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JUNE 2007

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INTERIOR DESIGN BY MEG BRAFF
INTERVIEW BY MIMI READ
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON UPTON

Lighten Up!

Living Color

Start with blue and white,
add big splashes of red, and bring
on the flowers of summer

MIMI READ: These days, the beau ideal of the summer house is pale, casual, and spare. Yet you've decorated your family's 1882 Newport summer house in rich layers of color and artifice. Why?

MEG BRAFF: The decor may not be weightless, but it is lighthearted. Because we use the house only part of the year, I felt I could go stronger in terms of stylized whimsy and color saturation. I wanted it to be expressive, even over-the-top. It is a bit formal—Newport itself certainly has a formal side—but because this house is snappy and fun, I feel you can dress it up or keep it really casual.

How did you begin furnishing the living room?

With the antique Chinese carpet. That gave me the color palette. Those Chippendale chairs came from Christie's, and I've had them in my basement a long time—they were blue, but just before Christmas I painted them red to introduce that red thread into the room. Then I just added those corally-red pillows. Above the sofa is a very pretty Chinese screen that gives the room scale.

You've used lots of chinoiserie in this house. Is it a passion?

I love the glamour, fun, and whimsy of chinoiserie. Besides, there's a long history of Chinese influence in Newport.... And have you





Controlled splashes of red add spirit to the living room, where Braff mixed glamorous chinoiserie pieces with old-fashioned ones to give traditional decor a smart, modern spin. A tight-back Bridgewater sofa Braff has had forever was reupholstered by Michael Millillo in DuraLee cream linen. The blanc de Chine ceramic garden seat came from Franklin & Company.



LEFT: Parrot tulips and cadmium yellow vases play off Scalamandré's seven-color Shanghai scenic wallpaper. OPPOSITE: Coaxing all possible sophistication from a primary color palette, Braff created a dining room where lighthearted glamour prevails. The mantelpiece is painted in Farrow & Ball's Blazer. The round table is from White Fine Furnishings. Chinese-style fretwork lacquered dining chairs are from C. Bell. The chandelier is by Currey & Company.

ever seen the Chinese teahouse on the seaside cliffs at Marble House? That's the summer house William Vanderbilt gave his wife, Alva, for her 39th birthday. Well, the teahouse is a fabulous folly beyond compare.

Speaking of chinoiserie, there's a whole lot going on in the dining room. There's a lot going on in just the wallpaper!

The wallpaper is called Shanghai and it's a seven-color chinoiserie toile from Scalamandré. The scale is very big, and it gives you a great color palette to work with. All that scenery means you don't need any art on the walls—in fact, art would be one step too far.

The brass sunburst, the Chinese Chippendale-style chairs, and the beaded chandelier all have strong presences as well.

The chairs are comfortable new ones. So is the chandelier—it's a new piece, not Chinese at all, but I thought it was fun and a little unexpected. The wooden beads have a beautiful brushed gold finish. Someday I'll use it in a more austere, traditional setting where it's the one piece that provides the punch.

When you move to the library, all the pattern has jumped off the wall and onto the furniture. You've mixed so many totally different genres of patterns in here, and yet it all works.

It's funny, I bought the sofa and those William IV armchairs facing it at auction and I've never reupholstered them. The chairs are covered in an old Clarence House print, a bit out of style in a way that appealed to me. It's a little more of that old-fashioned feeling I like to mix in. The animal print and the striped chairs just add more warmth.

The breakfast room has more of a classic summer house look—it's a much lighter and brighter, full of straw and bamboo.

I love those bamboo dining chairs. I think they look great with that old farm table. The six side chairs are old and the two armchairs are new ones. And I used simple bamboo matchstick

blinds that I think are so useful in a lot of different types of settings. The carpet is totally indoor-outdoor, so it doesn't slip, slide, or stain. Did I tell you I have four kids?

You didn't. Boys or girls?

All boys. My oldest is nine. The kitchen island is nice and generous. We do a lot of projects there and sometimes they have breakfast there, depending on how many people show up at once. We also make what we call candy bar ice cream there. Wherever my family goes, there's an ice cream maker.

OK, now I'm upstairs in the master bedroom, and I take it all back about your house looking rich, layered, and dense. This room is buoyant, and summery as a daylily.

I started with the wallpaper, a fresh celadon stripe. The curtains are a slightly darker green chintz. It was a very tricky window to dress, 13 feet long. I didn't want a big heavy curtain treatment that would call attention to it but, rather, something simple that would blend and soften it.

Why does the color in the room look so balanced?

There's a lot of white trim and white bed linens cutting through the color. And the antique bed is a lighter wood than most four-posters, but it still has a bit of that old Newport feel.

What's your husband's favorite spot in the house?

He loves the master dressing room. It's blue and white, very fresh and summery. It has a TV, a great desk for writing letters or using a laptop, a private phone, and a lot of nice closets.

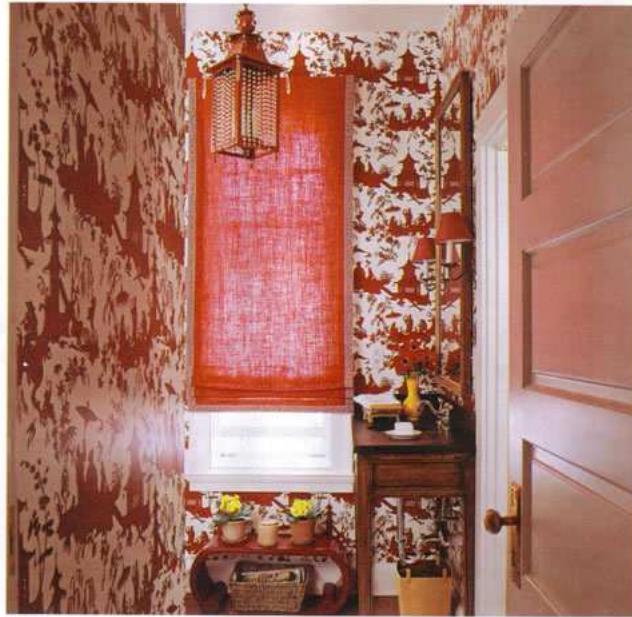
Where do the children hang out?

On the third floor. All their bedrooms are there, plus a playroom. It's really set up for having people visit. We have tons of cousins and friends, love having them around, and that to me is what summer's all about.

PRODUCED BY SENG MORTIMER AND DAVID M. MURPHY







LEFT: Farrow & Ball's Plain Stripe blue wallpaper with Stone Blue painted trim gives the library walls mysterious depth, making it an atmospheric backdrop for evening cocktails. Braff found the Heriz carpet, sofa, and armchairs at auction. The cocktail table is by Brunswick & Fils. White ceramic pagodas on the mantel are from Franklin & Company. Above the sofa are new prints of Chinese palaces from Trowbridge Gallery, London. ABOVE: Delightfully busy and engaging Jardin Chinois Red wallpaper from Waterhouse Wallhangings masks the flaws of an awkwardly shaped powder room. The window shade is Cire red linen by Lee Jofa with Clarence House Greek Key tape.



ABOVE: Braff celebrates summer in an open, light-filled breakfast room with antique bamboo dining chairs from Shi & Erhard. She found the lighthearted chandelier at Chelsea House and painted it red. **RIGHT:** Newport-based architect Steven Laurin designed the kitchen island, reminiscent of a farm table except for its top of Caesar stone, a quartz composite from CaesarStone USA. Braff chose the Sloan Street Shop Light, a large double pendant fixture from Visual Comfort, to balance out the large island and warm up the room: "It's more atmospheric than recessed lighting, and it's nice having linen shades as opposed to metal ones."

"I actually like very plain kitchens. This one is solid and timeless—it has a wood floor, a subway tile backsplash, stainless-steel appliances, and old-fashioned cabinets."

MEG BRAFF









LEFT : Braff's first purchase for the master bedroom—an antique barley twist four-poster bed—gives great calm to the space. The bedskirt is Bijoux Stripe by China Seas through Quadrille. The pair of chairs flanking the fireplace are from Franklin & Company and they're covered in a Brunschwig & Fils animal print. The Poppy sisal rug is from Country Carpet & Rug. Bedside lamps are by Shine. **ABOVE**: Fresh and clean in blue and white, the master dressing room has a white desk from Bungalow 5. If an old piece isn't terribly valuable, Braff has no qualms about painting it. The vintage desk chair was a darker color when she first found it at Franklin Cruise Antiques.

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THIS PAGE: Seen from another angle, the master dressing room has nothing to do with staying in touch with the office and everything to do with kicking back. Chinese Lattice wallpaper from Bob Collins has a fun, 1950s resort look. Echoing its colors and lines is a blue-and-white pillow from Williams-Sonoma Home. Above the sofa are black-and-white prints of America's Cup races from Trowbridge Gallery. OPPOSITE: Braff sees desktops as another opportunity for beauty. The large fish vase filled with ranunculus is from Franklin & Company. The pens are from www.asianideas.com.

