

NOVEMBER 2009

# House Beautiful

## GREAT HOUSES FOR ENTERTAINING

the **35** best  
**THANK  
YOU  
notes**

how to  
**dress up  
BASIC  
WHITE  
CHINA**



\$4.50



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November 2009

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IT'S ALL ABOUT  
**TRADITION**

A classic house,  
a classic dining room, but like none you've  
ever seen

Interior design by MARKHAM ROBERTS Interview by LISA CREGAN Photographs by CHRISTOPHER BAKER



HOW DO YOU LIKE TO  
ENTERTAIN?



A 10-by-3-foot horseshoe banquette makes the living room of a Long Island, New York, house. Markham Roberts designed it for the bay window and covered it in a fresh, bright green, Brasilia (in Anis) by Manuel Canovas. His pillows are simply inspired. OPPOSITE: A dining room cabinet lacquered tart apple green sets off a collection of porcelains and coral. "Everything looks amazing against this color," Roberts says.









"The living room is enormous," says Roberts, "and I wanted to fill it with seating to make it comfortable for either two people to sit at the game table, or 50 people to mill all over." A paisley ottoman serves as a coffee table or another place to perch. The ceiling is painted in a faux-wooden finish, to give it warmth and drama. Walls are upholstered in silk burlap to absorb sound.





Lacquered green walls bring the dining room alive. "Vibrant, shining green takes the fuddy-duddy out of this formal room," Roberts says. Queen Anne-style chairs are covered in Braquenié's Coromandel and backed with a Brunshwig & Fils velvet, Botticelli in Olive. Roberts designed the blown-up Chinese medallion rug and the red linen-covered console. The pair of lamps, from James Sansum, are made from 19th-century Chinese vases. Tole chandelier by Vaughan.





HOW DO THEY LIKE TO ENTERTAIN?

- Handwritten invitations or a phone call. No Evites!
- Linen place mats instead of a tablecloth—the table is so pretty.
- Soft lighting. No bright overheads.
- Black candles: they disappear.
- A drink with my husband before the party.







Glazed walls give the entry warmth and a glow, and the bold chevron carpet adds a casual touch. Roberts's miniature poodle, Choppy, claims his favorite spot in the house, a settee covered in Carleton V's Tamarack Stripe in Espresso. The antique Chinese lanterns and bamboo chairs are from James Sansum. OPPOSITE: A screen in Fraises Sauvages (in Multi on Cream, by Lelievre) defines the living room bar area.





**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 cabbage-rose 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. I 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 old-fashioned 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 romantic and 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 contemporary

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."







