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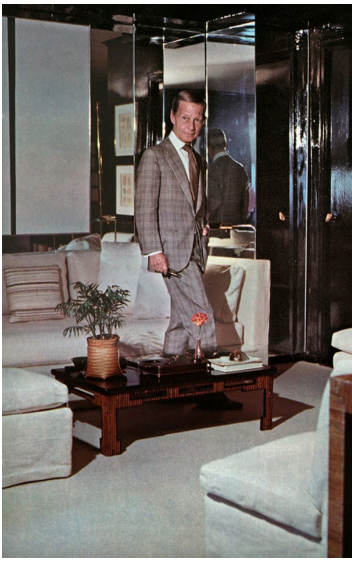
Elegance of the 40's – Rescued for the 90's



"I mentioned Billy Baldwin's name on a trip to Los Angeles last year"

..."and a person who should have known better said in all seriousness:

**'You mean Alec Baldwin's little brother, the actor?
Does he make furniture, too?'**



But if, Susan Dempsey, has anything to do about it, the country's homeowners and young design enthusiasts will soon be on intimate terms with Mr. Baldwin (no relation to Alec), the dapper decorator who brought richness of finish, purity of line and brilliant Matisse-inspired color to the homes of such clients as Greta Garbo, Cole Porter, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Mike Nichols.

The drawings and prototypes for Baldwin furniture were put up for auction last year after Luten Clarey Stern, the Manhattan showroom that owned the rights to them, went bankrupt. Miss Dempsey, 31, who used to work for the showroom (and who now owns Billy Baldwin Studio) decided to save the treasures from oblivion. The work of Mr. Baldwin, arguably the most famous American interior decorator, from the 1940's until his retirement in 1973, was a worthy cause. It's a collection, from the classic Baldwin slipper chair with comfortable, slightly angled back, to streamlined sofas and tables that look as good next to farmhouse antiques as they do alongside Lucite and chrome.

Thanks to its bilevel construction, the step table is "still my favorite bedside table," said Arthur E. Smith, a former associate of Mr. Baldwin. Miss Dempsey (isn't alone in her) appreciation for "Billy B," who died at the age of 80. Mr. Baldwin's admirers eagerly cite his influence on their work, not to mention his electrifying effect on American Style. Mark Hampton is a fervent Baldwin booster. So are designers David Hicks, Albert Hadley, Stephen Sills, James Huniford and Victoria Hagan. "He was the master of red-white-and-blue flag-waving America modernism," said Jeffrey Bilhuber, a decorator who said Mr. Baldwin's talent lay in "cutting through the clutter and getting down to the essentials." Mariette Himes Gomez, another designer who is a devotee, agreed. "He taught us the basics: polished floors, cotton upholstery, furniture free of distracting details," she said.

William Williar Baldwin Jr. was born in Baltimore, a city with the astonishing habit of churning out international tastemakers. The Duchess of Windsor was a local product. The extravagant editor in chief of Vogue, Diana Vreeland, claimed a healthy dose of Baltimore blue blood, too, as did Pauline de Rothschild. By the mid-1930's, Mr. Baldwin had made his way to the Manhattan offices of Ruby Ross Wood, a decorator of the society set, where he embarked on a career creating environments for top-drawer clientele. There was a rustic Hellenic hideaway for Jacqueline and Aristotle Onassis, a Belle Epoque salon at the St. Regis Hotel for William S. Paley, the founder of CBS and, most famously, apartments for celebrities like Miss Vreeland, who got exactly what she ordered: an all-red living room that she said looked like "a garden in hell."

Among the pieces reintroduced are his famous slipper chairs, as much a part of today's design vocabulary as they were 50 years ago. "Every woman has the most beautiful legs when she sits in one," Mr. Bilhuber said, "and better yet, it's wonderfully transportable."