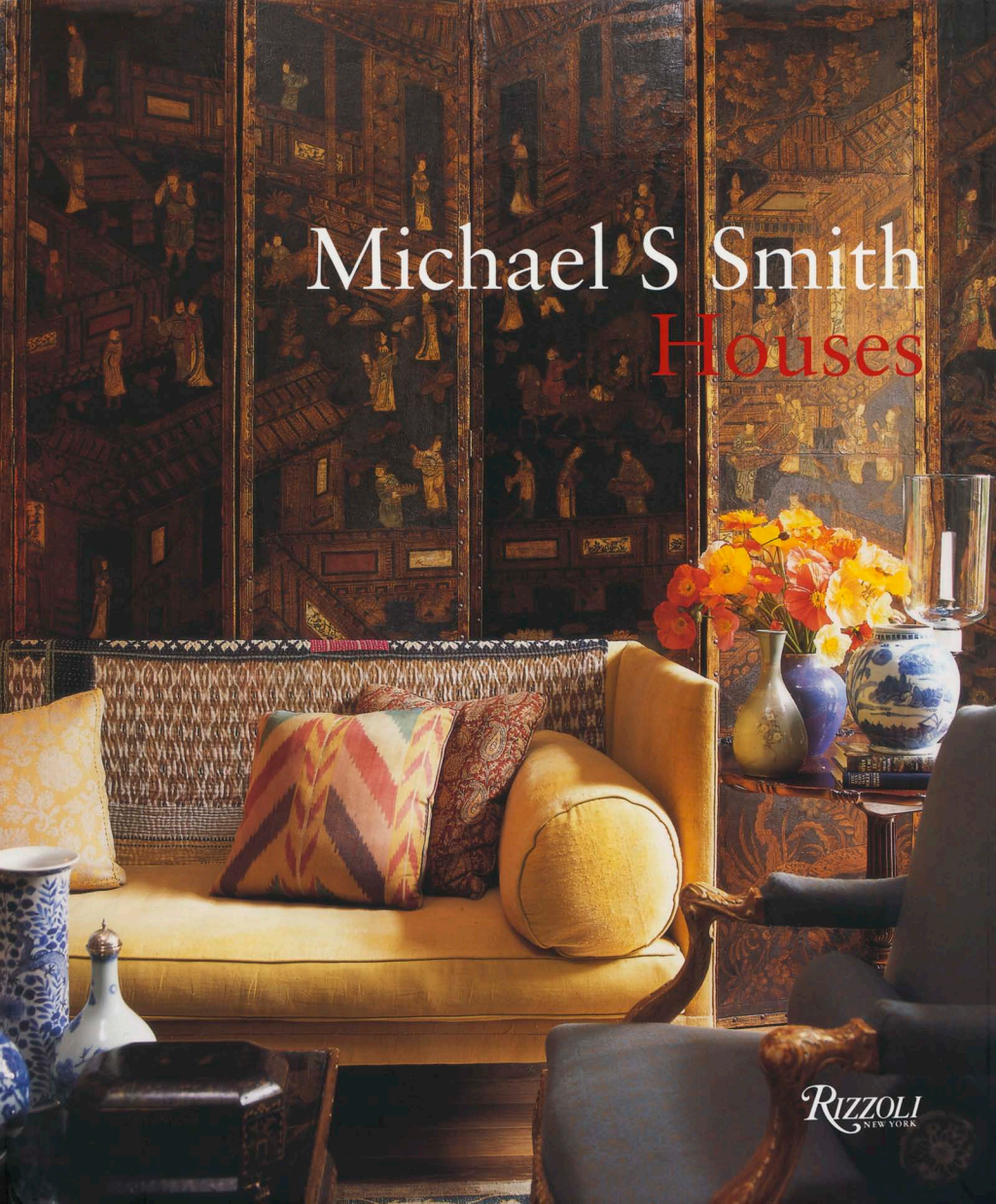
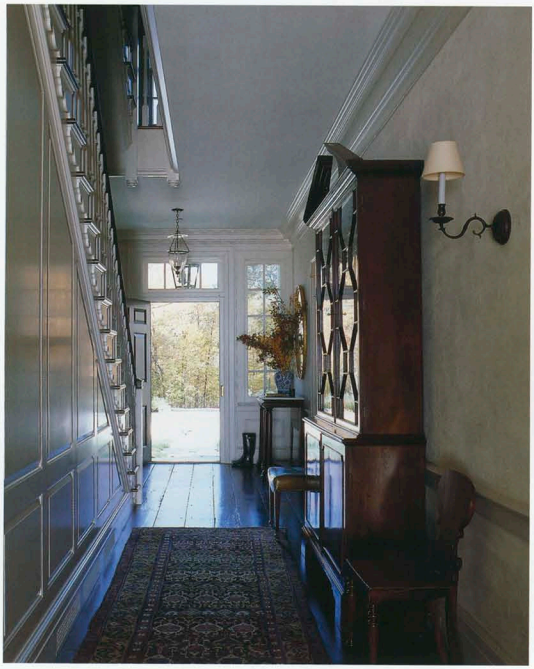


Michael S Smith
Houses

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK



MILLBROOK, NEW YORK

In my work, I'm always trying to create a sense of place. My clients, the television director James Burrows and his wife Debbie, fell in love with this property in Millbrook, New York. There's a sweep to the land, with forever views of rolling hills and the most idyllic countryside. Now architect Gil Schafer and I needed to build a house that lived up to the site. We took a close look at the local vernacular and designed a late eighteenth-century Colonial with higher ceilings and all the modern conveniences. It's a brand-new house that looks old because it actually has old components. We bought an old house near Hudson, New York, and took it apart and salvaged the pieces. We recycled the beams and the floors and the moldings. We bought incredible nineteenth-century wallpaper panels at auction and found beautiful old chimneypieces. It's difficult sometimes to stay true to a theme and not get too fancy, but I think we succeeded. This definitely feels like a big, rambling upstate New York country house.

It's a classic center-hall plan. From the front door, you can see right through to the view. In the dining

Above: This is a center-hall Colonial, furnished in the classic way with a handsome Georgian mahogany bookcase and two beautifully shaped hall chairs. Old wide floorboards and walls covered in a sandy Venetian plaster give the newly built house a sense of age.

Opposite: Quintessentially American furniture—a wicker sofa, a Windsor chair, an old farm table with a scrubbed wood top—gives the sunroom a simple country charm. An antique French game box is used as a coffee table. Porch ceilings are traditionally painted blue—at one point it was thought to ward off bugs—and I followed that old custom here. An antique ceiling fan creates a nice breeze.

Forms of Humor
ITALIAN PARKS AND GARDENS

room, we had a mural painted, depicting the surrounding countryside. It looks antique, almost as if it has a kind of sepia tint. There's some color, just not a lot. All through the house, we tried to buy things that already had a patina. We wanted that sense of being slightly worn, as opposed to overly polished. The dining table is English, probably late eighteenth century, a long rectangle with rounded corners. The wood is absolutely beautiful. When you wax something for over a hundred years, it brings out the character. That's something you can never duplicate from scratch, no matter how hard you try. The dining chairs are covered in bright red tufted leather. French doors open onto a long covered porch that runs the length of the house and overlooks the valley.

We designed the drawing room as a double parlor, each half organized around a fireplace that became the focus of a seating arrangement. The furniture is English, in country-house condition, which implies that the house has a history and was not furnished straight out of the showroom. One Regency sofa is real, the other is a copy. The colors in the Sultanabad carpets have become muted over the years. In the library, bookshelves line the walls from floor to ceiling. The vintage baby grand belonged to James's father, Abe Burrows, who wrote and directed Broadway musicals.

The big family kitchen is commensurate with the scale of the house. Flamed granite countertops have a rough, worn texture. Shadowy colors sponge up the light and give the house a sense of age. No white is white. No wall is flat. The sun moves around the rooms and picks out various details, like the carved moldings.

In the sun porch, comfy rattan chairs are gathered around a big square coffee table. There's an old stone fireplace and an antique ceiling fan. The fact that we could have high ceilings allowed us to create all these beautiful volumes. The room is lofty. You can almost feel the breeze.

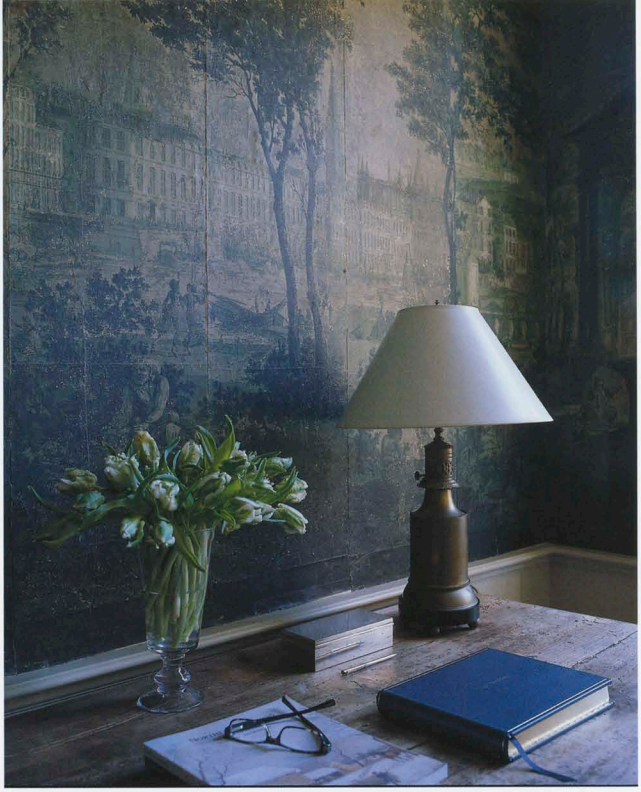
Debbie had always wanted a bedroom with Chinese wallpaper, so I had this beautiful eighteenth-century

We conceived of this project as a gentleman's farmhouse, which means no crystal chandelier in the dining room. Instead, I chose a nineteenth-century billiard fixture—less fancy and more masculine. The eighteenth-century portrait of Henry Hudson over the mantel was bought at auction. The dining chairs are English, dating from the 1860s. Inspired by the traditional red hunting jacket, I upholstered them in red leather.

Above: This is one of two major seating groups, each centered around a fireplace, in the large, double-parlor drawing room. Both the linen damask on the sofa and my Bentley Rose chintz, used for the curtains, have a lovely antique quality that makes the room feel as if it's been around for a while.

Opposite: The sofa in the library is upholstered in a linen velvet from my Jasper collection, in the same warm wheat color as the blanket-soft wool from Colefax & Fowler used for the curtains. The easy chair is covered in my Montecatini fabric for Cowtan & Tout. I found the faux-bamboo antique library ladder in Hudson, New York.

BREAD



Chinese wallpaper copied for the walls in the master suite. The graceful arches and the fireplace were salvaged from the old Hudson house. The colors are pale blues and creams, very restful. Each bedroom is unique. We personalized them with these extraordinary wallpapers from Adelphi Paper Hangings, a workshop that still makes wallpaper the old-fashioned way. That means each is printed by hand, on thick matte paper. They feel softer, older. The patterns are reproductions of early eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American wallpapers. They have a kind of bold, quirky charm that really helps a new room.

Each bedroom has a four-poster bed and a dressing room and a bathroom—some with tubs, some with showers—but all with real furniture. It's amazing how different a bathroom can feel once you put a table in there, with a lamp. Suddenly it seems cozy and much more antique.

Throughout the house, all the old wood and the old mantels and the old hardware add up to character. They provide patina and that little touch of eccentricity. That's what makes this house feel as if it has been around forever. It's all an illusion, but it works. The house feels authentic and true to this place.

Opposite: The countertops in the kitchen are made of flamed granite, which looks more soft and worn than polished granite and happens to be very durable. The pot rack was custom-made for me by Ann-Morris Antiques.

Above: This early nineteenth-century wallpaper was crumbling when I bought it at auction. We reinstalled it in the mudroom, which is furnished with a little desk—a copy of an Edwardian original made by Ann-Morris Antiques.

Opposite: Pocket doors in a lovely archway, salvaged from an old country house, separate the bedroom from the sitting room in the master suite. I found a pair of eighteenth-century English posts and made a simple canopy bed, hung in creamy linen.

Above: The sofa in the sitting room is covered in my linen ticking stripe, with my Indian Flower hemp on the pillows. I wanted all the fabrics to be soft and summery, as if everything had faded a bit in the sun over the years. The wallpaper that connects the two rooms was made for me by de Gournay.

Opposite: This guest room is quite simple and severe in black and cream, with a new Hepplewhite-style bed in an ebony finish. Nothing in this room looks fussy or decorated. The chest at the foot of the bed is a very rare piece that was made in the Bahamas. The quilt is a patchwork of old English chintzes.

Above: This is a play on the classic stripe you often see in early American houses, handmade for me in a wallpaper by Elizabeth Dow. The tub and faucets are from the collection I did for Kallista. I love that sweet little hourglass-shaped chair, which has followed the clients around from one house to another. It's too good to give up.