

SUMMER BREEZE

After one unhappy experience, Mark and Maggie DiStefano were skeptical about decorators, but Markham Roberts set their minds—and their new Hamptons house—at ease



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This page: The first thing designer Markham Roberts bought for the house was a vase made of antlers (at far left), which he filled with ostrich eggs. The bamboo chair is 19th-century Chinese, and the Anglo-Indian table is inlaid with mother of pearl and ivory. Opposite: Roberts (seated on sofa) with Caitlin DiStefano and several friends on the porch.

This page: Roberts placed an Anglo-Indian settee in the front hall, and its simple ticking upholstery is repeated elsewhere in the house. Opposite, top: He echoed the rosettes of the dining room's wheel-back chairs in a Chinese-inspired rug he designed and had made in Tibet. The walls are covered in bronze-colored grass cloth; the stenciling of bamboo trees was done by Maggie DiStefano's mother. Below right: Roberts continued his light, comfortable palette with the dining room table settings.



ONCE BITTEN, TWICE SHY. That's how Maggie DiStefano felt after a run-in with a decorator who left much to be desired.

"I had just finished doing a townhouse in New York, and it wasn't a great experience," she says. Maggie and her husband, Mark, were underwhelmed by the decorator's lack of follow-through. Ditto his convoluted billing system.

But her big new getaway place in Southampton was being built, and it needed designing—fast. "I was so nervous about using another decorator," she says. "I had been burnt once, I wasn't doing it again."

The DiStefanos wanted a summer home feel, but since their place weighs in at 15,000 square feet, the beach cottage look wasn't going to cut it.

The decorator who entered their life, Markham Roberts, arrived like a white knight, putting them at ease with his attention to detail and overall vision. He came up with a "relaxed traditional" look that was both proper and durable, considering the vigorous activities of the couple's two twenty-something daughters and their many friends.

"They wanted it to look nice," says Roberts. "But they didn't





This page: In the living room, brown velvet slipper chairs from George Smith are paired with tufted armchairs in an embroidered cotton fabric. The sofa is in gauffered green velvet. Right: A Balinese textile painting of a cheetah eyes the mahogany-walled library. Roberts placed an Indian /kaf textile on the sofa he designed.



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want some sort of fussy showplace. They're really low key themselves, and I think the house reflects that."

The main color scheme was going to be simple: lots of white, cream, and brown. Both decorator and clients loved this soothing combination, which brings to mind a large cup of coffee, light and sweet.

His first purchase for the house was admirably quixotic: a vase made of real antlers, which he filled with ostrich eggs and put in the relatively spare entrance hall. It baffled the DiStefanos at first—but once they saw the overall scheme, they understood how the nurturing symbol fit in.

Roberts designed much of the furniture himself, going for velvet, tufting, and ticking—all powerful vehicles on the road to cushy comfort. He was able to work in Maggie's favorite accent colors, red and green, in several rooms. He also wanted a dozen or so antiques to set the tone for the house. In the entrance hall, he picked a 19th-century Anglo-Indian settee and a table of the same pedigree, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory. For the dining room, he chose contemporary chairs with wheel-back splats in the shape of rosettes. Bronze-colored grass cloth walls boosted the room's rich look. And to prove how important family is to the DiStefanos, Maggie's



This page: In the master bedroom, the four-poster bed is covered in cream-colored muslin, and his-and-hers chaises have matching ticking. Opposite, top: A look from the sitting room into the bedroom of the master suite. The goal was softness, so Roberts went with a taupe-on-taupe wallpaper. The animal prints are by 18th-century naturalist Mark Catesby. Opposite, below: Red accents abound in one of the DiStefanos' guest bedrooms, starting with a Chinese lantern. For more details, see Resources.



72-year-old mother—Marguerite McFarland, a trained decorative painter—stenciled a bamboo grove on the walls.

The master bedroom was the apex of the collaboration between decorator and client. Maggie said she wanted softness, and she got it, but without monotony. On her four-poster bed that Roberts remade and expanded, he hung creamy muslin, and then chose a gentle floral fabric for the walls. Ticking covers the his-and-her chaises. "Because we were using this muted palette, I really wanted to add pattern," says Roberts. "Otherwise it would've been visually boring."

This finely calibrated response to a client's request should be the decorating norm, of course. "You know what Markham does? He listens," says Maggie. "And that, to me, is what it's all about." ●

