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MADE TO ORDER

常州大学山书馆藏书章



# CAMPION PLATT MADE TO ORDER

WRITTEN WITH MARC KRISTAL
THE MONACELLI PRESS

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#### FOREWORD JAY McINERNEY

Although I have been fortunate enough to have worked with Campion Platt on four different residential projects over the past twenty years I find myself suffering from a form of real estate envy as I peruse this volume. Call it design envy. I want that study/cigar room in Palm Beach. I want to climb that elegantly curved staircase with the gnarled wood railing in Southampton. No, wait, actually what I really want is to entertain my friends in that Art Deco living room on Central Park West. Actually, I'd like to live in most of these rooms. At any rate, it's great to be able to visit them in these pages. Flipping through them reminds me that I've learned quite a bit about design and architecture while observing the growth and development of Campion's ideas and his career. I like to think of Campion's mature aesthetic as modernism with soul.

We'd been friends for several years before I asked Campion to help me combine my apartment with a second apartment that I had purchased directly beneath me in anticipation of the arrival of twins. I had always admired Campion's sense of style, his personal aesthetic, but in this case the challenge involved a knotty engineering and structural problem, not to mention potentially crippling budget constraints. Campion's solution was elegant as well as practical and in the end the finished space seemed to have been waiting all along to manifest itself, though in fact it was wrestled into existence.

When divorce necessitated a move from that particular New York apartment I turned to Campion again to design my bachelor digs. I'm still in awe of the way he transformed a one-bedroom, prewar New York apartment into a beautiful, multipurpose living space. Since the apartment was a rental we weren't able to reconfigure it. Not the least of the challenges I posed for him was the need to accommodate some two thousand volumes of my library, while also leaving me enough wall space to hang my art. In one particularly crafty solution, he designed a room divider to create a discrete office space with a built-in desk and further bookshelf space above.

Once Campion had seized on the theme of writer's retreat, he carried it through the apartment, going so far as to create, in collaboration with a painter, a finish that mimicked sheets of parchment for the walls of the bedroom. I discovered that Campion was almost obsessively concerned with fabrics and finishes, which resulted in a very visually rich environment. Early on we decided on a relatively muted palette of browns, tans, and taupes with black accents. When an early visitor remarked that the color scheme was masculine, Campion responded, "So is my client." Which I thought was a very good answer. (Anyone who wonders about Campion's ability to get in touch with his feminine palette should check out the bedroom suite he designed for his wife in their Soho loft.)

In my little Greenwich Village writer's retreat, he also created a number of custom pieces of furniture that made the most of the limited space. Knowing that I like to entertain he reimagined my sixteen-foot-long foyer as a dining space, and designed a table that seated twelve when needed but folded into a narrow console after the guests went home.

My latest venture with Campion could hardly be more of a departure from our urban design projects. With my wife, Anne, I'd purchased two acres of beachfront property on Ambergris Cay in the Turks and Caicos Islands. We had a vague picture in our minds of a simple Caribbean beach house, a three-bedroom retreat, which Campion fleshed out with a modular design that involves three separate pavilions around a central courtyard—a master bedroom, a great room, and a two-bedroom house. The courtyard was in part a solution to the problem of strong northeast winter trade winds. Since there's hardly any rain on the island the open plan between the pavilions seemed ideal and afforded many views from each room. Although Campion is a modernist, he chose in this case something closer to the local vernacular—something, in fact, which bodied forth our fantasy of a tropical beach house.

The beach house was conceived as the guest house to a larger five-bedroom domicile, which we hope will rise on the bluff above it someday. This house was also built around a central courtyard with two bedroom wings framing the open space. We spent many hours with Campion designing this particular house, walking the lot, placing rooms, and getting lifted 15 feet above the bluff in a cherry picker in order to assess the view from the future second-floor balcony. The resulting house, which includes a turret facing the sea, so far exists only on paper, although I have no doubt that Campion can visualize it much more clearly than I can. With luck it will become a reality in the near future. In the meantime I will be thumbing through the following pages, looking for ideas and envying his other clients.

#### INTRODUCTION

If you've landed on this page, it might be by mistake.

I know that may sound funny. I also know that because I'm no different from anyone who picks up a design book: the first thing (sometimes the only thing) I want to do is look at the photographs. But if you don't read the text, you might be misled by what you're seeing.

Rather than discovering a "signature style," you'll find homes that appear to be quite different from one another—sleek modern lofts, an early twentieth-century manor, an old sea captain's house, urbane apartments. What's more, these residences—many of which are luxurious, glamorous, and have been published in high-end design magazines—may seem beyond most people's reach, with lessons not applicable to everyday life.

If you read the accompanying descriptions, however, you'll soon discover a common thread: each of these residences evolved from a few simple ideas—a story, if you will—which came out of conversations with my clients (or, in some cases, friends and family) about their dreams and aspirations. And you'll find that the same process can succeed for anyone, at any budget, working with or without a design professional.

That's because the ideas that form the building blocks of a successful project—like every aspect of the design process—are worthy of close consideration. And the best way to consider things, I've found, is to make them to order.

In fact, the impulse toward customization-creating or seeking out things that are unique expressions of one's own personality and approach—is an essential part of human nature. When we're young, we distinguish ourselves through sports, or by playing music, or with our hobbies and collections. We delight in our first made-to-order birthday cake, and even if a woman's never had anything specially created for her, she'll find someone to design her wedding dress. The bespoke influence has even crept into mass-market products-you can get special sizes from Levi's, unique colors from Nike, custom-made boots from Timberland, and create your own iPod playlist. Why should your home be any less personalized?

In the projects that follow, you'll find many things that are made to order—one of the most important being the actual process. Rule number one, in my view, is that handcrafting a home of one's own should be a pleasure, not a chore or something you turn over to "the experts" without comment. That doesn't mean there won't be miscues, wrong turns and moments of indecision. But as we all know, a lot of things that seem scary are actually fun-indeed, the scary part is the fun part-and design is no different. And the unexpected discoveries, the creative collaborations, and most of all the chance to put your personal stamp on every room are what make your home your own.

Although my projects tend toward the contemporary, I've found that clients appreciate the tactile quality inherent in craftsmanship-especially in contrast to the metropolitan experience, in which everything is so hard-edged-and so much of my interior and furniture design work is bespoke as well. While I don't build things personally, I remain very interested in how things are put together, and spend a great deal of time watching craftspeople set their tools to wood, stone, and metal. This enables me not only to respect the true nature of the material, but to understand how far I can push the design envelope.

And though it may not seem so, making things to order is also socially responsible. In this regard, the question of provenance-typically applied to valuable objects and antiques, to help establish their legitimacy-remains as important as the source of food is to a gourmet. From where does a chair or a fabric come? Was it produced by a local maker using sustainable materials-and if not, how far did it travel and how much fuel did the trip require? In a way, this represents an enlightened return to the period prior to the Industrial Revolution, when virtually everything was custom crafted. Making things to order, once again, is becoming the norm—and, in the process, connecting us to our humanity.

Don't get me wrong-I do hope you'll look at the pictures, and enjoy what you see. But I hope as well that what follows will provide you with a design tool kit of sorts, and serve as an inspiration. Many of my colleagues teach, and while my business makes that impossible right now, this is my way of sharing the knowledge gained from twenty-five years of experience, and of demonstrating that the design process is a fun one in which everyone can participate.

In other words, this book isn't for my fellow designers. It's been made to order-for you.



# TELLING A STORY

Everyone has had the experience of telling a story, whether to a child at bedtime or to a bunch of friends over a glass of wine, or in some other context. But what might it mean to "tell a story" with architecture?

Here's an example: A few years ago, I was asked by a Venezuelan couple to design their pied-à-terre in Manhattan. The apartment they had chosen posed a range of challenges, and I was at a loss as to how best to resolve them. While I was wrestling with the project, I went on a meditation retreat to Asia, and in the middle of it—remembering that my clients lived most of the year in the tropics—I had a vision of the pied-à-terre as a South American courtyard house: a place with an open-air entry garden, from which all of the home's rooms and circulation paths would unfold. Typically, I develop concepts through a give-and-take with the architects and designers in my office, after devising a program with a client. This time, captivated by my theme, I sat down with a sketchbook and drew the entire apartment—from the broad organizational strokes to the rooms and the ways they communicated to the architectural details and furnishings—in a matter of days.

The tale, as you will see in the coming pages, might also be about the lair of an old sea captain or inspired by a bunch of upper-crust Brits in colonial África. But whatever the case, my experience drove home one of the most valuable things I've learned: every successful project grows out of a story—and I can't begin until I have found the story I want to tell.

This lesson, I should add, is not only of use to design professionals. Finding a story becomes especially important when you consider that 80 percent of home furnishings are purchased not by designers, but by people shopping for their own dwellings. I can't count the number of times I've been asked to

help out clients who had bought very beautiful, very costly vintage pieces by world-famous names—and wondered why nothing seemed to go together. The reason was that no unifying idea guided the design approach to their purchases.

Whether you're a homeowner or a professional, finding a compelling story—or, if you prefer, a theme or concept—enables you to consider every decision with what amounts to a dependable true/false meter. At the largest scale, defining your inspiration helps to establish architectural principles that will organize the design—a courtyard house, for example, has certain signature elements upon which to draw. But having a story also helps with the details. Is this chair, wall covering, or rug contributing to the tale I want to tell? Or does it somehow strike a wrong note even though it's beautiful or "important"? If you have developed a strong concept, you will make fewer mistakes, create interiors that are more original, imaginative, and authentically your own—and you will be practicing the craft of interior design rather than simply decorating.

Of course, the prospect of coming up with something that will drive all of a project's design decisions can be daunting. The flip side of the equation is that every space has a story to tell—and so finding a story, at least in part, involves discovering what your home wants to be. If you're at a loss, try jump-starting the process by taking your cues from the architecture. Once you've got a dialogue going, everything that flows from it will be functional, beautiful, and welcoming.

Having said all this, let me add a caveat: if your theme just does not seem to be working after a few tries, don't be afraid to move on. There's a Buddhist saying: "The only way out is in." Immerse yourself in the process—and you will come out with the right story to tell.



#### TROPICAL MISCHIEF

Grand and elegant Gatsbyesque estates, with beachfront acreage, ballrooms, and bedrooms by the dozen come to mind when we hear the words Palm Beach—hardly houses at all. But like the rest of southern Florida, the city has a simpler side, one that's about the laid-back pleasures of abundant sunshine, fragrant vegetation, and the soothing effects of the sea. That's what my wife Tatiana and I were after when we discovered a 1924 British Colonial Revival house and made it our winter retreat. And just as we didn't want opulence and formality, neither were we interested in the traditional local decorative style, characterized by white-painted wicker and layers of chintz. For me, the task involved adapting the approach I'd developed on my urban projects—favoring strong contrasts, streamlined details, and unfussy layouts—to a tropical house in a very different sort of environment.

We found our story in *White Mischief*, a guilty pleasure of a movie about upper-crust Brits misbehaving in 1940s Kenya. Tatiana and I appreciated the film's hothouse air, the colonial interiors that combined propriety and primitivism. Taking the film's decadence as a departure point, I imported exotic style from Africa to the tropics, then brought it into the present—going native, but with design sophistication.

I began by securing landmark status for the exterior to ensure that regardless of who owns it, the house's history remains intact. Then we opened up the ground-floor plan: removing walls, enlarging doors and surrounding them with oversize custom frames, creating views from the entry gallery through the living room to the spaces beyond. The interior design scheme established a base of multiple contrasts—dark against light, pattern versus color—on which I built layers of detail that both established the house's style and personalized it. Some of these, such as the nailhead furnishings and objects upholstered in faux python skin and raffia, referenced the film directly. Others—the bust of a mythical goddess encrusted with seashells in the entry, the library's pickled cypress walls—put a Palm Beach spin on the British Colonial sensibility. And there is a strong contemporary influence to be found in everything from the artworks to the extensive use of Lucite to the reflective lacquer and polished stone finishes.

For our efforts, the city of Palm Beach bestowed the Polly Earl Award on the historic house and its interiors, of which we were very proud. Ultimately, it must be admitted, Tatiana and I wandered afield of our cinematic inspiration. But it provided just the right beginning, one that enabled us to construct a strong, personal narrative—and we still occasionally screen *White Mischief* on the theater-size screen overlooking the pool.