

# Doom Scrolling? Meet Room Scrolling.

It's just as fraught, says columnist Markham Roberts, who opines on *what we're missing in the swipe-and-like spaces* flying by on our phones.

**I**N THE EARLY 1990s, when I'd just begun working for Mark Hampton, he made me comb through his finely bound boxes of images he'd cut out from magazines over the years. They were in complete disorder and needed a gargantuan amount of sorting and reorganizing. What seemed like a gruesomely unfair punishment at the time was Mark's way of teaching me about the great designs of the past (while getting a crucial part of his office library cataloged).

It was a seminal learning experience, practically beaten into me, I say now with gratitude. Going through all the images for weeks on end, I learned that the iconic apartment of Oscar and Annette de la Renta, which blew my mind, employed the same design element as did the fabulous Park Avenue apartment of Grace, Countess of Dudley (by Tom Parr): chic, double-sided bookcases to differentiate the spaces between sitting and dining rooms. This inspired me to do the same in a dining room for one of my very first clients once I went out on my own.

There is no way I could have studied these or made such a connection on my phone screen. Nor could I have noticed the way that the great Brunschwig & Fils Menars Border II

fabric pattern was brilliantly used on all the furniture in Jayne Wrightsman's Palm Beach living room. I loved the way the pattern highlighted the forms of the upholstery.

I suppose that's why I would never have predicted the design industry's explosion on Instagram. I can barely differentiate a picture of a chair from that of someone's dog in photos this size (it's hard enough to read a book at night, or a menu in a dimly lit restaurant). I feel these tiny decorating images—flying by in a rapid scroll—give little sense of how a room unfolds visually in person. To me, they just do not convey a real understanding of the intricate, complex layers of a fully decorated room.

So how do we explain our fascination with looking at interior design by scrolling on our phones?

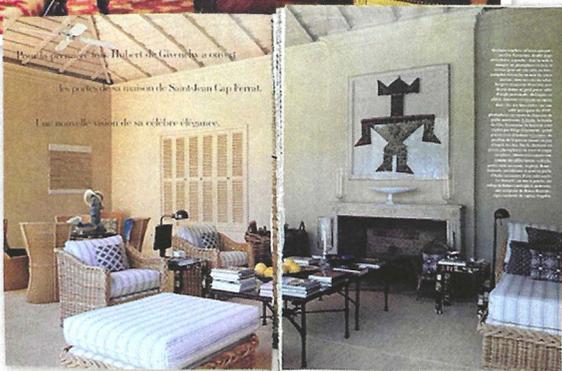
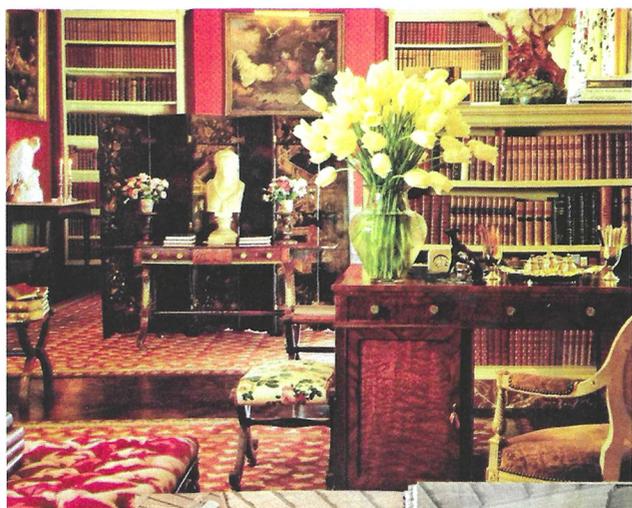
I don't know if I can, other than to say that I guess everyone lives somewhere, and for better or worse, we are an aspirational culture. Better, in that I think people should hire me to do something killer for them; worse, in that some may feel they need to live the way they think a celebrity does.

But Instagram is pretty great as a visual resource. It is so easy to get hold of pertinent images. I remember when I was just a wee decorating sprout, zealously protecting a special issue of *Maison et Jardin* on the couturier Hubert de Givenchy's different houses. I barely let that magazine out of my sight for fear



**House Rules**  
— BY —  
**Markham Roberts**





**CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:** The designer's tattered copy of a 1995 *Maison et Jardin* issue depicting the homes of Hubert de Givenchy. • Inspired in part by Tom Parr's design for the Countess of Dudley's Park Avenue apartment (top left), Roberts used double-sided bookcases to differentiate the spaces between sitting and dining rooms in one of his first solo projects (above).

of losing it. Why? Because short of stalking him and appearing at his door, looking at those big, beautiful magazine pages was the only way to see and learn about Givenchy's superb taste.

Recognition of his style wasn't obscure, but it wasn't easily accessible. The same way that Bunny Mellon's refined, relaxed, and deeply personal taste was something that wasn't obvious to everyone and their cousin. Knowledge like that was hard-won.

There are, of course, worse things in the world than giving knowledge away. But it has to be said that in opening up a giant portal to the design industry, Instagram has created a bit of a "Master of the Obvious" situation with ubiquitous posts. A vortex that seems to reduce rooms to their simplest level—a vibrant trendy color or the way sunlight hits a room, much like puppies are appealing to everyone with a pulse. But there are so many beautiful rooms in the world that don't even come close to revealing their true nature from a Post-it-size screen.

Believe it or not, I do love Instagram, and I admit to succumbing to the addiction of scrolling through images, liking posts (and feeling like my opinions might even matter), and just generally reacting to the show, though it can be a slippery slope. I've often thought, Wouldn't it be fun if there were a "Vehemently Dislike" button? Maybe a "No" option, or "Fishing for Compliments Much?" What I'd really find

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satisfying would be a "Did You Really Think It Worth Posting This Thought?" button.

Thankfully they don't offer that. Instagram (at least in the design industry) is largely a positive space—until political fights break out in the comments, but I digress.

The innovation has really changed the industry. It has given a whole new platform to people who may have never gone to design school, nor had any training at a design firm. To be clear, I don't think a lack

of schooling or training precludes anyone from being a good decorator. I think taste is inherent as much as it is learned. Maybe I'm just a little resentful about having put in the years I did to learn what I know. But rather than launching into a "You kids have it so easy" rant (too late, you might say), I offer a bit of advice for Instagram design enthusiasts: Stay focused. Rather than going down a rabbit hole of mesmerizingly shiny things, use Instagram to help you find things that you can perhaps study separately, in another format that may allow for larger, longer perusal.

Should anyone need me, I'll be posting every random thought and a montage or two of our dogs in various outfits. ◆

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