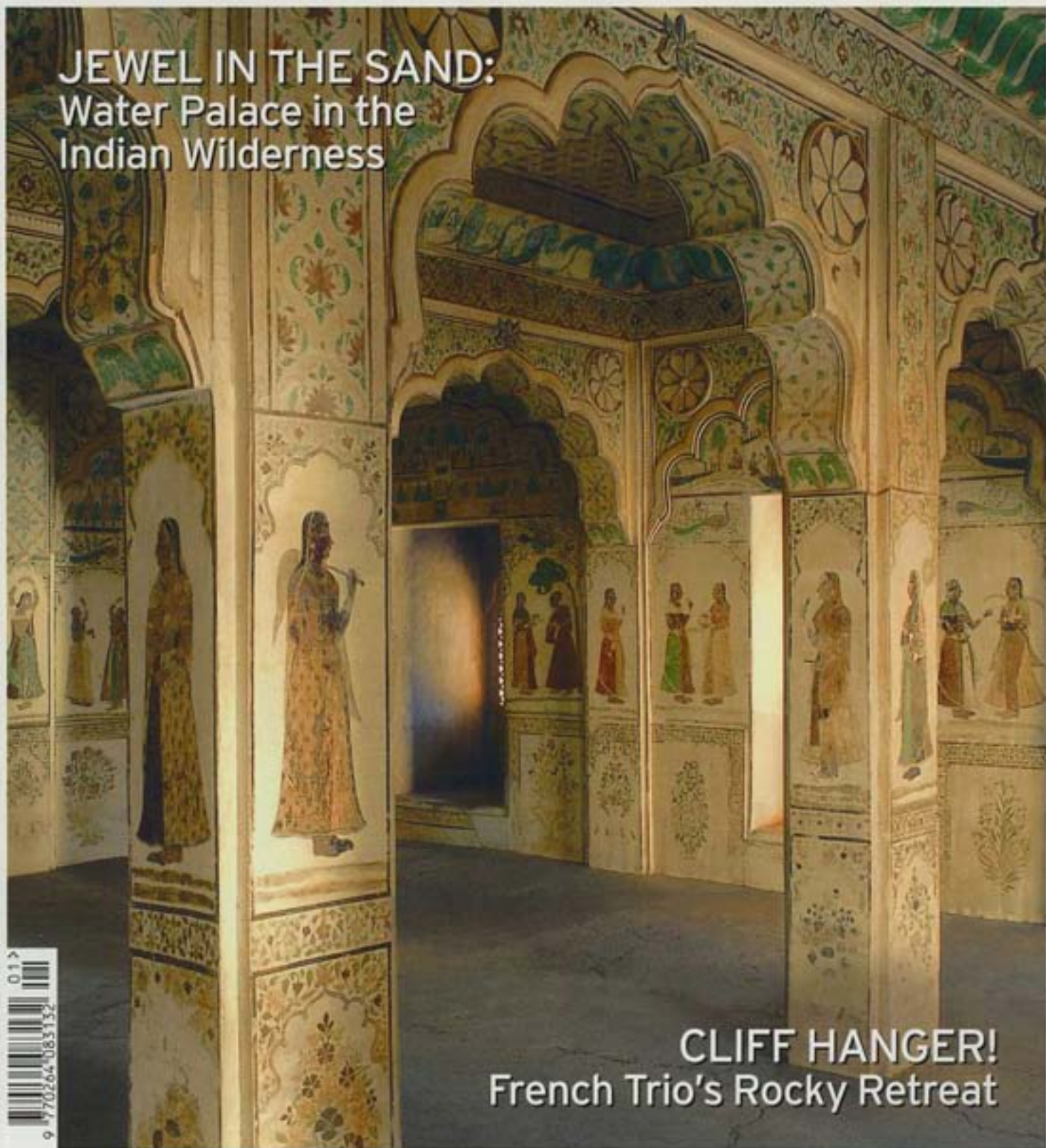


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THE WORLD OF INTERIORS

JEWEL IN THE SAND:
Water Palace in the
Indian Wilderness



CLIFF HANGER!
French Trio's Rocky Retreat





Main picture: the dining room's diamond-shaped window overlooks hydrangeas and a perennial garden bedged by boxwood. Opposite, top: the planked shutters of the 1810 farmhouse also carry a diamond motif. Bottom: the veranda floor is painted with Benjamin Moore's carnival-red 'Porch and Deck Enamel'



STRONG SUIT

In his 1810 holiday home in East Hampton, Bill Diamond alludes to his own surname in the shape of windows, chair backs and parterres. The lozenge leitmotif may be just the trump card for a decorator who, as here, can expertly shuffle Colonial style with cartoon characters, but Carol Prisant can't stop herself making a rumpus about his trademark rhombus. Photography: Simon Upton





A lantern by Paul Ferrante of Los Angeles hangs above an 18th-century-style table in antique cherry made by Tom Newman. Surrounding it are four (of six) 19th-century captain chairs in their original green-blue paint with stripes on the seats, while on it are creatures, are Liverpool jugs with ship motifs (part of a collection)





THE HANDSOMEST MEN are always decorators. Not that I have anything against decorators, but there you are, getting ready to worship at their feet when these handsome men start saying things like: 'Good decorators have to be capable of cutting the doors on 18th-century chinoiserie secretaries and making them into bars.' Aargh.

Not that handsome Bill Diamond, the decorator/owner of this 1810 East Hampton house ever said that. In recounting it, in fact, he's appropriately aghast at Dorothy Draper's having done just that and bragged about it on national TV. Yet he does admit to adding a half-metre or so to the bottom of his own period pine English cabinets so that they'll fit in his living room and – brace yourselves – painting out the Union Jacks on his nautical dioramas and replacing them with the Stars and Stripes. It's not that he doesn't love the English, it's just that... well, how can a person do his beloved Americana in his beloved American house without an American flag or ten? Still, when he disarmingly admits that even highly experienced decorators can't do their own places without 'eventually getting stumped', one softens, because hey, he's just like us.

And just like us, he bribes his friends for help. For only a lobster lunch, Bill's former partner, Pauline Feldman, and current one, Tony Baratta (*Wo/Oct 2008*), agreed to brainstorm, and he was blown away when Pauline advised him to paint the front porch the kind of shiny red enamel that makes UPS drivers drop their boxes. Tony's suggestion, on the other hand – that he *not* paint the loggia floors in an 18th-century cube pattern – he ignored. Still, he loved Tony's outstanding proposal that Bill do his house like 'Wallace Nutting on steroids'.

Who's Wallace Nutting? He's the once despised early 20th-century US author and furniture-maker who single-handedly resuscitated the Colonial era. Among his more impressive achievements was the flogging of ten million rose-tinted photos of chaste ladies in Pilgrimesque frocks doing chaste things in New England interiors. It was Nutting too who, for better or worse, introduced the spinning wheel, rocking chair and cobbler's-bench coffee table to American living rooms.

Bill, thank god, owns none of the above, though he does have a representative selection of the Colonial-ish chairs and benches that Nutting so admired, and has done them in his own droll version of redux. There are Bill-designed braided-rag chair seats, sofa seats (see the hall) and the black-and-white runner on the stairs which – while all high Nutting in concept – are in non-period hues like cobalt blue and black. Also black-and-white are some amazing faux-wood 'negative' painted floors, their painstaking creation requiring that artist Adam Lowenbein and four assistants live in the house while each artist painted only every fourth or fifth board to keep the individual floors from seeming to be done by a single 'hand', a staggered effect that, evidently, makes things far more real – if faux can be real.



From top: the dining room contains 19th-century ship dioramas recessed into the wall; in the living room, a pair of black-painted rattan sofas from the 1920s flank two facing 'camphor-wood' trunks on new black-lacquer stands; a 1950s toy car and a shelf full of yellow-spined 'National Geographic' magazines prepare the eye for the Dagwood pillow. Opposite: Swedish pine cabinets from Trude Weaver Antiques on the Portobello Road, London, look down on turquoise tartan upholstery hand-woven by Lois Chernin



Main picture: in the entrance hall, an antique Windsor bench with a triple-oval braided-rug seat pad rests on a floor hand-painted by Adam Lowenbein and his team in a 'cartoon' wood pattern. Opposite, from top: a Midwestern farm chair in its original white paint sits on a braided striped runner custom-designed by Jan Jurta of New Hampshire; faced by early 20th-century sailing photos, the handrail is inspired by those found on yachts; an antique 'windmill' entrance-hall piece, complete with mirror, coat hooks and shelf, hangs above the tub with its Czech & Speake tap

SUPPER AND ENTERTAINMENT







Equally well thought-out was the mounting of the dining room's nautical dioramas – the ones with the flags. All five deep, boxlike frames were sunk right into the wall on which they hang (a feat made possible by the closet on the other side). And in the living room, Bill continued the maritime theme with 62 mahogany-framed 1920s yachting photographs that wrapped the walls in sepia salt spray. Although on the first hanging, he didn't like the frames. That's why their canvas strips were belatedly painted to match the photos' sullen skies, and now they please him greatly; as does his collection of English creamware black-transfer-printed jugs. Scattered round on needlepoint cushions (though nothing's exactly 'scattered' here) are his favourite comic-strip characters: Popeye, Dagwood and Richie Rich. Their smiley, kitschy faces defate all haute décor... as they're supposed to do.

Bill's bedroom is a paean to American painted cottage furniture. The jaw-dropping bed itself, with its butch stag niche counterbalanced by dainty nasturtiums and a canopy 'straight from David Hicks', is a major statement. But the pictures on those walls aren't real. In their clever 'birch', 'twig' and 'tramp art' frames, they've been painted slap on to the planks.

Let's not overlook his windmill and swan motifs either: the former bespeak old East Hampton and the latter still cruise the pond beyond his door. But capping all referential leitmotif-nautical, Colonial, local – are Bill's own ubiquitous diamonds. They're his signature, of course, and 'sort of fun', he says, 'instead of a monogram'. He's put diamond cut-outs on the new black shutters, and chosen diamond lattice for the chair backs and wicker porch furniture. He's even put his stamp on the new dining-room window: a diamond flipped on its side. It's a big horizontal that opens up the room,' Bill explains, and his diamonds do the same for the small garden that, when he bought the place, was cut up into 'rooms' (perennials, rock garden, herbs, etc). It's now become one single airy space with diamond parterres planted in blue and white.

Tony believes that 'You know when a house is Bill's. It's classical, edited, organised and full of clarity.' (Which he adds with a smile, isn't *him* at all!) Nevertheless, the two partners have always shared a design mind, and that mind, as evidenced here, is a splendid, luxurious graphic, madly coloured with kids' crayons and as cheeky as a comic strip.

Actually, it wouldn't be a stretch to transform Bill himself into a cartoon character... Diamondman, say? Look! Up on that Park Avenue building! In that harlequin-patterned cap! There he goes: organising! Splashing colour all around! Finding themes! Shopping a lot and buying a little! Striking fear in to the hearts of pack-rats worldwide! Edit that, you compulsive shoppers, you! Pow! Zap!... Wow! ■

To contact Diamond Baratta Design, ring 001 212 966 8892, or visit diamondbarattadesign.com. 'All-American: The Exuberant Style of William Diamond and Anthony Baratta' is published by Pointed Leaf, pp.165



From top: David Cobn executed the trompe-l'oeil wall paintings, including landscapes and a faux fish diorama, in mock-birch frames; in the guest-room a bedside lamp made from an antique model of a windmill stands by a 19th-century tiger-maple bed; from the diamond-shaped boxwood garden, we look back to the house and new garage, designed to look like an 1850 carriage house. Opposite: with its David Hicks-inspired canopy, this cottage-style four-poster was modified to increase its width by a quarter

