

# *Charm School*

*With a neutral color scheme and a mixture of furniture and objects from three centuries, interior designer Markham Roberts creates a classic, lived-in look for a new Southampton home.*



**In the Folds** | A Hounds cotton madras (PREVIOUS SPREAD LEFT) drapes like a balloon. **Have a Seat** | A calfhair throw (PREVIOUS SPREAD RIGHT) adorns a chair from Old Town Chipping in Southampton. A graphic carpet by A.M. Collection keeps with the neutral palette. **Splash of Color** | Pink peonies and George Smith chairs upholstered in a chocolate-richer (THIS PAGE) by E. Schumacher & Co. bring color into the Southampton home. See Resources.

When Markham Roberts embarked on decorating a 15,000-square-foot house in Southampton, the client's list of edicts was short and straight to the point: Keep the color scheme neutral, and integrate as many of the furnishings from the couple's previous summer home as possible.

Roberts was happy to oblige. "I used every single piece of furniture they had in their former house. Most of it went into the nine bedrooms," he says. "Any client loves to hear 'We can use this.'"

But there is a slight difference of opinion between Roberts and his client, when it comes to how faithful he was in keeping the palette neutral. "He says that it's neutral, but every time I look, there's color. I would say it's a little bit muted but with splashes of color. There are splashes of raspberry in my bedroom and accents such as two lime green vases," she says, clearly loving the results.

For the walls, Roberts used white paint as well as textured wall coverings like grass cloth. "Then I contrasted that with stronger colors and patterns in other places," he explains. "With a client who doesn't love a lot of strong color and pattern, you still need to find ways to make certain things stand out. I brought in color, but I had to sneak it in where I could—with the chocolate rug, the green sofa."

The two-story shingled house is a new construction that the architecture firm Zwirko & Ortmann designed to look as if it's been here for a hundred years. "My client's husband is fascinated with traditional old houses, but he opted for a new house so that it could be built to his specifications. If you do it well, you have the opportunity to have the charm of an old house, along with perfect air conditioning, perfect wiring for computers and all that is the best of both worlds," Roberts says. Arched doorways and an abundance of molding help evoke an earlier period, but what really gives the house the patina of age is the landscaping. "The best money they spent was planting mature trees," Roberts says. "It makes a huge difference."

Rather than adhere to a particular era with the furnishings, Roberts chose to create an interior that looks as if it evolved over several generations. "There are 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century things as well as new furnishings. The pieces came





**Sunny Sensibility** | Light floods through the windows (left) in the living room. *Living with Clotilde* contains hints of color within its neutral color palette. The cool green sofa is upholstered in fabric from Clarence House. The double-gated table lamp by Christopher Spitzmiller was found at Abecassis. **High Dining** | The Donghia gate cloth wallpaper in the dining room (above left) was hand-painted with a bamboo design. A large oil painting by Markham Roberts's own design, realized by Apurva, set a handsome foundation for the room. Americana and ceramics are from John Rosselli. **Au Natural** | A woven placemat from Stark adds subtle patterns to the walls of the upstairs hallway (above right). Laminate floor John Rosselli chose an asphalt leading to the master sitting room. **Sound Sleep** | The four-poster bed (below) was designed by Roberts and is available through Boston-Style. A custom shade is draped in the Master bedroom. See Resources.





from different places and work together. It looks more lived-in and normal than if it were all one period," Roberts says. Using pieces that the client already owned helped create a sense of history and continuity for the family.

The dining room is a perfect example of his approach in the design, a soufflé of pieces from a variety of sources, tied together by a rug with Chinese medallions that Roberts designed and had made in Tibet. He chose some classic Chippendale reproduction chairs to pair with the table, an 18th-century French mahogany piece the client already owned, but he had an unpleasant revelation while watching television. "I was watching 'The Sopranos' one night and they have the same chairs!" Roberts still loved the chairs, but decided to add a white chalky finish in order to differentiate them from the ones in the Sopranos' dining room. He swathed the chandelier with crystal beads to dress it up. "It's a wrought iron piece that you see everywhere, but I wanted to make it look one-of-a-kind," he says. The client's mother, a professional faux finisher,

hand painted bamboo shoots over a bronze-colored grass cloth for the walls.

Each room has its own character, but the neutral tones on the walls help maintain the flow. "They are all very different, but I don't walk from one to the next and feel jarred," the client says.

"Very chic, but very casual and exceedingly comfortable," is how Roberts describes the home. "It's a tailored look, but very relaxed. The family actually uses the house, and they wanted it to be comfortable. There's nothing too fancy or fussy about it," he says.

Roberts managed to decorate all 26 rooms of the home in nine months, completing it in time for the winter holiday season. After less than a year in the home, the living room is the client's favorite, but the kitchen is where the family congregates. "They use it for birthday parties and as a gathering place," Roberts says. "They also spend a lot of time on the porch. When you have 15,000 square feet, it will be years before all the rooms are used." ■

**The Designer |** Robert Lunn  
against a slate-topped table (opposite) from Trullage in New York.  
**Care:** He found the wickled-encrusted  
mirror with the beehives in  
Sagamore. **Breezeway |** A wide  
porch provides outdoor living space  
for traditional wicker furniture.  
Inset: pillows, Lee Jofa fabrics; Jit-Lamourne.

