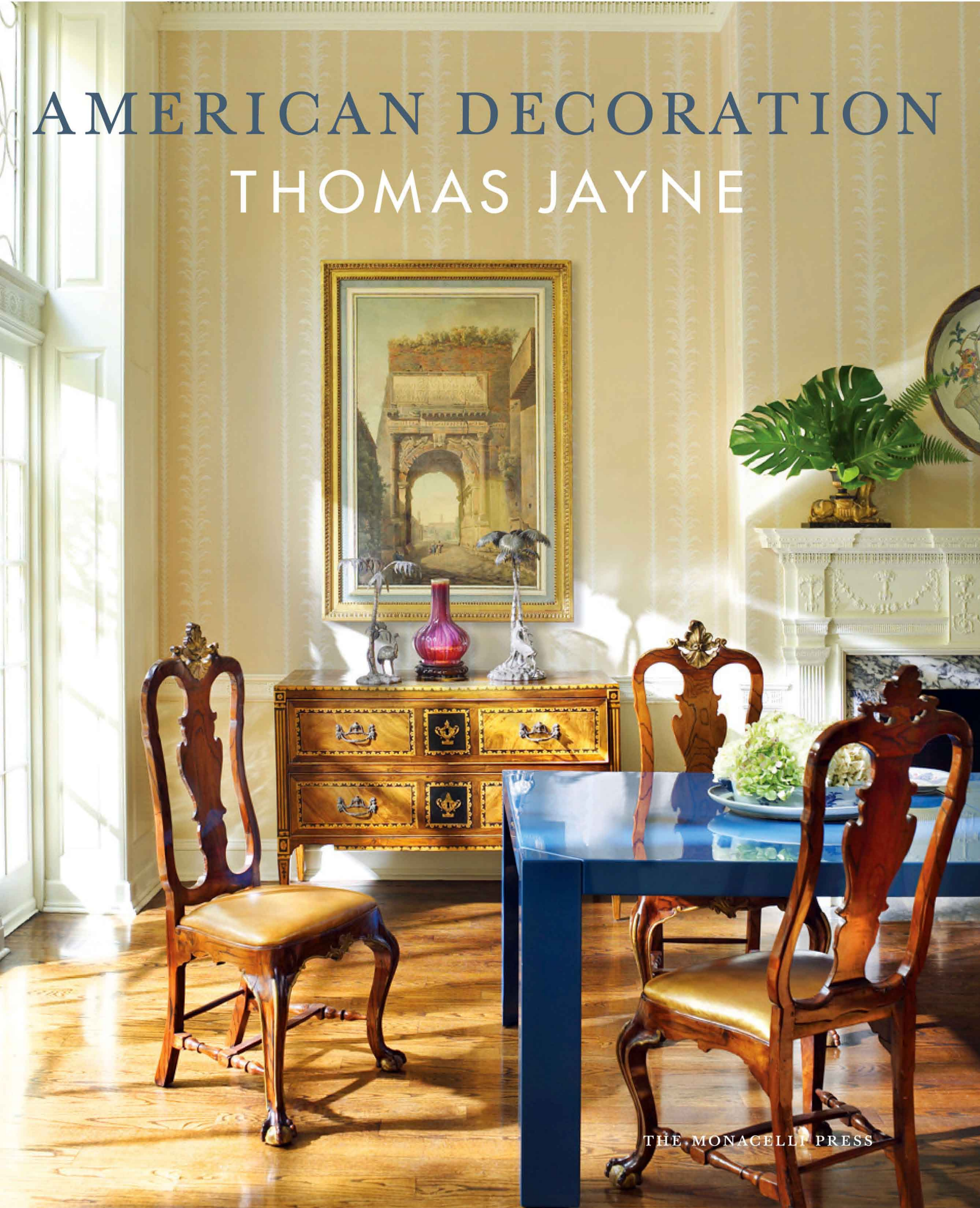


AMERICAN DECORATION

THOMAS JAYNE



THE MONACELLI PRESS

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AMERICAN DECORATION A SENSE OF PLACE

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Enriched Decoration

New York, New York

AT THE FIRST DESIGN MEETING for a project, I like to “reach,” as they say, and present my best thinking, no matter how grand it might be, with the understanding that these ideas will be adapted and tailored to our clients’ responses. At the inaugural meeting for this project, I offered the concept that within this relatively small two-bedroom apartment, each room would have a distinct theme and personality, much like rooms found in grand historic houses.

I suggested that the living room feature boldly painted walls based on a pattern for an eighteenth-century English dress silk, the second bedroom be turned into a library in the Egyptian Revival taste, and the bedroom be hung with Chinese wallpaper with views of villages. The dining room would be draped to resemble a tent, and the two connecting halls would be covered in aubergine silk.

All of this, of course, ran counter to the accepted wisdom that in smaller spaces it is best to keep things neutral and free of large patterns. Suggesting a contrarian view is an approach I call “advanced decorating,” or decorating that is, at least at first, not easy to appreciate or adopt. In this case, our client liked them all, and now she has a very personal and handsome apartment filled with delightful spaces.

The living room walls are covered in canvas painted by Anne Harris, based on 1707 designs for English dress silk by James Lehman. The pattern, dramatic but modulated so as not to overwhelm the room, is visually balanced by the weight of a Venetian fireplace and the frames of the paintings, especially a fanciful portrait reputedly of Marie Antoinette, and a series of abstract flowers, also by Anne Harris.

Two Egyptian-style bookcases with cavetto cornices and inlaid with the eyes of Horus, a symbol of protection, royal power, and good health, are the signature elements of the library, along with a collection of archaeological artifacts. The bedroom is also densely patterned with Chinese wallpaper commissioned for the room from Gracie. The furnishing fabrics are intentionally quiet to combine with the paper and give the room a calm nature.



The tented dining room has a Central European chandelier, remarkable collages by noted designer and artist James Mont, and a group of nineteenth-century English porcelain, including two vases decorated with polychrome flowers.



The dining room is at the center of the apartment with the front hall, living room, and kitchen opening into it. It is tented in part to balance the four asymmetric doorways and to eliminate the awkwardness of multiple doors.

Now this apartment is enriched to the point where it looks much larger than it is, suggesting that painting everything neutral colors and eliminating pattern might, in fact, make places look smaller.

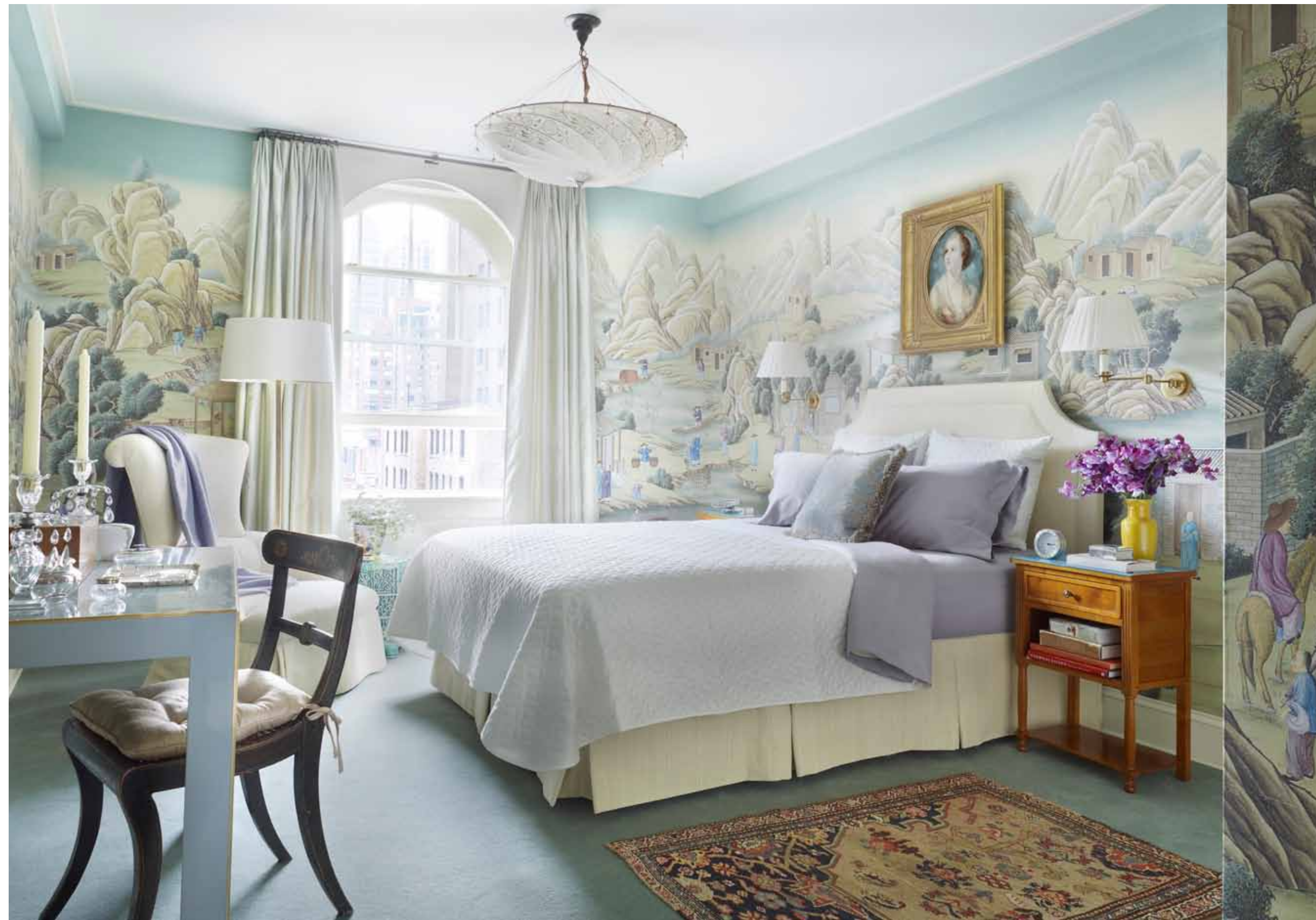




Many of the windows in this apartment are arched and almost touch the ceiling. In order to install shades and curtains we made window frames with deep reveals. Each room displays portraits from the collection our client has assembled over her lifetime. Here an English portrait is flanked by views of Egypt by David Roberts.



The bedroom is hung with paper painted with Chinese village scenes. The clean lines of the dressing table bring the room up to date. The carpet in the foreground is a rare Bidjar Sampler.





Quiet Colors for Collectors

Wynnewood, Pennsylvania



AT OUR FIRST DESIGN MEETING, our clients mentioned that they wanted to simplify the decoration of this historic house to display their expanding collection of postwar art.

We found the walls upholstered in striped silk taffeta, and the curtains were lined and interlined with rich valances of swags and jabots. Although well executed, the effect was dated. In contrast, we proposed russet-toned wool for the walls.

To complete the room, we supplied a suite of furniture based on models designed by Jean-Michel Frank in cream silk and plain cream-colored curtains, on simple rods and rings with the only surprising color accent a small yellow cuff. A green and cream brocade on the pillows also provides a modest contrast. The rest of the furniture is from the clients' collection of English and other European antiques.

Our clients resisted even this much color, and we began a lengthy discussion about how their art would look with it. I thought this was an understated choice; they thought it adventurous. After a substantial period of consideration, the russet wall covering was installed, and, in the end, we all agree it makes the art sing.

All the public rooms in the house use brown and green as the basis of their decoration. Our clients came around to our rationale that green performs as neutral color since it can be used alone and combined with any other color. All the rooms also share equally clean upholstery models, antiques, and uncomplicated curtains. At first the clients were hesitant to use any curtains at all, but we counseled that the historic proportions of the rooms, relative to the scale of the windows, demanded this somewhat old-fashioned luxury. To minimize the bulk of the panels they were made with one and a half widths of fabric rather than the usual three. Double pleating, rather than the typical triple pleat, also made a cleaner appearance.

In the breakfast room, the restrained color scheme is furthered by its centerpiece, a Calder mobile, a rare example in all white—even Calder's signature primary colors are not found here. The wicker chairs are stained green to contrast with the wooden cabinets, perhaps in an oblique nod to the dominant color scheme.





ABOVE

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We deconstructed the existing sun room, by removing a cornice made of bullion fringe, a legacy of 1980s taste, and refurnished the room with a suite of rattan with modern lines and soft upholstery covered in char-treuse standing against forest-green walls. In this verdant setting the Roy Lichtenstein in the corner of the room and the Richard Serra on the lawn outside are seen to full advantage.

Upstairs each bedroom is designed around a soft grays. The master bedroom is silver with further hints of yellow.

Of course what our clients meant by “no color” was low-key color, and its use was indeed an effective approach to decorating the house and to displaying the art. When we were photographing the house, the client mentioned that a number of museums now display their postwar art on brown walls—are ideas in the air, or might this be the result of the visits of many museum groups they so generously host?



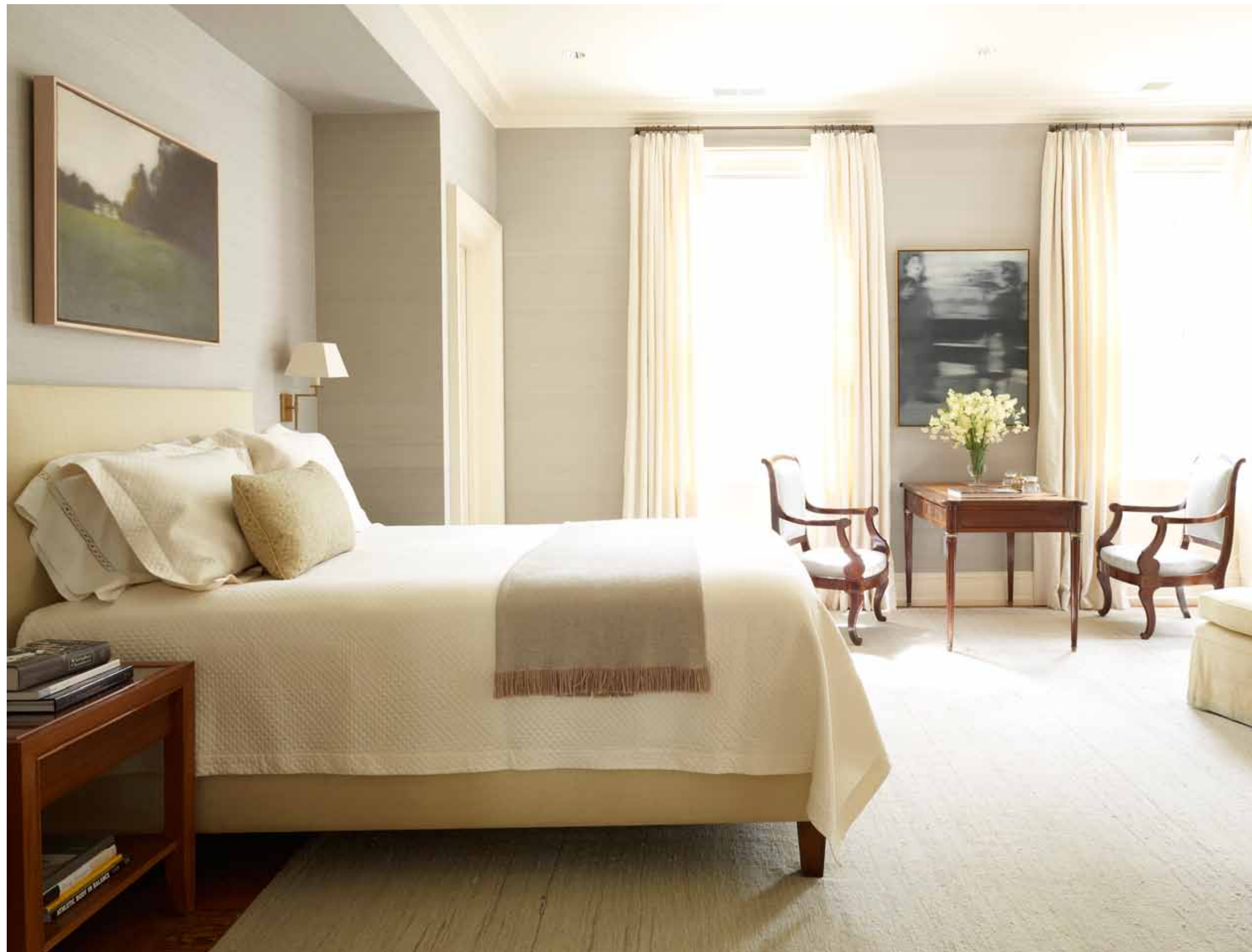
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ABOVE

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