

AMERICAN DECORATION

THOMAS JAYNE



THE MONACELLI PRESS



New York designer and
American decorative arts scholar
**THOMAS
JAYNE**

may have the mien of a quiet traditionalist — all buttoned-up, bow-tied and bespectacled — but there's a sly audacity in the way he crafts and chronicles interiors. In 2010, Jayne, who has a penchant for rich, often surprising color palettes, historic wallpapers, murals and a deft mix of period styles, made his writing debut with *The Finest Rooms*, a collection of historic and contemporary interiors that boldly quoted and expanded upon the 1964 classic *The Finest Rooms by America's Decorators*. Already established in the industry as an alumnus of Parish-Hadley and the founder of his own firm, Jayne cemented his reputation as a standard-bearer and arbiter of refined taste with that first foray as author.

Interior designer Thomas Jayne's new monograph reveals how he is undaunted by seemingly disparate period pieces and complex prints, both of which he uses to great effect in the living room of this Manhattan apartment. Photo by Pieter Estersohn

As an encore, he has now produced a monograph of his own work, one based on a monolithic concept: *American Decoration: A Sense of Place* (The Monacelli Press, \$50) attempts the lofty goal of distilling the essence of our native style. The lavishly illustrated volume covers two dozen Jayne commissions — from New York to New Orleans to New Mexico — and not only promotes the value of traditional design and the artistry of American antiques but also proposes a definition of American interior design: “The diversity of our population encourages the use of virtually every style from traditional to modern, western to Asian, formal to informal,” he writes.

A girl's room in a Fire Island, New York, beach house features a George Nelson chest of drawers, a small Eames table and a tie-dyed bedcover she chose herself. Photo by Jonahan Wallen





Jayne brings a wealth of personal associations to his work. In the book, he writes of his family roots that extend back to “medieval dwellings at Plymouth” and his civil engineer grandfather’s Craftsman-style bungalow in Santa Barbara decorated with antiques and Mission furniture. At 13, Jayne recalls, he painted his bedroom in a postwar Pacific Palisades, California, house to match Jacqueline Kennedy’s Red Room in the White House. He studied architecture and art history in college and was a graduate fellow at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware.

The russett-colored walls of this Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, living room provide an ideal backdrop for antiques and an impressive collection of postwar art, including an Ed Ruscha painting. Photo by Pieter Estersohn



Colorful Matisse prints jazz up a Southampton, New York, living room. Photo by William Waldron



Such a pedigree might scare off the uninitiated, but even the most devout modernist can't help but be impressed by Jayne's sense of scale and proportion, his exquisite green and blue rooms and his effortless mix of patterned carpets and fabrics with ornate antiques and 20th-century art by the likes of Keith Haring and Jeff Koons. While many of his interiors exude period grandeur, there is often an intriguing contemporary counterpoint: In the dining room of the 1860s Philadelphia townhouse featured on the book's cover, a group of Portuguese claw-and-ball foot chairs surround a 1970s Parsons table lacquered in an almost Yves Klein blue. For a Southampton, New York, living room, Jayne hung pale celadon drapery embroidered with an 18th-century vine pattern on curtain rings in a pink that might've made Lilly Pulitzer blush.

The sun room of the Wynnewood house features works by Warhol, Lichtenstein and Koons, among others.
Photo by Pieter Estersohn

Undaunted by seemingly disparate period pieces and complex prints, Jayne's harmonious orchestrations make even highly embellished, formal rooms seem more friendly than formidable. Children's rooms, so often relegated to an afterthought by designers, blossom with butterfly prints and canopy beds sprouting feathers. Jayne is also a master of using art as a focal point. In his own New Orleans apartment, in the French Quarter, he juxtaposes an Audubon print of a somewhat disagreeable condor with a pretty field of French floral wallpaper. In a chapter entitled "Quiet Color for Collectors," he achieves a sublime minimalist moment, pairing Donald Judd's wooden *Meter Box* with a yellow-painted Regency bench.

In the Wynnewood guest room, Donald Judd's wall sculpture and an English Regency bench appear to speak a common language. Photo by Peter Estersohn





A child's bedroom in a New York City brownstone is filled with exuberant touches and playful colors. Photo by William Waldron



Jayne sets forth his design creed succinctly: "Very few pieces in my rooms match," he writes. "Instead they relate visually in abstract ways." So too do the homes he presents here, which represent a cross section of architecture, from a Beaux Arts Fifth Avenue apartment in New York City to a 350-square-foot Creole flat. The common threads are Jayne's eye for quality — inspired by, but never a slave to, the heritage of American design — and his custom touches. "It is difficult to make a memorable room without something bespoke to tie the room together, even if it is just a special paint color or a simple pair of curtains," he declares.

Jayne channeled Delaware's Winterthur Museum, where he studied, for the drawing room of a Georgian Revival house in New York's Dutchess County. Photo by Pieter Estersohn

In relatively brief essays — and, for the detail-obsessed, not nearly enough captions identifying materials and resources — the designer describes the history and decorating process behind each of the homes included in the book. As befits Jayne's sensibility, they are photographed in classical sunlit compositions and laid out in a clean and timeless fashion that may remind some readers of vintage issues of *Architectural Digest*. Flashy they are not. And like Jayne's designs, it's hard to imagine that *American Decoration: A Sense Of Place* will ever seem out of date.

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A pair of red Gothic chairs were original to this Philadelphia townhouse; the stair runner is based on a 19th-century example. Photo by Pieter Estersohn

