



THE ENTRY TO THIS CHARMING HAMPTONS COTTAGE was a little abrupt. The front door opened smack into the living room, killing any intimacy and baring everything at once. There was no drama of discovery. But I don't think the only alternative to this condition, which is very common, is a formal foyer enclosed by walls. We invented a solution based on the idea that peeking into the space might be a good approach.

First, we conjured up the notion of an entry by painting a black "rug," with glossy outdoor deck paint, on the white floor. I suppose I could have bought a real rug, but that would have been too literal. I was creating a virtual foyer, and I wanted to simplify the thought down to its essence. A French iron pedestal table—made around the same time as the Eiffel Tower, when craftsmen were translating classic forms into industrial materials—provides a place to park your bag. Second, I placed a black, gridded Chinese folding screen to the left. The screen allows glimpses into the living room. Once you reach the pedestal table on the black carpet, you turn left and enter the main space. The cottage was suddenly more polite. We subtracted the space of the virtual entry from the living room, and added etiquette.

The cue for the black carpet was the black handrail. The black gave the white space a welcome sense of depth and self-assuredness. The contrast was graphic and modern, and the neutral black and white brought out the sculptural qualities of the iron table, which I had cherished and held onto for a long time. I give up unique pieces like this only when they go for a good cause—and a good client.

When you round the corner past the Chinese screen, you arrive in a small living room that looks boundless because of the white. I took care to keep it sparsely populated—an Eero Saarinen chair, a French 1940s chair, and a roomy high-backed

ratchet sofa that I designed with one splayed arm (two arms would have closed it off as you came in). All you need really is a few good pieces, and each of these holds your eye. The all-white background helped reduce the visual competition. Since the furniture has a strong linear quality, I wanted an irregular shape on the floor. The free-form cowhide makes the room feel a little loose, and the color worked with the beige leather on the French chair, the linen on the sofa, and the darker linen on the Saarinen chair. I hung an Edward Weston photograph on the screen because I wanted a focal point above the sofa. The screen is folded but the picture is straight and floats in front. It's a reminder of the wall that isn't really there. The Chinese screen is distantly related to the carved teak Indonesian screens over the fireplace, which were once used as transoms above doors. They give the room another contrast of dark and light—a very graphic touch.



SOMETIMES DIFFICULT ROOMS CAN TURN OUT TO BE the most successful. This bedroom had all sorts of peaks and juts with high windows and strange little alcoves. Some walls were paneled and others were not. There are designers who would try to camouflage all the different shapes with flowery wallpaper, overloading the room. But I chose to simplify things and paint the ceiling and walls the same cool bluish white—Benjamin Moore's Patriotic White. By washing the room in one color, you neutralize the boundaries. The lines between ceiling and walls blur, and there is more of a sense of cohesion. The focus is on the color, not the angles. It's more restful that way.

But there was still one problem. How do you create intimacy in such a large room? I decided to do a seating alcove by the fireplace and set it off with curtains. The tiebacks give you the sense of a small, private area within the large space. I emphasized the separation of the spaces by laying in a darker carpet by the fireplace. The carpet and the upholstery fabrics are all slight variations on the color of the walls. I'm working with small tonal shifts between light blues and grays.

I hung the photo over the fireplace asymmetrically. I think it's nice to throw one thing off in a room. It relaxes and humanizes a space. It makes it less strict and predictable. If the photo had been centered over the fireplace, you would have just registered it as part of a typical grouping. I think you actually focus on it much more this way.

I built a stainless-steel frame around the king-size bed to delineate the sleeping area and hung more fabric behind the headboard to add softness. The bed doesn't look like the rest of the furniture in the room, and the frame establishes its own zone.

There's really no reason that bedside tables have to match, and I like the imbalance created by two different pieces. If one table is higher or older or a different color, it invites a different treatment. Here each table has its own collection. By using my



favorite Hansen swing-arm lamps on the wall, I give myself more room for a table. To the right of the bed, I've got a table on top of a table—a little Chinese altar table inlaid with mother-of-pearl holds six-hundred-year-old Thai porcelains, all arrayed on top of a Burmese table. And under that I've propped a photograph on the floor, which gives you something to discover in an unexpected place. The square, boxy tables in the alcove are Chinese, made of bamboo.

Soft colors evoke a sense of calm and peacefulness. Furniture floats against cool white walls.



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