

# AMERICAN HomeStyle

FORMERLY DECORATING REMODELING

Jan/Feb 1994 U.S. \$2.95

## THE NEW THRIFT

**Fresh Decorating Ideas**

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**A Step-by-Step Guide**

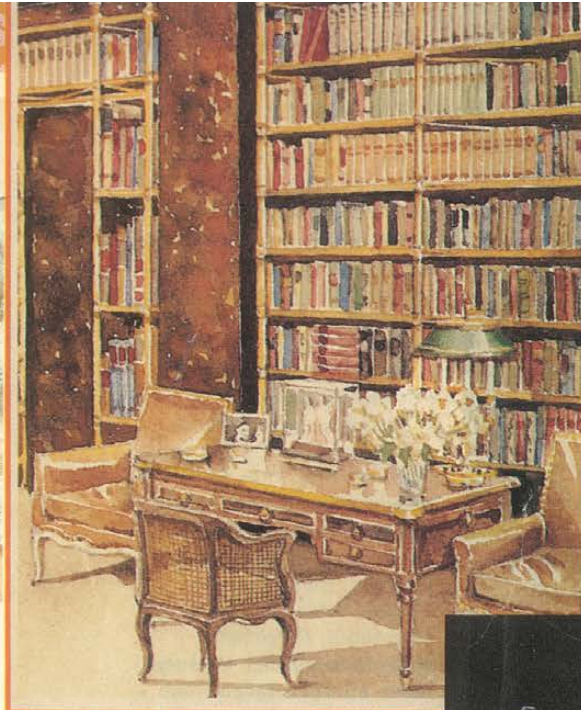


# 'S Wonderful

Furnishings inspired by Billy Baldwin's  
classic American designs







**1955** For Cole Porter, Baldwin (right) created a brass-and-leather library at Manhattan's Waldorf Towers (above), for Chicago socialite Mrs. Clive Runnells, **1959**, a chalk-and-cobalt living room in Florida (top).



JOHN BUTLER



**Produced by  
Mitchell Owens  
Photography  
by Tria Giovan**

BILLY BALDWIN HATED DECORATING. NOW, that may seem an odd assessment, given the celebrated interiors that the Baltimore-born tastemaker (1903–1983) created for Greta Garbo, Jacqueline Onassis and others, but it's true. A designer who left a legacy of classic furniture pieces as well as beautiful settings, Baldwin fervently believed that comfort was more important than furbelows. His style and philosophy are very much with us in the '90s, from the many reproductions of his furniture currently on the mar-

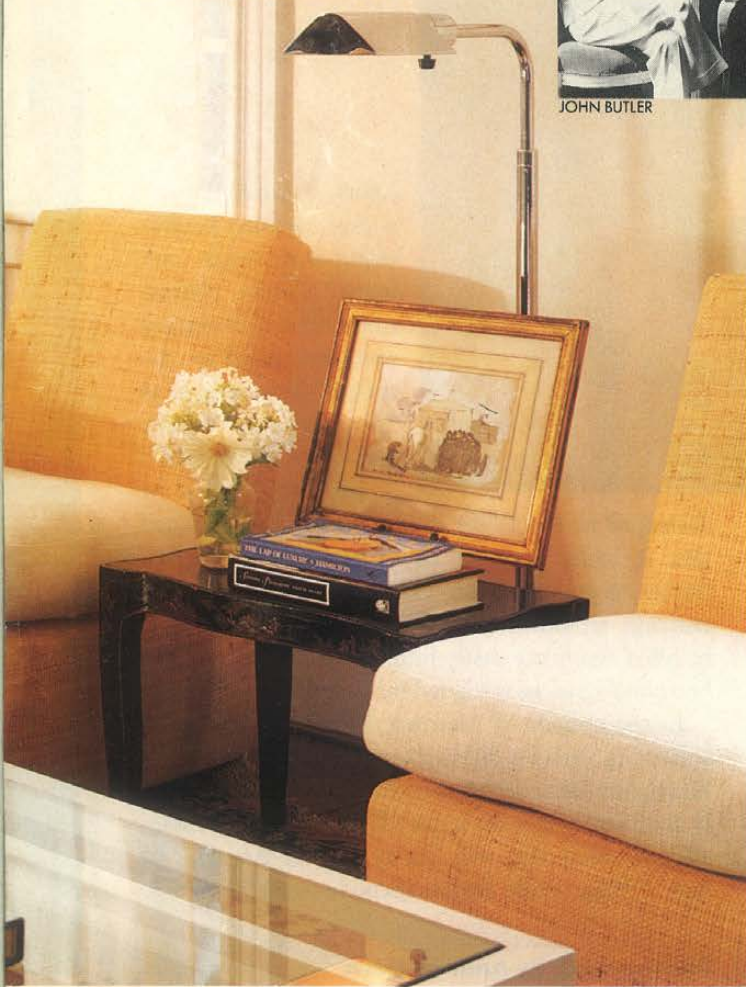
ket to the work of today's best young designers. The recent Nantucket Designer Showhouse was conceived as a tribute to Baldwin (he retired to the Atlantic isle at the end of his life). Relaxed in attitude but tailored in execution, each of the showhouse interiors perfectly illustrated Baldwin's paramount philosophy: "You should never be so aware of a room that it comes between you and the person you are with. That's not decoration, it's interference."

A Baldwin interior was a domestic declaration of independence, combining old-world icons (Louis XV armchairs, Chinese screens) with egalitarian essentials (Parsons tables, denim slipcovers). Though the generation of decorators before him worshiped the grandeur of Europe, Baldwin kept his eyes fixed, at least metaphorically, on Plymouth Rock.

"I can't tell you how American I am," he once said. "I'm against the all-English house or the all-French house or the all-Spanish house. . . . We have taste, too—in fact, we're a whole empire of taste."

Baldwin championed American virtues—simplicity, efficiency, honesty, charm. He loved clear

**1993** At the Nantucket Designer Showhouse, Matthew Patrick Smyth's room used Baldwin basics—sofa, chairs, table, all by Billy Baldwin Studio.







**1994** Create a Baldwin look with products made today. *Left:* Writing table, Bielecky Bros.; chair, Henredon; floor mat, ABC Carpet & Home; Roman shade, Pier 1 Imports; boxes, Takashimaya; gold candlestick, Barneys New York; gilt frame, Eli Wilner & Co. *Below:* Screen, Pottery Barn; lamp, Hinson/Hansen; decanters, Baccarat and Conran's Habitat; tray, Pier 1 Imports; tablecloth fabric, Shyam Ahuja. *Opposite:* Settee and chair, Pier 1 Imports; tiles, Country Floors; coffee table, Ikea; side table, Palazzetti; goblets and bowl, Pottery Barn; cushion fabric, The Ralph Lauren Home Collection; pillow fabrics, Shyam Ahuja and Laura Ashley.

**Shopping Guide, page 110**

#### BASIC BALDWINISMS

No color you like is ever out of style • Vinyl is a gift from heaven for children's rooms • An overlit room is a horror for dining • Upholstered furniture should be covered in neutral twill, then slipcovered • Good hardware gives a room a sense of quality • Napkins can't be too big • There is nothing duller than perfectly good taste • No room has atmosphere unless it is used and lived in • What's practical is beautiful • A room should be equally appetizing when filled with people or when you're alone there



colors, textured fabrics, wicker, Roman shades, swing-arm lamps and framed family photos. Checkbook decorating was something he despised, dismissing it as "not suitable to the way most of us live."

The slipper chair he developed in the 1930s is so perfectly proportioned that it looks great in any covering, from black leather to quilted chintz (Ventry Limited makes an exacting reproduction). The wicker-wrapped desks he liked assimilate easily into any decor; so, too, the brass bookcases he designed for Cole Porter's library.

In the opinion of Matthew Patrick Smyth—who scored big with his Baldwinesque living room for the Nantucket Designer Showhouse—the late, great Billy Baldwin is the decorator of the 1990s. "Simple, elegant rooms that will last as long as you do," he says. "What more could anybody want?"

**Photography by Andrew Garn**



Baldwin's best advice spans all times, all budgets:  
"What's practical is beautiful"

