



Home Front

Designer Jamie Drake

A bold eye for color

By Jackie Cooperman on March 30, 2010

"I have a gazillion colors in my head at any given moment," says designer Jamie Drake. "If a client has a fabulous antique rug, I'll look at the colors and note down: 'blue plum.' I can read my notes two days later and get that color pretty much on the money." Does he test colors before applying them to a client's walls? The very idea seems almost to offend him: "I pick the color, it goes up, and it's right."

Such swagger might imply hubris were he less successful. Drake's bold eye for color, though, particularly his signature use of heavily saturated hues, has drawn clients as diverse as Madonna, Random House executive Phyllis Grann, and most famously, of late, New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. Drake has designed several houses for Bloomberg and is now at work on the decrepit Gracie Mansion, official residence of New York's mayors since 1942--a project Drake declines to discuss. (Bloomberg still lives in his Upper East Side townhouse.) Everything around Drake reflects the confident embrace of unconventional pigment; even his bespoke navy-blue jacket by Savile Row's Ozwald Boateng opens to reveal a lining of cobalt-blue silk punctuated by lilac piping. "Boateng does great lining," says Drake, 45, whose sartorial taste--perfectly tailored but with a tinge of eccentricity--mirrors his approach to interior design.

"Most of my clients have forceful personalities, so they like a strong look, but they're not often hugely specific," he says. "They define whether they want contemporary or traditional, intense or softer color, and we take it from there." Planning a home on Fisher's Island, near Miami, around a couple's antiques collection, he kept the tone traditional, painting the living room a pale "Madame de Pompadour blue" and filling the master bedroom with "a panoply of yellows and golds and pinks and reds" to draw out the Italian linen-and-silk floral wall coverings.

Elsewhere, he tends to mingle time periods and styles. In Los Angeles he stenciled 17th-century Florentine patterns on the ceilings of a 1920s Spanish Revival house. For a Knightsbridge flat, the client suggested using American furniture and antique flags, Drake recalls, "but I thought the flags were a little coy, and the American furniture wouldn't have been appropriate to the grand Regency architecture." When Drake showed him pictures of both American and European antiques, the client veered toward the latter's more opulent aesthetic. In the end, Drake mixed European antiques with important works of 20th-century American art like Andy Warhol's *Nine Multicolored Marylins*, satisfying his client's yen for a flag with Jasper Johns' large 1973 painting *Flag 1*. "My clients come to me for something different from what they would do themselves," says Drake. "They want to be stretched."



When he can't find what he wants, Drake creates it, customizing textures (using a 19th-century French technique called *gaufrage* to emboss patterns on silk and velvet), materials (sandwiching rice paper between layers of hand-poured glass), even plumbing fixtures and hardware. A line of rugs due out in September, inspired by things like a 1940s Venetian mirror, a swatch of paisley, reflects "my love of color and of curvaceous, sexy shapes."

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