

Rooms *in* Bloom

INSPIRED BY THE GLORIES OF THE GARDEN, THREE ENCHANTING SPACES OFFER TRANQUIL RESPITE YEAR-ROUND.

WRITTEN BY BART BOEHLERT



PHOTO: ANNIE SCHLECHTER.



In a Greenwich, Connecticut, garden room designed by Matthew Kowles, his client's trip to Morocco led the room's scheme—from the color palette down to the antique fountain and cafe table.



Vibrant Escape

New York-based designer Matthew Kowles brought the essence of Marrakech to Greenwich, Connecticut, crafting a verdant garden room for a client who had recently moved into a classic stone-and-timber house built in 1893 for a Gilded Age heiress. With views of Cos Cob Harbor and the Long Island Sound, the designer knew the neglected second-floor open-air space had the potential to be transformed into a peaceful, restorative retreat.

Kowles devised a scheme that would nod to its natural surroundings as well as the homeowner's far-flung travels, including a recent trip to Morocco (the interior pool gardens of stately riads

proved especially inspiring). In keeping with the home's origins, Kowles stripped the room's original hickory beams to expose the natural graining. He then drenched the room in Moroccan green, laying the floor with glossy hand-chiseled terra-cotta zellige tiles in a watery, bottle green hue and enlisted decorative painter Shelly Denning to adorn the walls and ceiling in a matte lime plaster finish. The contrasting tableau creates a cocoon of rich, tactile layers. "We made the green all-enveloping," says Kowles, "so we didn't need many plants to still have a garden feel."

Overhead, Moroccan-inspired rattan pendants add an exotic touch. A chaise that once belonged to the

homeowner's mother was recovered in Miles Redd's exuberant Peacock fabric for Schumacher. Kowles worked hand-in-hand with his client throughout the process, even teaming up to scour antique markets for finishing touches. "We did an extensive antiques dive," recalls Kowles. "She is an adventurous client and a lot of fun to work with." Their finds included a romantic bird cage and Tuscan-style fountain that add to the room's charming ambiance as well as a cafe table that Kowles topped with a marble slab. What's more, the once-forgotten space is now an all-season retreat thanks to heated floors, bringing the feel of the garden indoors even when it lies dormant beyond the windows. matthewkowles.com

PHOTOS: ANNIE SCHLECHTER.



Floral Fantasy

A master at bringing the allure of the outdoors in, Rachel Lambert “Bunny” Mellon was a renowned philanthropist and horticulturalist who imbued interiors with her love for the garden. A close friend and mentor of Jacqueline Kennedy—for whom she redesigned the White House Rose Garden—Mellon deftly combined gardens, antiques and art to create breathtaking homes that reflected her decorating dictum, “Nothing should be noticed.”

“Her sophistication and the way she lived was simple yet very luxurious,” observes Dallas interior designer Cathy Kincaid, a longtime admirer of Mellon’s inimitable style. “She would have a Manet or Rothko painting next to a sawhorse table.” Adding, “everything was collected, edited and well thought out.” Though Mellon had access to the world’s finest art and furniture, her homes were neither fancy nor stuffy. Instead, they were marked by an airy, comfortable and relaxed ease that remains the hallmark of great American style today.

When tasked with reimagining a room for Kips Bay Decorator Show House Dallas, Kincaid drew inspiration from none other than Mellon’s Oak Spring Farm estate in Upperville, Virginia. In a nod to Mellon’s signature time-worn, understated color palette, Kincaid wrapped the walls and ceiling in Lisa Fine’s Persian Garden wallpaper. Window seats and romantic architectural details were added by architect Alex Eskenasy, including Gothic arches accented with plaster appliques by Casci Ornamental Plaster. And in keeping with Mellon’s penchant for painted wood floors, Kincaid called on Mirth Studio to adorn the room’s flooring with a striking geometric motif. Gardening books and topiaries—another Mellon hallmark—dot the refined and restful space that is imbued with a lightness and charm that echoes the understated elegance of Mellon herself. cathy-kincaid.com

PHOTO: KRIS ELLIS, COURTESY LISA FINE.



Botanical Beauty

When designer Gretchen Farrell's clients called upon her to rethink an architecturally-devoid basement room with low ceilings and wall-to-wall carpeting, she looked no further than the property's beautiful backyard, which was ripe with inspiration thanks to a charming garden and Victorian Gothic greenhouse. "The clients, who are avid gardeners, said to me, 'Can we do something that is an extension of the garden right outside the door?'" recalls Farrell.

The North Salem, New York, designer took cues from the famous garden rooms of Federico Forquet and Renzo Mongiardino for Marella Agnelli, among others. "Their spaces are very lived in and possess an ease while still being thoughtfully designed," she observes.

Farrell got to work ripping out the carpeting and laying down a unifying bluestone that can also be found in the garden. To store the homeowners' collection of vases, vessels, pots and candles, she designed 18-foot-long Shaker-inspired cabinetry on one side of the room, which is accented with printed linen inserts set behind chicken wire (a nod to the clients' hobby of raising chickens).

A medley of pale, neutral colors and textures flow throughout the scheme, while jute rugs and an Elizabeth Dow woven wallpaper add a layer of warmth. Centering the room is a 19th century English antique farm table atop of which potting and gardening often takes place. Nearby is a seating area featuring vintage rattan furniture sporting its original

garden-inspired green hue. Throughout, the homeowners' collection of framed pressed flowers, garden reference books and inherited garden objects add a dose of horticultural authenticity. A truly multifunctional space, it can morph from gardening workhorse (ferns and geraniums are moved inside come winter) to entertaining central. When evening temperatures make it too chilly to dine alfresco, the space is dressed with candlelight and linens for spontaneous dinner parties. But it is at daybreak when the real magic happens. "Every morning the client sips her coffee overlooking the greenhouse as the sun rises," reports Farrell. "It's been the most pleasurable, happy outcome for them, which is the most rewarding experience I can have as a designer." gretchenfarrell.com