



Designer Robert Goodwin painted the upper portions of the hallway that divides the dining room from the living room in Benjamin Moore's Iron Mountain, which he describes as "a brown with a lot of blue in it. There's nobody who comes to this house who doesn't have a favorable reaction to it and want to know what color it is." A stunning 18th-century French pedestal holds an urn that few guess is painted fiberglass.

Interior design by ROBERT GOODWIN
 Interview by CHRISTOPHER PETKANAS
 Photographs by GRIDLEY + GRAVES



The New Mix

PURPLE VELVET, CHINESE PORCELAIN, THE CHAIR OF THE MOMENT (AND NOT A PIECE OF MIDCENTURY MODERN)...THIS MUST BE 2007

CHRISTOPHER PETKANAS: You get high marks for giving this classic 18th-century Pennsylvania farmhouse a traditional yet thoroughly-up-to-date look. How did you do it?

ROBERT GOODWIN: Since the house was added on to only once—soon after it was built in 1755—it was tempting to try to reimagine the past and create a series of period rooms. But I quickly realized that I didn't want one of those frozen, historically correct places with a spinning wheel in one corner and a butter churn in the other. I preferred to include furniture and objects from the house's entire timeline, right up to the present. I was determined that it be realistic and livable, without a single uncomfortable or unusable chair.

So what do I see that's original to the house?

Some of the architectural details, colors, and surfaces. These were filled out with wallpapers, color schemes, flooring, and lighting from successive decorative periods and reflecting technological advances. Oil lamps were converted to electricity for the two bedrooms. There's a very smart Italian halogen lamp in an alcove in the hallway. And candlelight is the only kind of light I have in the dining room.

Can you get through an entire meal without changing the candles in the chandelier?

Somehow their going out seems to coincide with guests nodding off, whether from the wine or the hour—so usually it works out.

How did you arrive at the palette?

The colors are basically earth tones—lots of rich browns and beiges, plus some taupes. Unlike most period houses in the area, mine receives a lot of sunlight and the windows are fairly generous, so I felt the interiors could handle darker colors. Blue and white are the accent colors. Most of the blues were borrowed from the Chinese export porcelain that was so popular in America 200 years ago.

When people think of historical interiors in this country they tend to think of white walls with contrasting door casings, skirting boards, cornices, and wainscoting. The trim and wainscoting are emphasized, not the walls.

Exactly. To give the house a more contemporary feel, I reversed

the formula. The walls usually carry the color, and the trim and wainscoting are white or the same color as the walls.

Your rule held even when you used a wall covering, as you did in the living room.

I'm crazy about that paper. It's this incredible maize-colored vinyl with a brushed texture from Japan.

The wood floors are one of the house's great assets.

They probably date from the 19th century. The planks are as wide as 16 inches. The wood was actually harvested from a walnut grove on the property. I decided not to refinish the floors—they have all these great age marks—but to simply hand-wax them and leave them their rich, natural color.

The dining chairs' blue-and-white slipcovers printed with those highly stylized overblown flowers pick up any slack.

That was the idea. Another thing I did to prevent the room from feeling too period was to hang a collection of prints and mezzotints from floor to ceiling. The room has one of those big walk-in Bucks County fireplaces, and it's pretty overwhelming. Arranging the artwork this way helped tame it.

What guides you when choosing a fabric, and how that fabric is treated, for a sofa or chair?

I love fabrics that look traditional but also have something contemporary going on. The one on my pencil-post bed in the master bedroom is a perfect example. It's a slightly iridescent synthetic that has all the wonderful qualities of silk and changes color when it moves. It can be brown, sea blue.... And I like furniture that references the past, but with modern fabric treatments. In the living room there's a pair of reproduction French-style armchairs with gray-painted frames and nailhead trim. The bodies are upholstered in fine-gauge raffia, but the cushions change with the seasons—animal spots and crewelwork in summer, silk velvet and a heavier ribbed raffia in winter. The sofa is a 19th-century Chippendale-style English camelback, but covered in a twenties-inspired leopard pattern.

The ceiling rafters in the master bedroom are as important a design element as anything in the room.

They've never been painted, if you can believe it. I thought about doing the room white, but the contrast with the dark, mellow wood would have been too stark. The latte color I ultimately used has a softening effect on the ceiling.

Yours must be the most glamorous, most sophisticated entrance hall in rural Pennsylvania.

Nearly everything in it is from or associated with the 18th century: the French console, the English mirror, the Chinese porcelain, the crazily carved gilt brackets. The room is surprising and, even I have to admit, a little over the top. But in its eclecticism and blending of cultures it's a room of today.

Given the house's country setting and humble pedigree, no one expects such a dressy front hall. There's even an urn on a neoclassical pedestal in the corridor. What statement are you making?

That this house is not standing still. Like the contemporary paintings in the corridor, the urn and pedestal are part of the timeline. It's all my way of blurring boundaries between traditional and modern points of view.

Is this house typical of what you do for clients?

I guess I would say it's a little less reserved. The look of my house is one they'd gradually work up to. For a client there might not be so many i's dotted, so many t's crossed.



Goodwin chose the Ishikawa textured vinyl wallpaper from Brunschwig & Fils in the living room to help nudge his 1755 house into the 21st century. The arrangement of furniture and upholstery of antique pieces in fresh, contemporary fabrics work toward the same goal. In their cool-weather guise, a pair of raffia-covered Oly Studio armchairs have Pottery Barn back cushions, also in raffia, and seat cushions in Prince Igor silk velvet from Brunschwig & Fils.





Goodwin painted the trim in the entry the same color as the walls. He prefers this modern-looking treatment to the tradition of painting it in a contrasting color. Surrounding the Louis XV console and Queen Anne mirror is a collection of 18th- and 19th-century blanc de chine figures on brackets. OPPOSITE: An antique English dining table is surrounded by chairs slipcovered in Schumacher's Wythe House Border Resist. The chandelier is a custom Goodwin design.





RIGHT: Goodwin honors the house's history in the master bedroom with a canopy bed, but gives it a modern spin with hangings in an iridescent synthetic, Larsen's Cybele, lined with Brunschwig & Fils' Camaldoli Check. The Maroc wool rug from Masland builds on the pattern. Lacquered a

blackish tea color, the custom pencil-post bed was copied from one at Winterthur, Henry Francis du Pont's Delaware estate. Bedside lamps are converted antique silver-plated candlesticks. Pottery Barn pillows. **TOP:** Goodwin placed two 19th-century linnet cages atop an antique English oak chest. "To me, birdcages are like architectural models," he says. "They always incorporate some classic architectural element in miniature—arches, domes, crenellations." **ABOVE:** Crowning Goodwin's birdcage collection is a Regency design in the form of a castle. **FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES**