

# ELLE DECOR



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# ELLE DECOR Style

Make the great escape—our journey starts with up-and-coming designer [Steven Gambrel](#). His weekend house on Long Island is a whaling-era Federal, but the interior is a sherbet-painted reverie, more St. Bart's than Sag Harbor. At home in Westchester, furniture guru [Ralph Pucci](#) adheres to the three Cs: continuity, clarity, and consistency, with a little help from designer [Vicente Wolf](#). Architect [Sig Bergamin](#) beats the Brazilian heat in a jungle of blues and reds. [Annie Kelly](#) gives songwriter [Glen Ballard's](#) Beverly Hills hacienda a laid-back groove. At decorator [Tom Scheerer's](#) New York apartment, Zen tranquility tempers prewar gentility. The partners of [Shelton, Mindel & Associates](#) cast their cool vision over Central Park West. And [Jean-Yves Legrand's](#) Miami Beach cottage covers the postwar lexicon, from Baker to Widdicomb. Soaking it all in? Our bath accessories are the essence of indulgence, whether in cool crystal, earthy copper, or satin-finished steel. So refreshing!



# yankee hip

On the East End of Long Island, designer Steven Gambrel puts an all-American spin on a multicultural *mélange*

Written and produced by Mitchell Owens

Photography by Anita Calero

Styled by Anita Sarsidi



That old cliché about not judging a book by its cover just got a refreshing corollary: Don't judge interior designer Steven Gambrel's house by its shingles.

Behind the stern Federal façade of the eastern Long Island house that Gambrel shares with bank exec Chris Connor, sleek chic rules. Against walls painted the tart-but-tender colors of beach glass (not to mention the insides of a few closets), Euro-chic treasures cozy up to funky objects culled from flea markets and secondhand shops in Chelsea and on the Lower East Side. Tattered 1920s Chinese panels loom behind lime-green yard-sale dining chairs, the eau de cologne in the guest bathroom is made in Madrid, and on a recent morning, Bose speakers pumped out Turkish techno-groove.

"America is a composite culture, and this is a composite house," says Gambrel. That goes for the 30-something owners, too. A broad-shouldered Southerner with a hail-fellow-well-met handshake, Gambrel studied architecture at the University of Virginia and toiled at

Facing page, from top: Steven Gambrel seated at the zinc-top kitchen table. An English cockfighting chair upholstered in Clarence House black horsehair surveys a pair of bronze tables in the sitting room. This page: Gambrel painted the bronze sconce in the entrance hall white and added stitched goatskin shades. See Resources.



the design firm of retro guru Jeffrey Bilhuber before setting up his own SoHo practice. As for Connor, he's a Nagasaki-born, Kyoto-bred officer of a Belgian bank. And a man of simple tastes. "I don't need anything more than a futon and a little table," he says. Gambrel shakes his head, growling, "I'm not sleeping on a futon, kid." Without missing a beat, Connor delivers an affectionate coup de grâce: "Steven's the kind of guy who likes curtains—with shoes to match."

Though their rooms might not make it immediately clear, pride of place drives the couple's decor. Sag Harbor, the village where the two Manhattanites spend weekends, was a venerable whaling port (James Fenimore Cooper was a local maritime entrepreneur before putting pen to paper). Sailors carried processed oil to ports around the world and returned loaded down with choice souvenirs from Cuba and Canton, Patagonia and the Sandwich Islands. "They brought it all here and put it together," says Gambrel, who's doing his part to keep that globe-trotting spirit alive by co-operating Summer Stock, a seasonal (Memorial Day through Labor Day) international-flair antiques shop, in nearby Sagaponack. So when he and Connor bought the 200-year-



This page, from top: Bold lilac reigns in the pantry, where baskets for wine mix with 19th-century English plates and platters. In the library, a sofa upholstered in a Manuel Canovas rayon and an American Empire mahogany chair, a college-days find. Facing page: The dining room's 19th-century table is surrounded by vintage mahogany chairs that Gambrel painted lime-green. See Resources.



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“We wanted to get the architecture right and then be irreverent indoors,” says Connor. Nevertheless, the pair dutifully jumped through the hoops of the local historical-review board. So while they adopted more than a few period-perfect details—mercury-glass doorknobs resembling the sterling-silver ones they saw in Nantucket houses, properly scaled baseboards, and a narrow Federal-style staircase with balusters as rail-thin as a supermodel—everything else was tilted in the direction of young and modern.

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Ingenuity, too, is part of Gambrel's take on American style, what the designer calls "making do with nothing." After he and Connor rescued a friend's water-damaged gouache panels depicting a quirkily comic landscape of pagodas, mandarins, and rickshaw drivers, for instance, they applied frames made of tortoiseshell bamboo strips taken from dismantled window blinds found at Chinatown's Pearl River Mart. "That really was the best weekend," says Connor. "Sitting around in sweats with tacks and a glue gun."

Similar handiwork prevails throughout the house. The mirror in the guest bathroom is bordered with a length of rope, and the cabinet door pulls are rope, too, knotted large. The master bedroom, a sunny corner as white as a piece of scrimshaw, is anchored by a sports-car-length sofa, designed by Gambrel and upholstered in spring-green-and-white gingham (look again—the sprightly cotton fabric is a set of recycled king-size flat sheets from Garnet Hill).

"Style is what matters to me, not provenance," says Gambrel. And though he's as susceptible to the allure of mid-20th-century swank as the next up-and-coming aesthete—a pair of "probably Jansen" gilt-bronze tables in the living room; a Jean-Charles Moreux limed-oak desk upstairs; a Jacques Adnet stitched-leather luggage rack in a guest room, topped with a Hudson's Bay blanket—the bottom line,



Facing page: A 1940s oak desk by Jean-Charles Moreux anchors one end of the master bedroom; a 1930s mural-size reverse-painted mirror stands beside it. This page, from top: Light pours into the scrimshaw-white master bedroom; the vintage mahogany bench is by Paul McCobb. In the guest bath, a 1940s French rope mirror found in Paris.









This page, from top: In a guest bedroom, 1980s painted slipper chairs play off a 19th-century fireplace surround. An antique French dressing table in the upstairs hall. Facing page: The maple four-poster belonged to Gambrel's great-great-uncle. The paisley cotton fabric is by Schumacher. See Resources.



he says, is that it's the simple things that count. The robin's-egg-blue entrance hall is outfitted with little more than a bronze sconce painted a stark white, and a hefty pink conch shell is poised on the pine floor, the bleached boards paste-waxed to a gentle gleam. Spaces are given a poetic twist with spare sculptural bits placed to etch a private Vermeer moment: a chunk of coral atop an inlaid Dutch table that Gambrel bought in his college days, a vase of towering fig branches in the pistachio dining room. On a long, lean Paul McCobb bench, a shadow box collage is arranged with surreal flotsam. "I wish it were Joseph Cornell," Gambrel says of the collage, shrugging. "But it's just me."

This passion for big-impact gestures has provoked more than one friend to good-natured ribbing. "Take a look at this," says Connor, pulling out a roll of paper towels as Exhibit A. Made in England, the St. Michael absorbent sheets are bordered along one edge with Mondrian-like rectangles of purple and blue. It's a touch that's pure Gambrel: a utilitarian object given a high-style twist.

"I didn't buy those," the designer insists, explaining that a friend purchased the towels for him, knowing how much he liked them. "Bounty's good enough for me. I'm not that obsessive. Fretting over the perfect paper towels is the kind of behavior that makes your mother lose sleep." But, Gambrel admits, grinning at the shrink-wrapped cylinder, "Is that great or what?" ■