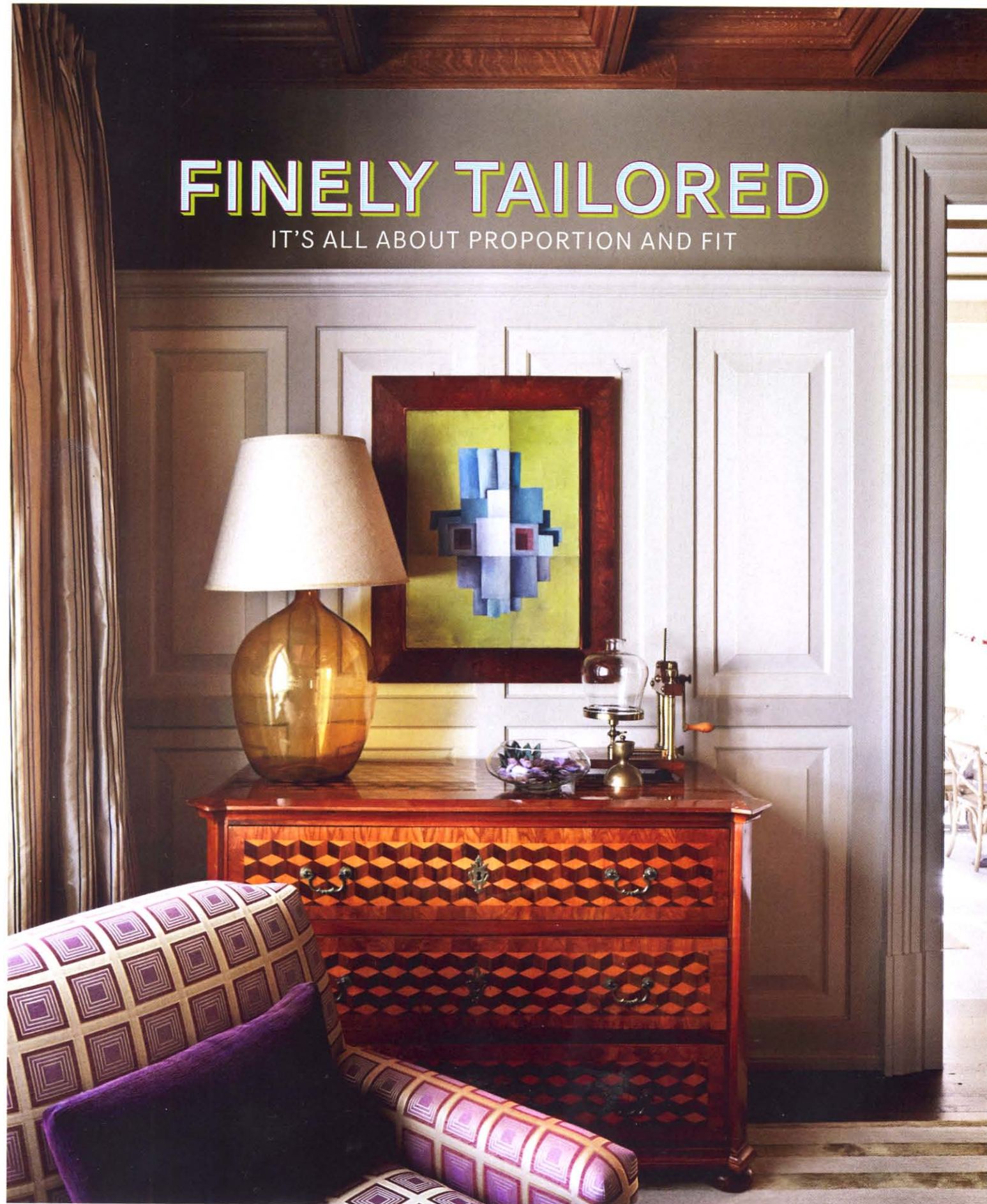


FINELY TAILORED

IT'S ALL ABOUT PROPORTION AND FIT



Designer Steven Gambrel refashioned the upstairs hallway of a 19th-century Connecticut house with English chestnut, clerestory windows, and Tudor-inspired arches. Mirrored "windows" on the left reflect light from the real ones on the right. OPPOSITE: A mix of geometric patterns lends depth and energy to a corner in the family room. The chair is covered in Osborne & Little's Plaza. Walls are Appaloosa and panels are Lambswool and Phantom, all by Pratt & Lambert.

Interior design by STEVEN GAMBREL Interview by LISA CREGAN Photographs by SIMON WATSON



Gambrel gave the family room the feeling of a genteel club. He designed all the seating and blended it with midcentury pieces. The coffee table is by Edward Wormley for Dunbar. Tommi Parzinger side tables hold 1930s fruitwood lamps by Billy Haines; a Paul McCobb side table sits between a club chair and a love-seat. The Hodson Stripe Lapchi rug is from Beauvais Carpets.

LISA CREGAN: This house strikes me as quintessentially American in its blend of past and present.

STEVEN GAMBREL: I worked closely with the architect, John Toates, to reimagine the house in the spirit of what it once was, with a genuine sense of place—but also with a sense of ‘right now.’

What’s its history?

It’s a large 19th-century Shingle Style house in an old Connecticut port town, but it was in extremely bad shape. It had been altered a lot over the years. We redid the home with authentic details, but geared to a modern lifestyle.

Would that be characteristic of your decorating style in general?

I have to say, I love history. I guess I always want to instill it so that a house feels seasoned. I like to take what’s given and figure out what’s missing for a modern family. That’s harder with a new house. I always study the vernacular, the lifestyle of a region. But I’d describe my style as a classical sensibility that comes alive with a mix of modern and traditional furnishings.

And how does your personal style reflect your decorating style?

I’m all about the details—proportion and fit. Think: Thom Browne suit. Simple, modern, and tailored is what I like, like the furniture I choose.

Your furniture has a distinctly individual look.

My furniture is a distillation: English comfort and French chic. I noticed that in the 19th century, English interiors moved away from formality and became more comfortable. I measured the depth of sofas and club chairs, and then I figured out just how low I could go with the backs.

Why low backs?

I like them. They make the ceilings seem higher, which is always nice, and their graphic simplicity enhances the look of the objects in the room.

No skirts or fringes?

No. I like to see the frame. I like to see the way the sofa relates to the carpet, the wood, the material, the nailheads. I think it’s my architect training.

You don’t shy away from pattern, do you?

I love mixing patterns. Pattern on pattern on pattern. When you do that, pattern is almost neutral. It cancels itself.

I count five or six in the family room alone. What’s the secret to making it look so coherent?

They’re all geometric. They don’t clash. Their graphic nature plays off one another. They’re also similar in scale.

And the colors have a surprising calmness.

One reason it feels quiet is that purple and green are opposites on the color wheel, so they balance each other. One would be too strong in this room without the other.

This is a room that seems made for Cognac under a cashmere throw—elegant without being formal.

That’s because it’s an ode to a gentleman’s club. A family room *should* have a clublike atmosphere. And our interiors usually have a bit of the casual. It’s hard to be overly formal with this furniture.

I’m pretty sure I’d never set foot in my dining room again if I could serve my guests in a dining alcove like this one. So plush and cozy!

It’s a place to eat, obviously, but it’s also a place for lounging. I liked the idea of creating a dining area where the chairs aren’t so upright and stiff, and you can lean back. It’s like the lounge of some great European hotel where the tables and chairs are low and you just want to kick back and spend lots of time there. This table is two inches shorter than the norm, 27 inches rather than 29.

What inspired the orange and yellow?

Warmth and happiness. They’re like a cantaloupe. Although does that sofa look like a Chanel suit, or what?

On the other hand, soft blues and grays give the living room a misty feel.

They complement the water views. The shoreline is often misty and overcast. It’s like Normandy. All the colors are a little toned down, because the light isn’t very sharp.

Your bedrooms are so often blue.

That’s true. It’s a very soothing color, and it works for both a man and a woman. It’s especially good for a master bedroom.

And I’ve seen other kitchens you’ve done with tile covering the walls.

This isn’t tile, it’s brick with a crackled glaze. The grout is black. It was originally used for service kitchens. We referenced a kitchen in a 19th-century Vanderbilt mansion designed for a large staff.

What’s behind that big wood door?

The pantry. It’s done like a giant ice chest. And we designed the refrigerator to look more like cabinetry. The black granite countertops remind me of those in old labs. I like the way it looks between the stove hood and the dark floors.

It’s not often I see a gigantic hood over an island.

The client wanted her Lacanche range to be in the island, facing out, so she could participate in the activity in the kitchen when she cooks.

You carry the glazed bricks out to the mudroom and down the stairs leading to the wine cellar. That’s a pretty intense green on the walls above them.

It’s an institutional green like you might see in the back-of-the-house staff wing of a great old house in Maine. Of course, nobody has a staff wing anymore. The back of the house is the front of the house these days, right?

PRODUCED BY DAVID M. MURPHY



1. “The textiles in the family room are velvety, dense, and complex,” Gambrel says. “They tell you this is the place to go on a cold day.” 2. A porch off the living room. 3. The living room’s heavy limestone fireplace gets a “lift” with a light palette. Walls are painted Pavanne by Pratt & Lambert. The oversized terra-cotta table lamps are Portuguese antiques. 4. Hand-cut Japanese textile stencils from the 19th century create an arresting focal point in the dining room. Vintage leather chairs are by Frits Henningsen. 5. A range of watery blues give a soft lilt to a daughter’s bedroom. Walls are Pratt & Lambert’s Violet Echo. 6. Waterworks’ Clothilde tub adds vintage-style glamour to the house’s “hers” bathroom. 7. A powder room gets a big dose of personality with David Hicks’s Hexagon wallpaper by Cole & Son. Sconces are from Woka Lamps. 8. A sunroom off the family room evokes “an old-fashioned screened porch,” Gambrel says. “The palette is kind of out-of-date, but it’s a great way to suggest sun on a gloomy day.”



The kitchen is modeled after service kitchens in 19th-century houses, but with a contemporary point of view. Walls are covered in Grove Brickworks from Waterworks. Gambrel designed the doors of the glass-front Klondike Case refrigerator to look like period cabinetry, and the large wooden pantry door to mimic a huge ice chest. The Lacanche range sits in the island beneath a hood designed by the architect, John Toates. Countertops are absolute black granite. Stools are vintage.



THE NEW GATHERING PLACE

Think of it as a cross between a breakfast room and a dining room, with coffee-house and cocktail lounge thrown in. Comfortable and versatile, it's informal enough for cozy family meals, dressy enough for a chic little dinner party, and an irresistible place to hang out with friends for hours. So pull up a plush, tufted chair and make yourself at home.



TOP: The oak butler's pantry off the kitchen is an updated interpretation of a 19th-century pantry. Hardware from Nanz. ABOVE: Shelves are backed in mercury glass for a little shimmer. LEFT: The family has cozy meals in the invitingly comfortable dining alcove, or dinners for small gatherings when they entertain. Gambrel made the furniture low-slung to give the little niche a "loungy" feel. The Turkish sofa is covered in Lemma by DesignTex and the Klismos chairs are in Lord Byron by Brunswick & Fils. Blue de Savoie marble tabletop.



Pale colors and plush textiles add a feminine note to the tailored master bedroom. Gambrel's Fiat club chair is covered in Toile Victoire by Clarence House, and his Glover bench is cushioned with Shrunken Buffalo Bull leather from Edelman. Curtains in Pierre Frey's Satin Gary. Walls are painted Whisper by Pratt & Lambert. OPPOSITE: Glazed white brick links the mudroom to the kitchen and extends down the stairs to a wine cellar. Upper walls are Benjamin Moore's Cedar Green. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES