

THE HOUSE LOOKS EAST
OVER PUGET SOUND'S
ADMIRALTY INLET, WITH
WHIDBEY ISLAND AND
MOUNT BAKER IN THE
DISTANCE. FOR DETAILS
SEE RESOURCES.

KEEPING THE PEACE

On Puget Sound, *Markham Roberts* and
James Sansum's spirited style kick-starts
their heirloom Victorian getaway

TEXT BY MITCHELL OWENS PHOTOGRAPHY BY NELSON HANCOCK



A DÉCORS BARBARES COTTON PRINT WRAPS THE DINING ROOM. JOSEF FRANK FOR SVENSKT TENN RATTAN CHAIRS; IKEA PAPER LANTERN; 19TH-CENTURY BESSARABIAN FLAT-WEAVE RUG FROM JAMES SANSUM INC.



HARRIET, A POODLE-SCHNAUZER MIX, RESTS ON THE LIVING ROOM SOFA, WHICH IS COVERED IN A BRUNSWIG & FILS LINEN-COTTON BLEND. 19TH-CENTURY CHINESE BAMBOO LOW TABLES.



"It was a crammathon,"
ROBERTS says of the initial
FURNISHING strategy, and
he's not joking at all.

A GEORGE NELSON
PENDANT HANGS IN
THE CARRIAGE HOUSE'S
BEDROOM. BED AND
ACCORDION SCONCES
BY WEST ELM; VINTAGE
INDIAN APPLIED
COVERLET; SEAGRASS
RUG BY STARK.



IN THE LIVING ROOM, A 19TH-CENTURY AMERICAN CLASSICAL SOFA IS SET BESIDE A WINDOW OFFERING VIEWS OF PUGET SOUND. AT LEFT, THE ANTIQUE SLIPPER CHAIR WEARS A GALBRAITH & PAUL PRINT; 19TH-CENTURY TIBETAN PAINTED TRUNK.



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hen AD100 interior designer Markham Roberts is conjuring up rooms for clients, it's all about deadlines, lots of pressing deadlines. Workmen have to be scheduled, fabric orders fulfilled, furniture upholstered, paint finishes finessed, et cetera, often with a tight turnaround and no little impatience from various corners. But when it comes

to personal projects, the Manhattanite's attitude, surprisingly enough, is frankly laissez-faire.

"This house is something we've been involved with for nearly 20 years now," Roberts says of the pale-yellow Victorian in Port Townsend, Washington, where his life partner, art-and-antiques dealer James Sansum, spent youthful summers and holidays and they spend a couple of aggregate months a year. "We're still working on it; we have to get the gardens going, the kitchen needs new cabinets, and the bathrooms have to be brought up to speed." Including one in which the original shower stall, a low-budget insert, is so narrow it might as well be on a boat. As for the dining room curtains, which were expertly made in New York City and shipped out West, Roberts adds, "There was nobody to help, so James and I" (both admit that they're not particularly handy) "got a power drill and a ladder and did it. I'm still amazed they haven't fallen down."

Built in the 1870s by one of Port Townsend's founders, the plainspoken house was ambitiously expanded by a sea captain and his wife, who added a second story and inviting porches that take in glittering Puget Sound and its parade of ocean liners,

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JAMES SANSUM.

nuclear submarines, ferries, and the like. (Eagles perch in the trees, so Harriet, the couple's poodle-schnauzer, isn't allowed outside without supervision.) "There's a little bit of Shingle Style, a little bit of Colonial Revival, plaster ceiling medallions from the earliest time of the house, and crazy stained-glass windows," explains Sansum. His parents, who lived in California for most of the year with their children, purchased the place in the 1970s, having been entranced by Port Townsend's laid-back hippie culture and still potent low-key charms. "It's the most relaxing place," says Roberts, whose next book,

Markham Roberts, Notes on Decorating (Vendome Press), will be published in the fall. "Our biggest decision is, Will we have a hot dog at the hot-dog stand today or get lunch from the taco truck?" As adults, Sansum and his sisters shared the property from 2001 to 2017, at which time he and Roberts bought it and embarked on a relaxed makeover.

Just how relaxed? Let's just say there was no rhyme or reason in what went where, other than covering some bedroom walls with William Morris papers and the dining room in a Décors Barbares fabric and painting wood floors pale blue or smart white.

"It was a crammathon," Roberts says of the initial furnishing strategy, and he's not joking at all. Many of the pieces had been in storage, an occupational hazard for both men, and, matching or not, made their way across the country. "There's a lot of strange stuff in this house," Sansum says, a sentence that takes in creaking wicker chairs, low Chinese tables, his grandfather's fall-front desk, a Thebes stool, 19th-century Bessarabian carpets (one is blithely folded under to make it fit), inexpensive paper lanterns, a fish-shape vase turned into a table lamp, Josef Frank rattan chairs designed for Svenskt Tenn, and art that is old, new, curious, and charming, all stuck here and there, seemingly at random.

"THE LIVING ROOM is full of stuff from a friend's house, James's family, and my family," Roberts explains of the sunny space, where myriad batik fabrics meet wicker baskets brimming with zinnias in every color imaginable. The dining room is striped with a sinuous pattern that Roberts ordered in a custom color and knew that he'd have a place for eventually. Sansum's childhood four-poster bed, once his grandfather's, occupies the dressing room, though sans its old horsehair mattress, which the dealer remembers as torture to sleep on. In another bedroom, Colefax and Fowler's iconic Bowood chintz, blowsy with white and green roses, was applied over an existing pink wallpaper—and an unexpected side effect pleased Sansum and Roberts' eyes. "Now the white background has a pink cast," the decorator observes, so the wicker dressing table was painted to continue the room's rosy glow. Overhead hangs an acid-green Chinese paper parasol from New York City's Pearl River Mart that—in a bohemian fillip that aptly reflects its new geographic location—has been repurposed as a ceiling light.

Addictive visits to Port Townsend Antique Mall—always on the itinerary when guests, who bunk in the suavely decorated former carriage house, arrive—continue to round out Sansum and Roberts's aesthetic landscape. Their decoration is ad hoc and thus prepared to absorb almost any find. "The result is you get a very layered look, one that's not too much one way or the other," the designer says. "All this stuff came from all these different places at different times. It's like a game of Rummikub—you take something from here and make it work there." ▲

A RATTAN BED BY JUSTINA BLAKENEY ANCHORS THE MASTER BEDROOM. ON BED, BLANKET MADE FROM A RALPH LAUREN HOME LINEN; MORRIS & CO. WALLPAPER; THE 19TH-CENTURY ENGLISH CHAISE LONGUE IS COVERED WITH A SCHUMACHER PRINT.



IN THE DRESSING ROOM, A DOUG INGLISH PRINT SITS ATOP AN 18TH-CENTURY ENGLISH CHEST. MORRIS & CO. WALLPAPER; LATE-18TH CENTURY AMERICAN DESK.



A DASH & ALBERT STRIPED RUG JOINS COLEFAX AND FOWLER'S BOWOOD WALL COVERING IN A GREEN-TONED GUEST BEDROOM. CUSTOM CURTAINS AND PELMET BY MARKHAM ROBERTS.



design notes

THE DETAILS THAT MAKE THE LOOK



A 19TH-CENTURY QUILT COVERS THE DRESSING ROOM'S FOUR-POSTER BED.



BESSARABIAN RUG 16765; PRICE UPON REQUEST. WOVEN.IS



COLLAGE OF WILD GINGER LEAVES AND DELPHINIUMS BY MARIAN MCEVOY; \$1,200. KRBNYC.COM

BOWOOD COTTON BY COLEFAX AND FOWLER; TO THE TRADE. COWTAN.COM



SEAWEEED WALLPAPER BY MORRIS & CO.; TO THE TRADE. STYLELIBRARY.COM

MOUNTED RED THORNY OYSTER SHELL; \$250. CREELANDGOW.COM



MAZE LINEN BY CHINA SEAS; TO THE TRADE. QUADRILLEFABRICS.COM



CHAIR 1184 BY JOSEF FRANK FOR SVENSKT TENN; \$1,520. SVENSKTTENN.SE

PRODUCED BY MADELINE O'MALLEY

PAPILLONS EXOTIQUES COTTON BY BRAQUENIÉ; TO THE TRADE. PIERREFREY.COM

MOLDED PLYWOOD DINING CHAIR BY CHARLES AND RAY EAMES FOR HERMAN MILLER; \$1,195. DWR.COM

RECTANGLES 3 PATCHWORK QUILT; \$395. MARIGOLDLIVING.COM

CHAMBERS LARGE TABLE LAMP BY CHRISTOPHER SPITZMILLER FOR VISUAL COMFORT; \$925. CIRCALIGHTING.COM

THE SUNPORCH FEATURES VINTAGE PAINTED WICKER SEATING.

“The carriage house was always storage; now it's for guests.”

A VINTAGE TURKISH KILIM BRIGHTENS THE CARRIAGE HOUSE.



TABLETOP BACKGAMMON; \$1,795. OOMPHHOME.COM



AMBROSE TRIBAL LAMPSHADE; TO THE TRADE. VAUGHANDESIGNS.COM

SARAH CONSOLE; TO THE TRADE. MADEGOODS.COM



LA GAROUBE LINEN; \$276 PER YARD. RALPHLAURENHOMES.COM



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“All the patterns come from the garden,” Roberts notes.