

MY FAVORITE ROOM | NOVEMBER 26, 2011

Museum Quality

Enter the eclectic, cozy paean to 18th-century French style that shaped designer Timothy Corrigan

By JEN RENZI



Jean Tholance

The Blue Room at the Musée Nissim de Camondo

You'd never guess it from his portfolio of tony,

antiques-strewn lairs, but as a young college grad visiting Paris, Timothy Corrigan couldn't distinguish *régence* from rococo. "I studied English lit, so what did I know about French decorative arts?" the designer said with a laugh. It was around this time that he discovered the Musée Nissim de Camondo and began mastering the fine points of the Louis XV aesthetic. The 1911 neoclassical-style manse, modeled on Petite Trianon, was once the home of a prominent Turkish-born banker whose passion for 18th-century antiques resulted in an unparalleled collection of Sèvres porcelain, gilt clocks and furnishings by Jean-François Oeben and Jean-Henri Riesener—including pieces owned by Marie Antoinette. In memory of his son, killed in World War I, Comte Moïse de Camondo donated the property to the French government with the stipulation that the décor remain untouched.

To Mr. Corrigan, it looked rather imposing. "When I first visited, the space seemed so over-the-top and grand with all this gold," he said. "But looking at it from a more educated perspective today, I understand that the interiors were very restrained relative to 17th-century design. At the time they both

looked the same to me, but there's a huge stylistic difference between those two periods: The 18th century is all about comfort and the intimacy of grandeur."

Still, he remembers one space offering a welcome caesura from the ormolu and swag: the Blue Room, which the Count used as his personal sitting area. The space has a casualness to it, with an assemblage of vignettes for working and lounging. "It was a breath of fresh air in the context of such refined, uptight beauty," said Mr. Corrigan. "The room looked like someone actually lived in it. It was an epiphany that a beautiful setting could also be functional, comfortable and practical. That awareness shaped my design philosophy."

No one thing dominates: not art, not furniture, not accessories. If you took any one thing away, the room would still work.



Alan Silfan

Timothy Corrigan

Mr. Corrigan waxes poetic about the room's atmospheric lighting scheme, overscaled carpet and the softly padded walls. He also marvels at its holism. "No one thing dominates the room: not art, not furniture, not accessories. All the elements blend together to create a total experience. If you took away any one thing, the room would still work. I always tell clients to not get hung up on any one object, because the room has to work without it. Relying on a mix of elements gives you more latitude." And a perfectly balanced scheme.

1. Dim the overheads

"This room demonstrates the importance of having varied light sources. Mixing task and atmosphere lighting at staggered heights—overheads, desk lamps, floor lamps—is key. One of the biggest challenges I face is clients who want to have recessed can lights everywhere. It kills a room! And a single overhead makes everything look washed out.

I especially love the tole chandeliers that flank the desk. Tole creates such an interesting effect, and wasn't very common in 18th-century interiors—this is the first time

I've seen it used." For a similar look, Mr. Corrigan likes the Vase Roseaux from Charles-Paris, charles-paris.com.

2. Invite dissonance

"What's great about this room is that it's not too matchy-matchy. Note the colors: There's red upholstery, yellow drapes, green walls and a blue carpet. I try to achieve a similar mix in my own work, whereas some people become obsessed with having the exact same blue everywhere in their house—which can look so overdone and fussy.

Decorators often choose the rug first and use it to guide the palette. But I try to avoid letting the carpet drive design choices, as I think it makes the décor seem forced. Start picking other pieces first and then choose a rug that doesn't match too perfectly, so it feels like the room has evolved over time—as if

you've inherited an antique and just made it work. That's a more European approach." Stark is a favorite source for carpets.

3. Let the windows breathe

"The wonderful blonde fabric used for the walls and window treatments is called cheveux de la reine, which translates to 'the queen's hair'—based on Marie Antoinette's. It catches light beautifully. Window treatments are one of the most important elements in a room—certainly the strongest vertical gesture. Choose wisely because even simple white canvas will telegraph a lot. I prefer a clean look like this: just great cords and tiebacks. The sharp tailoring reinforces the architecture of the room and lets the windows be the star." On the designer's wish list: Décor de Paris's Canovaccio Tieback, decordeparis.com.



F. Martin Ramin/The Wall Street Journal

Décor de Paris's Canovaccio Tieback

vacuum's standard upholstery attachment." Mr. Corrigan likes the indoor-outdoor fabrics, from left: Opuzen "Native Rattan," Giati "Niagara Aqua," Kravet Soleil "Diamond Raffia" and Maria Flora "Cipresso."

6. Gold + gray-green = chic

"The room's name derives from the original paint color: peacock blue. Over the years, the walls faded to a light green. It's funny—I don't think I'd like the room as much if it was bold blue and gold; that would have been too sharp and in-your-face. The color combination as it exists today is one of my favorites. My bedroom is that same gold and mossy green." Mr. Corrigan likes to pair Farrow & Ball's Cream No. 44 with Ball Green No. 75, farrow-ball.com.



4. Treat accents like jewelry

"Accessories are essential; they flesh out a space and make it feel more lived-in. Without them, it's like going out for the evening sans jewelry—you're slightly undressed. You don't have to cover every surface with objects, but you do need some to show that you have interests. For clients I'll build a collection of Grand Tour objets, like marble obelisks, which date from the period when accessories first became fashionable, as people collected keepsakes during their continental travels." Marble urn from timothy-corrigan.com.

5. Fabric and walls make good bedfellows

"Upholstered walls create an enveloping feel (and great acoustics) in rooms that demand a sense of intimacy, like bedrooms and libraries. Padded fabric reads differently than fabric wallpaper; it's a very subtle thing. People consider the treatment to be quite traditional, but it can veer contemporary depending on the fabric and if you match the walls to the drapes. And it needn't be high maintenance: use an outdoor fabric so you don't have to worry about kids or stains. I tell clients to clean their walls every few months using a

vacuum's standard upholstery attachment." Mr. Corrigan likes the indoor-outdoor fabrics, from left:

Opuzen "Native Rattan," Giati "Niagara Aqua," Kravet Soleil "Diamond Raffia" and Maria Flora

"Cipresso."

7. Don't forget the cushy factor

"Comte de Camondo integrated really comfortable, practical furniture. That chaise lounge is like the 18th-century equivalent of a La-Z-Boy recliner! This room



Brewster chaise from George Smith

proves that you don't have to make a trade-off between comfort and elegance. Design only works if it has both qualities. A space is not successful if it's not inviting." For a balance of comfort and elegance, he recommends the Brewster chaise from George Smith, georgesmith.com.

Bio in Brief: **Timothy Corrigan**

His résumé

Prior to working in design, the decorator and antiques purveyor headed the international operations of a large ad agency. He opened his Los Angeles firm in 1998, following with a Paris office shortly thereafter. Mr. Corrigan's work marries the sensibility of his two home bases: European elegance meets California casual.

His clients

Mr. Corrigan has projects dotting the globe, from Park Avenue apartments and Seattle homes to French châteaux and luxury yachts. He has designed residences for clients ranging from Hollywood celebrities to the royal family in Qatar, all of which exhibit his trademark infusion of classical design with contemporary comfort.

His goods

The designer's L.A. storefront carries a mix of antiques from the 17th through the mid-20th centuries as well as items from the Timothy Corrigan Home line of furniture, lighting, eco-friendly home products, scented candles, table linens and more. He will soon debut rugs and carpets with Stark, a tabletop collection with Royal Limoges and a book about the design of his Loire Valley château (Rizzoli, 2013). For more information, visit timothy-corrigan.com.

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