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To get the inside scoop on this room!
SEE PAGE 12 FOR DETAILS

The living/dining room of designer Brian McCarthy and Daniel Sager's country house in Kerhonkson, New York, "is all about bringing light and the outdoors in," McCarthy says. He chose a Swedish palette of ivory and pale gray for the background, which he repeated throughout the house. Walls are Linen White and trim is Stonington Gray, both by Benjamin Moore; a gray wash gives the pine floor a naturally bleached look. An antique suzani adds a bold hit of pattern and color to the elegant simplicity of the room. Vosges dining table and chairs. Painting by Michael Krebber.

IT'S NOT ABOUT "DECORATING"—
IT'S ABOUT FURNISHING A ROOM
WITH THE THINGS YOU LOVE

COLLECTING

Interior design by BRIAN MCCARTHY Interview by BARBARA KING Photographs by FRANCESCO LAGNESE



LISTEN!
SCAN THIS PHOTO
TO HEAR FROM
THE DESIGNER

A fantastical, wall-size painting by Kati Heck titled *Spring Cleaning* hangs opposite the fireplace in the living room. “I like how the Directoire daybed establishes a foreground and leads you into the scene,” says McCarthy, a longtime collector of late-18th- and early-19th-century French furniture. A backgammon table from the Rubin Museum of Art holds a table lamp of natural sponge and iron by Parisian designer Hélène de Saint Lager.



BARBARA KING: Quick quiz: What word best captures the spirit of your house?

BRIAN McCARTHY: Scrapbook. It's not about fabulousness or decorating for decorating's sake. I can walk you through, and there's not a single thing I can't tell you about—where it came from, when, whether it's from my life before I met my partner, Danny, or from our combined lives.

Pick one and tell me about it.

The Directoire bed in the living room is the first piece of French furniture I ever bought. I was working at Parish-Hadley—this was about 25 years ago—and two dealers in New York were going out of business. Sister Parish and I went there one day, and I ended up buying the bed along with a wonderful embroidered cover, which she was ready to knock my lights out for. I said, 'I'm sorry. I saw it first!' I was living with nothing at the time, but I had an interest in 18th- and 19th-century European furniture, mostly French. The first apartment I did for myself was very Parisian—and very decorated. I would never do that look again in a million years.

Why French in particular?

I liked the architectural quality, the lightness of the lines. So I began to collect.

And you kept on collecting.

Most of the French pieces are from my past life. My zeal has moved to art and objects, but I'm not driven to acquire things in an academic way. There's a coherence to what I collect, but if you ask me to define what it is, I couldn't begin to tell you. I just buy what I love, what strikes my eye. Collections create the layers that are what give a house heart and soul.

Those layers are a narrative telling the story of a life.

A house ought to be reflective of your passions. If a client came to me and said, 'I'm passionate about pickup sticks. I want to do a whole house around them,' I'm telling you, I'll take that passion and run with it. Come to me with your idea, and I'll embrace it! That's assuming it's not a horrible idea, of course.

Unlike pickup sticks, you mean?

I could probably do something really interesting with them. I could come up with some exciting modernist creation. I'm already imagining Sol LeWitt paintings.

What did you imagine here?

Danny and I knew we wanted a Greek Revival house—it has a purity of form we both love. I use the term very loosely, because our house is sort of a dumbed-down, humble, American farmhouse version of the style—what I call 'Midwestern Greek Revival.' But it was two years before there was even a semblance of a completed furniture plan. When we finished building the house, we moved in with nothing except a card table from Staples,

a leather coffee table from my old apartment, and four Saarinen chairs. And then we said, 'Let's get whatever we have in storage and bring it up here.' Over time, we've added and subtracted, but it's not a deliberate house.

Not deliberate—now that's an intriguing word choice.

I mean that there's a kind of looseness to the way things are put together. I was greatly influenced in that regard by Albert Hadley. Architecturally, a house had to be correct, but there was nothing rigid about Albert's interiors, or Sister's. The beauty of the Parish-Hadley approach was the eclecticism. I think that's one of the things that's so great about American style: the wonderful amalgamation of things, the way they're mixed. There's a certain casualness to it.

And yet there are definite elements of a very well-ordered, traditional plan here.

Oh, absolutely. I started with the classical structure—the architecture—but then softened the edges. It's the same with our garden.

Which, to me, conjures the English country gardens of Russell Page and Gertrude Jekyll—that dreamy blend of formal and natural.

You're spot-on. The garden has an architectural sensibility, but it takes off from the formality with a certain wildness. The plants begin to billow and flow. When we bought the property—it's 16 acres, five of them are our gardens and the other 11 are an alfalfa field—there wasn't a tree or a blade of grass. So I started spending my Sunday mornings walking around with my sketch pad and doing scenarios of where everything should be—every shrub, every border, every path; the pergola, the pool, the lotus pond.

Your pergola is like a little Greek temple in the woods.

Thank you, Prince Charles! There's a folly on the grounds of his country home, Highgrove House, that I fell in love with. This is my interpretation.

Are you and Danny always in sync with the way things should look?

Sure. Well, before we moved in, he made this sort of broad declaration: No Louis XIV, no Louis XVI. It's a country house in America, and he didn't want museum-quality French pieces here. There are good pieces, but they fly under the radar. It's not a precious house. We've got items we've bought for about \$200.

Are you exaggerating?

Not at all. The living room chandelier was \$100—and then, OK, \$3,000 to electrify it! My jaw hit the floor when I got the bill.

Still not exaggerating?

I wish I were. But at the end of the day, it was worth it. It has a beautiful simplicity, and it's one of the last things I would ever think to replace.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO



The master bedroom is a testament to McCarthy's passion for ethnic patterns, metal pieces, and European antiques. A French iron light fixture hangs above the bed, dressed with a Madeline Weinrib suzani and draped with Restoration Hardware curtains. The window curtains, Masara by Warwick Fabrics, pick up the diamond pattern of the bed's footboard. A flea-market club chair is upholstered in Anatolia by Brunswick & Fils and accented with a pillow covered in Indian embroidered fabric. Daisy, a poodle mix, is allowed full run of the house.



1. The stairwell hall serves as a mini-gallery for contemporary art, including wire insects in glass boxes. "Danny is a freak for wire," McCarthy says. 2. A framed grasshopper from Deyrolle in Paris brings a colorful note to a guest room. McCarthy used wallpaper in the guest rooms "to add a little atmosphere, being that they're small." 3. An African feather headdress pops against Albert Hadley's Fireworks for Hinson & Company. 4. A Tom Blake lamp made of salvaged pipe appeals to another passion of the couple: artisanal pieces. Behind the lamp is a photograph by Elisabetta Benassi. 5. An antique French daybed in the study. 6. A mirror from Balsamo is flanked by a pair of Italian gilded wood mirrors on a chest of drawers from Cupboards & Roses Swedish Antiques. 7. The jaunty wool blankets in a guest room are from Dabney McAvoy Home. 8. An early-19th-century French bergère offers an inviting place to read by the fireplace in the master bedroom. Above the mantel, a painting by Edi Hila. 9. An antique tole lantern is paired with a vintage flea market painting. **OPPOSITE:** Like the master bedroom, the master bath is trimmed in dark gray—Benjamin Moore's Ebony King—to create contrast and highlight architectural details. A dainty Elsie de Wolfe-style chair and a pair of surreal photographs by Jean-François Fourtou create their own kind of contrast.





A Greek-temple garden folly at Highgrove House, the country residence of Prince Charles, inspired the wood pergola. The royal version was designed by the much-revered Isabel and Julian Bannerman, known for dreamy English gardens filled with classical allusions. McCarthy planned all the trees and shrubs on the property, which was once entirely alfalfa fields.



Stone paths, iron urns, and curved garden benches dot the five acres of gardens surrounding the house, which McCarthy describes as "Greek Revival meets American farmhouse." **OPPOSITE, TOP:** An abundance of plants lining the pathway to the pool are allowed to grow wild in the natural style of English country gardens. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM:** The gracefully undulating, sculpted boxwood border that frames the lotus pond has a more formal presence, reminiscent of classical French gardens. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES