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Great Houses for Entertaining

"If marble isn't stained, it means you're not really cooking."
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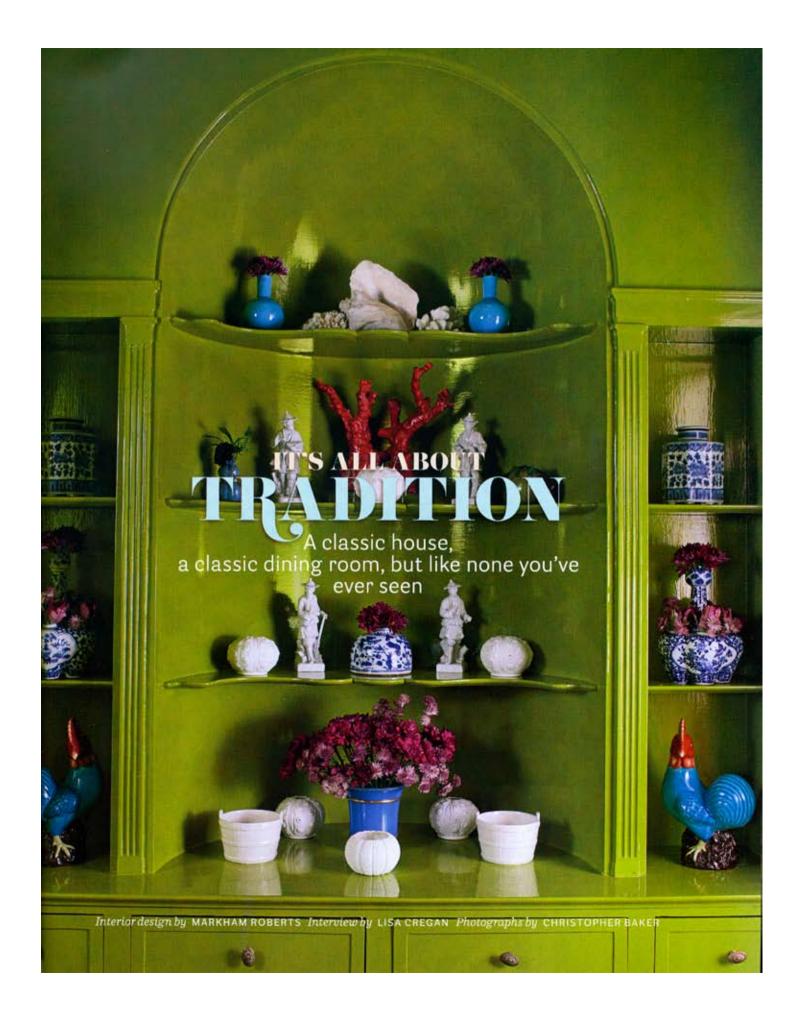












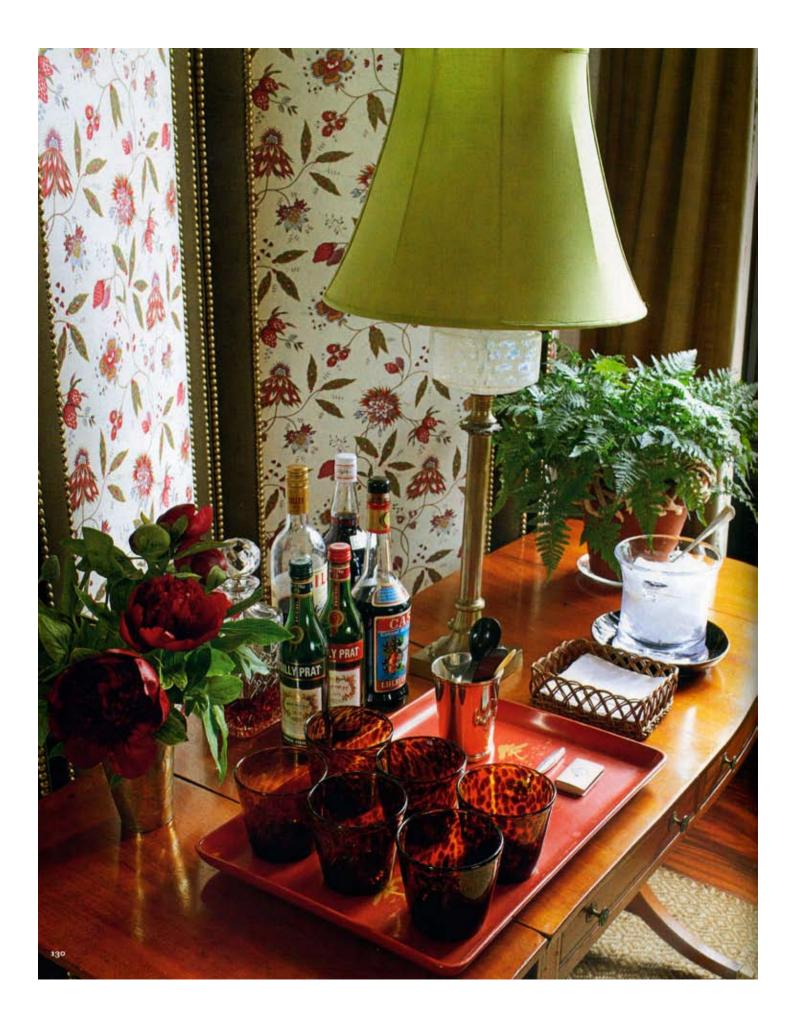














LISA CREGAN: A real honest-to-goodness formal dining room! I thought they'd gone the way of tomato aspic.

MARKHAM ROBERTS: Just because there's a big Georgian table in a big formal dining room doesn't mean there's a butler serving dinner. This room is octagonal and serious, but the

walls are all wild and bright. And I specifically said to myself, 'You are not going to use an old Georgian sideboard or Chippendale chairs here.' The owners are good friends of mine, young and super-fun with three little children, and they give long, long dinner parties where guests sit forever talking and laughing. You can't sit forever in a Chippendale chair. I know that because my grandmother had them, and we died. You can sink into these chairs and enjoy yourself all night.

Is that what meals are like at your house?

I don't have a dining room. When I entertain, we eat on our laps.

Like so many of us today.

But this is a classic 1930 house. There's no gigantic 'not-so-great-room' off the kitchen. I think if the owners had come to me and said they wanted to add a family room, I'd have said, 'I won't do it!' Because then this beautiful dining room would only be used on Thanksgiving or Christmas, and no one would ever spend time in the living room.

So they really use the living room.

They have drinks in there all the time, there's a backgammon table

the kids love, and see those antique settees? I ripped off their formal silk damask and burned it. Just kidding. But I did get the 'old lady' out of them. They were so Miss Havisham. That's what I did everywhere. I think the citrine green on the living room banquette and the sour-apple green lacquer on the dining room walls make this house feel so much younger than you would expect.

I'll bet your grandmother never used those colors. But even so, it does look as if you're keeping traditional decorating alive.

I don't really think of myself as traditional. You can see I use a lot of modern furniture and art. And I certainly don't want to live like my grandmother. I want to put my feet up and watch a flat-screen TV. But I do love elegant old houses, and I'm not sure everyone knows how to make them comfortable. If I filled this place with midcentury furniture or 1970s chrome and glass like some people

do today, it wouldn't work long-term. Eventually the rooms would feel like some time capsule of what's popular now. They'd wind up looking hilarious.

Well, you also know how to make big rooms feel cozy and intimate.

I think that's because there's not a lot of wasted space. If you fill up a large room with furniture, it's just so much more useful and comfortable. The living room is filled with seating, and it's comfortable for two sitting at the game table, or 50 milling about.

Are you always this fearless with pattern?

I do enjoy using pattern in rooms where

there's a lot of furniture because it adds so much interest. That beautiful fabric on the dining room chairs is strong and lively enough to hold its own against the lacquered walls and iridescent curtains. But then I kept the rug a simple color, a glowy taupe, very good for hiding stains, dragging

dining chairs across, and stabbing with high heels. And I'm proud to say there are at least seven florals in the living room. But I'll tell you why it works. It works because they're masculine patterns, not cabbaggrose chintzes. There's an Indian tree of life here, an ikat there. The kind of unfussy patterns that appeal to me.

But those are some pretty big roses on the dressing room walls.

That's a whole different thing.1 wanted to do a pretty, fancy lady's dressing room for my friend as part of the master suite. I said, 'This is your space, only for you, let's just do it in this wonderful oldfashioned chintz.' I did softer walls in the bedroom. I think the room would have died if I hadn't used pattern, but this print is watery and calming. Women always want their bedrooms to be romanticand pink, but pink isn't always popular with men. This blue makes both men and women happy, and it's still romantic.

How would you define your style?

I don't know if I could ever define it exactly, but I will say that all my clients like antiques, and so I always try to squeeze in some contempo-

rary elements for a bit of youth. The English Regency console in the living room has a big unframed modern photo over it. I hung a contemporary painting, a mandala, in front of all the books in the library.

It's really kind of hypnotic.

Mandalas are supposed to cleanse your energy, but for me it cleanses the room, rids it of formality.

Is the library paneling original?

Yes, it's pine, and very Georgian. It's not perfect, but I said, 'Don't you dare touch it!' Its imperfections are beautiful.

PRODUCED BY SENGA MORTIMER & WHITNEY ROBINSON

ABOVE: An elaborately feminine dressing room is a Roberts signature. Chintz-covered walls in Hydrangea & Rose in Green and Pink by Travers. OPPOSITE: Roberts wanted pattern in the master bedroom, but he also wanted the room to be peaceful. He struck the perfect balance by upholstering the walls in a watery blue print—Colefax and Fowler's Lincoln, in Cream and Aqua. "The rest is comfort and softness," he says, "from the pale beige rug to the ivory curtains"



