraps reveal who you are. I've had clients come to a meeting with a file full of pages and pictures, and once it has been unpacked and examined it doesn't take me long to decode the message that she loves soothing pastels or he feels most relaxed in monochromatic rooms or she has a secret yearning to live in Provence. We start from there, together, client and decorator. At its most basic level, that is what interior designers do—you reveal, we interpret.

Inspired details bring a strong sense of individuality to any environment, transforming it into a world unlike anybody else's. The great tastemakers of the past—architects, interior designers, fashion icons, and almost anyone who developed a distinctive personal style, one who refined it and lived it—would be worthwhile study guides for anyone. It is impossible to copy someone's style (indeed, why would you want to?) but it IS possible to study, to learn, and to adapt someone else's bright idea as a springboard for making your own statement. Truman Capote, author of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, once claimed he learned everything he needed to know about decorating from the best-dressed socialite Babe Paley, citing how she confidently combined inexpensive finds with costly treasures in rooms decorated for her by the crème de la crème of tastemakers, such as Stéphane Boudin, Albert Hadley, and



Billy Baldwin. Coaxing luxury out of the commonplace is among the hallmarks of genius. Twentieth-century architect Louis Kahn made concrete sensual, Coco Chanel sparked a fashion revolution with simple jersey knits, and architect Frank Gehry startled the design world by making chairs and tables out of layers of corrugated cardboard. When Fred Astaire, the Oscar-winning actor and dancer, couldn't find a belt, he secured his trousers with a striped silk necktie. Whether the subject is fashion, decorating, or food, it's not what you've got, it's what you do with it.

The history of style is populated with men and women who took ordinary things and made them extraordinary. In my house and my office files are filled with vintage magazine articles and newspaper clippings and shelves are loaded with books about individuals who enhanced their rooms and their lives—creatively, inventively, passionately—and I dip into them frequently for inspiration. Pauline de Rothschild, glamorous American wife of an innovative French winemaker, set the dining tables of her husband's chateau on the outskirts of Bordeaux with magical arrangements of weeds, vegetables, and fruiting branches. Challenged by a restrictive household budget, fashion plate Gloria Guinness simply bought the cheapest chintz she could find to decorate her home in Switzerland and had it tailored as carefully as an haute-couture gown. Marie-Louise Ritz, wife of the Paris hotel owner, lined lampshades with pink silk so guests' complexions blushed with a rosy glow. Evangeline Bruce, an American ambassador's wife, decorated her drawing room in Washington, D.C., not with flowers in vases but with vibrant green heads of broccoli tucked into Georgian silver biscuit tins. Marie-Hélène Serreulles, directrice for society jeweler Jean Schlumberger, scented the room of her country house by scattering dried lavender over burning logs in its fireplaces. When the Duchess of Windsor wanted distinctive curtains for one of the rooms in her Paris residence, the chic lady from Baltimore framed its windows with panels of diamond-quilted emerald silk that resembled glamorous comforters.

Ideas like those can be the start of a beautiful room. In *Charlotte Moss Decorates*,