

APRIL 2008

# House Beautiful

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**furniture**  
*issue*

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SMALL  
ROOMS

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*American*  
**CLASSIC**

A SOPHISTICATED NEW TAKE  
ON THE SURE, TAILORED  
TRADITION OF BILLY BALDWIN  
AND ALBERT HADLEY

*Interior design by*  
DAVID KLEINBERG

*Interview by*  
LISA CREGAN

*Photographs by*  
CHRISTOPHER BAKER

In a classic 1920s Long Island house, David Kleinberg blended serious antiques into relaxed rooms designed for family life. "The upholstered furniture here is the supporting cast," Kleinberg says. "The antiques are the stars." Midcentury pieces like a leather chair by Jacques Adnet, an end table by Maxime Old, and oak-framed armchairs by Jean Royère "work beautifully against the traditional American architecture," he says. An antique Italian sunflower mirror hangs over the fireplace.

**LISA CREGAN:** This Long Island house is so high-spirited, I feel like a guest at a great cocktail party—do I stand in one spot and enjoy looking around, or do I move into the next room to see what's going on? How do you keep things so lively?

**DAVID KLEINBERG:** I never ever want a person to be able to take in a whole room in just one glance. That would be so boring, and things become much more interesting when there's a mix. I always try to make sure things correspond and relate but not repeat. Does that make sense?

**I think so, but give me an example.**

OK, take those tables on either side of the central sofa in the living room. The round one on the left is French from the 1940s, and the dark square bentwood table on the other end is earlier 20th-century Austrian. They are completely unrelated, but somehow they read as two of a kind, you know? We were careful about scale, not about finding tables that were exactly the same.

**You seem to have focused on lots of dark midcentury oak pieces. Any particular reason?**

This is one of those classic 1920s houses on the East End of Long

Island, and I think all the dark modern furniture juxtaposes beautifully against the traditional American architecture. For example, something like the dining room table, which is 1940s French, has a traditional aesthetic to it but it also has a wonderful edginess to the design. But we weren't strict to any period, so even though there's continuity as far as visual interest here, there isn't a sameness to any of these rooms. I hope!

**So would it be fair to call your style eclectic?**

Oh no! I was once quoted as saying that when the word 'eclectic' hit the design community, it was the death knell for taste. I'm kidding, but to me that word somehow implies you can mix things together without serious thought. Everything I do, even where there's a bit of whimsy, like in this house, has an underlying structure—I've thought it through.

**Essentially this is a beach house, isn't it? And the owners have two young children. Weren't you taking a risk decorating with all those lovely vintage pieces?**

This is user-friendly furniture, nothing fragile, meant for shoes-off, T-shirt kind of living. I'm always

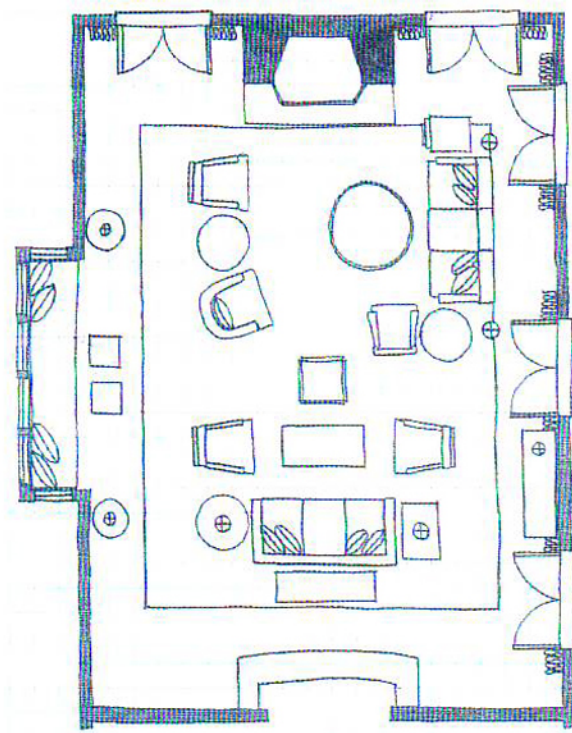
drawn to a craftsmanlike quality when it comes to furniture.

**That craftsmanlike quality is what struck me immediately about pieces like the library coffee table and the dining table and chairs—they have such a personalized look.**

You're right. The coffee table is glazed terra-cotta tile. It's only nine inches tall and you practically have to fall off the sofa to put something on it, but there's something charming about that and, of course, it's bullet-proof. My clients don't have to worry about the kids spilling on it or putting their feet up. The dining room table expands in a very carpenter-like way, and those dining chairs, where the leather is attached with those very obvious overscale nail-heads, have backs that adjust manually with a ratchet behind the seats. It's all meant for everyday use. I love that about it.

**What's your secret for how to edit a house, how to keep from overwhelming it with too many furnishings?**

We try to avoid what we call 'Dick Van Dyke moments.' You know how he trips over the ottoman in the opening credits of his old show? When we're doing a floor plan and



**LIVING ROOM** David Kleinberg suggests...

- Place identical upholstered sofas in each of the two furniture groupings to maintain balance: "I always create some kind of symmetry."
- Round tables break up the linear furniture arrangement, and every seat has a convenient table for "a glass of wine, a book, or a cup of tea."
- Create what he calls, "conversation distance" between seating arrangements. "Not too far apart, but not too close together, either. I don't like extraneous chairs filling up a room."
- One large rug rather than a group of competing small ones holds the room together. "It's a very subtle pattern here, but I still think it helps animate the furniture, with all those broad strokes of solid colors on the upholstered pieces."
- A pair of floor lamps behind a sofa spread reading light evenly—no need to lean left or right.



The dining room's set of ten 1950s oak chairs by Maxime Old, upholstered in their original black leather, are sturdy enough to withstand everyday use. "The family is supposed to be hands-off," says Kleinberg. The tall Jacques Adnet sconce is one of a pair. "I like it because it recalls a street lamp, garden light, or even a Venetian torchère." The oak extension dining table is by Jacques Klein.



something seems like it might get in the way, I say, 'That might be a Dick Van Dyke moment.' I don't like to fill up a house with extraneous bits. That's how I edit.

**Your paint colors are well edited, too. Everything is soft and subtle.**

I just think that the use of color with some restraint is so much more effective. I either use color and pattern in this way, restricted to throw pillows in the living room, or I use it everywhere. Either restrained or in abundance. For me, there's no middle ground. The walls here go from pale aqua in the master bedroom to creams in the downstairs spaces. We wanted the house to have a calm, coherent quality. Those colors maximize light and it all sort of speaks quietly.

**And which part of the house speaks to you the most?**

The pool house. I love it! We built it

from scratch, a big continuous sitting room with a kitchen at one end. The floor is bluestone and it continues out onto the terrace on the poolside. It's meant for wet feet and grass in your toes and the kitchen is very help-yourself. I had a clear vision and I always knew I wanted a sky blue palette there. The furniture plan is very symmetrical—a sofa flanked by four chairs, basically. There's a fireplace at one end and tall 22-foot-high ceilings, and behind the kitchen there's a little bedroom. I think I could live there so happily. It's all I would need, you know?

**Is there anything else that you especially love here?**

The house is on a high piece of property, and from the desk in the corner of the master bedroom you can see the ocean. It's a curved desk, angled to catch the view, but it also works

because it's a curve in a square corner. You can sit there and rotate to look through both windows. I also love that crazy headboard with its wobbly wings. And I love that lamp on the desk. It goes back to that craftsmanlike quality—you can see how it was thrown and it provides such dramatic contrast.

**It must be hard for you to find such wonderfully individual pieces and then have to give them up for adoption.**

I'd like to think I'm a very well-adjusted decorator. If I allowed myself, I could be in a constant state of wanting, so I try not to covet anything that I find for clients. But having said that, there is that set of three Jean Royère armchairs and matching ottoman in the living room....

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO  
AND CHESIE BREEN  
STYLED BY WHITNEY ROBINSON

ABOVE: The Kleinberg-designed pool house is a favorite spot for family lunches. The 22-foot-high ceilings are grounded by a set of 1940s oak frame chairs and two coffee tables from France, and a Jean-Michel Frank-style sofa. LEFT: "I tried to limit the traditional kitchen elements, because I wanted it all to feel more like furniture," says Kleinberg. The 1950s bar stools are by Jean Prouvé; the pair of British Colonial brass extension lights are early 20th century from India.



"In the master bedroom we used carefully placed punches of blue," says Kleinberg. "Bursts of color have so much impact." The blue porcelain lamp by Paul Hanson is from the 1950s, and rests on a 1930s English oak table. Ocean views are framed by curtains in Julienne Taffeta Stripe from Brunshaw & Fils. Kleinberg designed the headboard and covered it in Montague in Sky from Rose Tarlow. An antique klismos chair is paired with a midcentury oak writing desk; ceramic lamp is from Madoura.

Kleinberg based his design of the master bathroom sink-stand on a French iron console. The rug is 1950s Swedish by Marianne Richter. OPPOSITE: The pair of midcentury Hans Wegner Papa Bear armchairs flanking a 1940s French table in the master bedroom "are iconic," says Kleinberg. "People are drawn to them—they're enveloping and welcoming. I can just see this couple sitting there at the end of the day with a glass of wine and a big fire going."





A David Salle painting is a dominant presence in the library, "which is used as a family room," says Kleinberg. "The kids watch TV in here." The Chanel-style sofa and the upholstered chair are by Anthony Lawrence-Belfair. The mahogany and cane chair, terra-cotta tile coffee table, and round oak and marble side table are all 1940s French. The leather and linen carpet is from Patterson, Flynn & Martin. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES