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Interior design by

MEG BRAFF

"I'll always
have a starburst
in my life."

Interview by
CHRISTINE PITTEL

Photographs by
THIBAUT JEANSON

The first thing designer Meg Braff bought for this Palm Beach living room was the fabric on the club chairs, Cowtan & Tout's Tortola in Multi Fern, and then she pulled her palette from it. The Chelsea armchairs from J.C. Cody, based on a design by Frances Elkins, "would add a lot of style to any room," Braff says. Starburst mirror from William-Wayne. Sconces from the Brighton Collection. A furry pouf from West Elm, in front of the fireplace, was the final touch.









CHRISTINE PITTEL:

If *Mad Men* was set in Palm Beach, this could have been Betty Draper's house—pretty and ladylike. What is it about this kind of decorating that's so appealing?

MEG BRAFF: It's reassuring, isn't it? There are no hard edges. I think I like it as much for what it represents as for the actual aesthetic. It suggests a nice way of life—linen cocktail napkins and a pitcher of martinis by the pool. The house was designed by John Volk, a prominent local architect back in the '30s and '40s whose houses are all very understated and manageable, not big "Ta da!" mansions. It's an elegant and restrained house that commands a certain level of good behavior.

Who's the client?

A snappy, 'with it' mom of three, and yet she has an old-fashioned side to her. When she told me she collected that great green Dodie Thayer Lettuce Ware from the 1960s, I knew we were going to get along perfectly. We made sure the dining room worked with it. >>

"This room really sparkles during the day, between the glass of the window and the glass on the table," Braff says. The "coral" chandelier mimics the curves of the Regency Center table by Niermann Weeks, set with Dodie Thayer Lettuce Ware. Fretwork side chairs from Hickory Chair can be customized to your color. Sea Island Trellis wallpaper by Brunschwig & Fils.



The trellis wallpaper and the palm trees make me think of white-gloved ladies lunching at the Colony Club.

I know—there's a lovely, genteel air about it, but it's not the least bit fogyish. My client wanted the trellis because it was light and cheerful. We cared just as much about how the room looked during the day as at night, because they eat every meal here. There's no place to eat in the kitchen. But this room was tricky because it's basically a passageway. I struggled with the table. I didn't want something that took up too much space visually, so I went with glass. And no carpet, because it can be a tripper if you're constantly walking across the corners. In a room without carpet, wallpaper is a good choice. It pulls everything together and adds some interest at eye level.

I see another '60s classic in the family room—grass cloth.

Grass cloth gives a nice weight to Sheetrock walls, and it comes in so many good colors now, like this charreuse. The color is repeated in the piping on the upholstery and relates back to the dining and living room chairs and ties these three main rooms together. I like to repeat a color. It might be a thread in a carpet, a wall, a trim, or the edging on a lampshade—just a touch, from room to room.

I'm looking at that starburst mirror over the mantel. When does a classic become a cliché?

Not yet, as far as I'm concerned. I'll always have a starburst in my life. There's just something about a radial design that draws your eye. This one is almost too big for the space, but that makes it more powerful. It's like all those old Kenneth Jay Lane faux brooches I keep buying. That stuff is so much fun.

A bedroom right off the living room is a challenge. How did you handle it?

I didn't use a lot of color because I wanted it to sort of disappear. I was going for something restful, neutral, beige, creamy. My client loves chinoiserie, and we found this pretty Brunswick & Fils wallpaper. Then we had a headboard made in



ABOVE: "Chinoiserie is so charming and never goes out of style," says Braff, who redid the stair rail in Chinese fretwork to liven up a dull entryway. Chandelier from John Rosselli. OPPOSITE: In a guest bedroom, Lhasa Camel wallpaper from Brunswick & Fils picks up the theme. Braff bought the vintage chest and then found linens by Jane Wilner with a similar fretwork motif. She added Oly's Claire bench "so the first thing you see from the living room isn't the bed." The light fixture is vintage: "I'm a great fan of vintage fixtures. They bring a lot of personality."

the same simple cotton as the curtains. We were on a tight budget, but I still did everything, down to the linens on the beds. Pretty linens really make a room.

So where do you put the money if the budget is tight?

The quickest way to blow a budget is on a carpet. Unless you're doing something really special, keep it simple. We did sisal in the living room. I ordered a sofa and had it covered in raw silk, which was a bit of a splurge. And then we put a nice bullion fringe on it to bring in more of that slate blue from the Cowtan & Tout fabric on the chairs. You could do the same thing with a sofa off the floor at Crate & Barrel—just add a trim to personalize it.

What's the easiest way to do curtains?

A pocket on a rod, like we did in the living room. It also makes the room seem taller, because your eye keeps going up that extra three inches around the pocket instead of stopping at the rod. Since I mounted them at ceiling height, there's a lot of wall space between the window and the

rod. I did tortoise matchstick shades to bridge that gap, and to make the silk curtains feel less formal.

I'll bet there's a logic behind those balloon shades in the master bedroom.

That's three yards of fabric per window, instead of 10, so they're less expensive. Besides, I didn't want to do the typical long curtains and little nightstands. It's a small bedroom, and I wanted to take advantage of the space I had by doing larger tables that could double as desks, or a dressing table, with a little stool you could pull out from underneath.

The mirrored finish adds a touch of glamour. And where did you find those great mirrored frames over the bed?

That was pure serendipity. They came with the prints, bought online from trowbridgegallery.com. They're a great source for affordable art, and I've discovered that these kinds of companies are often willing to customize the colors for you, if you just ask.

What's the biggest mistake people make when they hang art?

Scattering it around a room instead of grouping it. By hanging six prints in a grid over the family room sofa, I got the impact of a much larger piece of art. You look straight at that wall when you're sitting at the dining room table, so I needed that focal point. It's important to think about what you see when you're looking through a door to the next room.

Do I see that same ginger jar from the living room, now morphed into lamps?

Yes, there's that repetition again, which gives a house a subtle sense of continuity. Before I finish a job, I'll go to places like West Elm, William-Wayne, Mecox Gardens, and Pearl River or check out their Web sites to look for accessories—inexpensive Chinese porcelain, trays, place mats, table settings. You can really stretch a budget and still get that last layer of personality.

I have to ask: Why did you need two of those fish sculptures?

Because two is always better than one. I love pairs: they're classic.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO





One fabric—Talavera by Brunschwig & Fils—is used throughout the master bedroom, and that helps create a sense of serenity. “Blue and white just has a wonderful, airy feeling, and it appeals to both men and women,” Braff says. Willa bed by Oly. Bed linens by Hamburg House. Mercury glass night tables from JM Piers Designs. Armchair by Lee Industries. Artwork and mirrored frames from trowbridgegallery.com.





The family room feels relaxed and relates to the outdoors thanks to Phillip Jeffries grass cloth on the walls, furniture woven from water hyacinth reeds, and the palette. Chartreuse and slate blue, used as accents in the living room, become the dominant colors here. The upholstery is Norbar's Titan, with a contrast piping in chartreuse. "I liked the Bungalow 5 coffee table because it was a classic shape done in a contemporary way," Braff says. "And the lacquer finish looked great against the rougher textures." Artwork from Mecox Gardens. Rug from Saxony Carpet. Bijou end tables from Hickory Chair. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES