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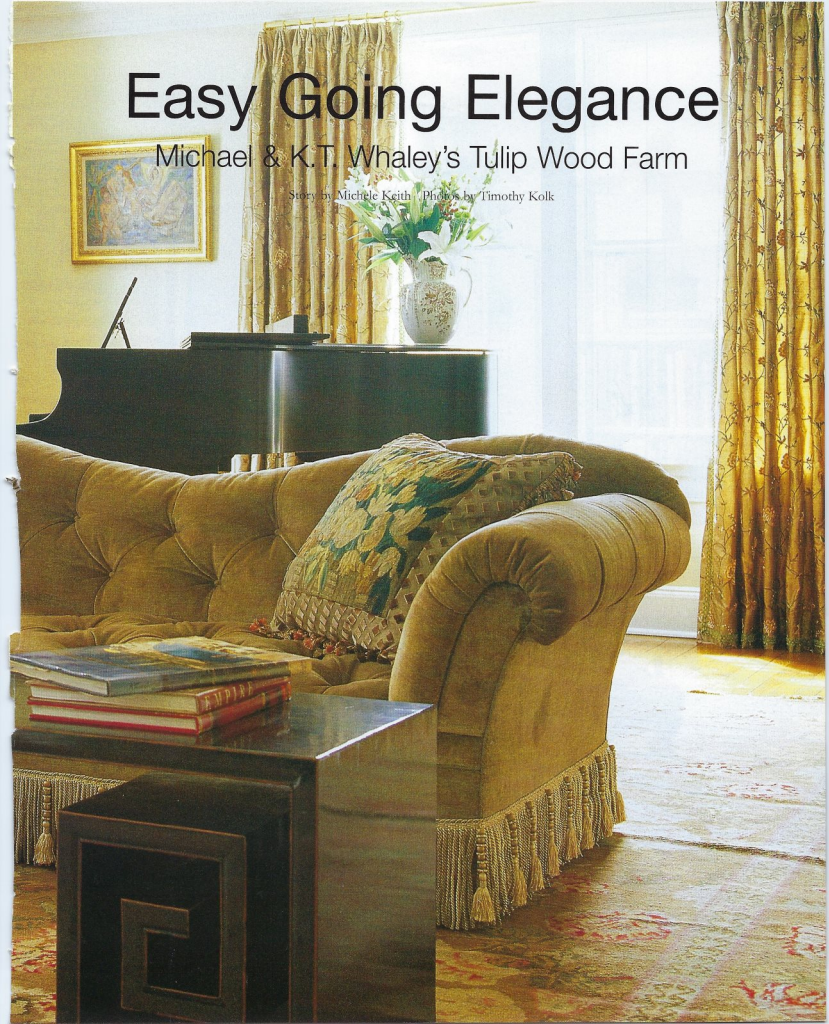


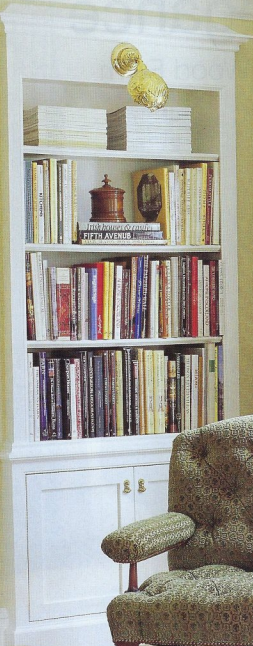
A beautiful room divider, the Schiaparelli sofa is "sexy from every angle."

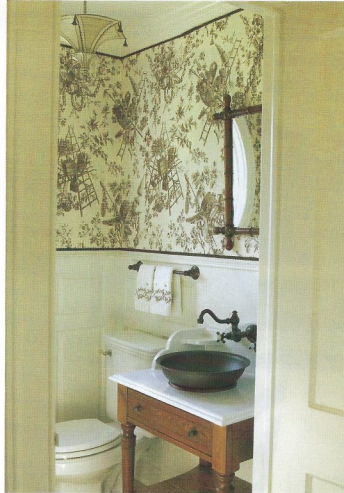
Easy Going Elegance

Michael & K.T. Whaley's Tulip Wood Farm

Story by Michele Keith | Photos by Timothy Kolk







The name says it all. Tulip Wood Farm. An image instantly pops into mind: Simple elegance. Luxurious and fresh. Uniquely beautiful. The home that interior decorator Michael Whaley has created for his wife, two little girls and himself is that...and so much more.

Twenty years spent in the interior design business, some of it with the renowned, some would say "revered" Sister Parish who decorated the homes of Anne Getty and Betsy Whitney among other top-tier clients, shows in Whaley's work. Subtle shades and mixes of color, contrasting yet compatible shapes, a layering of textures and patterns to create a rich, but never overdone look, and unparalleled attention to detail are his hallmarks. Add a judicious sprinkling of fine antiques found stateside and in Europe, and abundant natural light, and you begin to understand why his faithful clients trust him implicitly.

"Decorating for yourself," he says, "can be more fun, and also more difficult, than for a client. You want to do all those special things that you love, but that they don't go for, and add touches that no other house has to make it truly your own. This one is really 'me,'" he says. "Most clients don't want brown, one of my favorite colors, or lime green, my wife's preferred shade, both of which are used extensively here. The look is formal as well as welcoming, a comfortable home that we can use fully – for everyday living and entertaining."

Not just a "lipstick job," the 1930s colonial he and wife K.T. bought four years ago presented a variety of architectural and structural challenges, including such mundane, but important



matters as insulation, air conditioning and heating and rain gutters. Not touched in 30 years, "the house was held together with duct tape," Whaley laughs. "We basically gutted it." The 4-bedroom, 3 1/2 bath house, situated in a lush, hilly area in North Stamford, was found after an extensive, three-year search. Michael had lived and worked in Manhattan for 20 years, ever since studying architecture at Columbia. But with a second daughter on the way, and the desire for a better balance between work and home, he and K.T. decided it was time to move. Plus "Most of my clients have at least one home in Fairfield County," he says. "The location is perfect for frequent shopping trips into the city; I can give my clients the individualized attention they deserve; and still spend lots of time with my family."

Passionate about and greatly inspired by classical French and English 18th and 19th century design, which he studied in great depth while living in France, Whaley is an expert when it comes to antiques of those periods. The house is a seamless mélange of fine European pieces but thanks to Whaley's deft touch, not projecting a "don't touch" message. Instead, the fine chairs and sofas are upholstered in a marvelous mix of textures and patterns that

(Left) A corner of the living room showing the Edwardian and Regency chairs.

(Above) Once bubble-gum pink, the ground-floor powder room now sports a sophisticated brown-and-white scheme with bronze, glass and wood accents.

(Right) Catching light in the entrance way is the bull's eye mirror flanked by antique tole sconces.



sing out to guests, bidding them to sit down. The porcelains and art that he and K.T. collect are displayed for easy viewing, an integral part of the design, and never placed so that visitors, or the children, feel anything less than relaxed.

Entering the front door, framed by slivers of windows fitted with hand-blown, leaded restoration glass, one arrives in the vestibule. Setting the stage, with its damask-patterned, hand-blocked wallpaper in an unusual cocoa shade, and bull's eye mirror hung from an antique rosette, it took a near total re-creation to achieve its current state. Plaster molding was installed as well as the front door and glass replaced, the reclaimed hardwood floors laid. "I had had a sample of this wallpaper

for years, waiting for the perfect client. We realized that we were that client," explains Michael, "The pattern is overscale; the robust cocoa color ties all of the major rooms of the house together."

Turning left is the kitchen and to the right the living room. Awash with sun from the windows at either end, the kitchen is the perfect spot for family gatherings. The

(Above) With English china, crystal goblets and Italian linen napkins, their monogram designed by Michael and fabricated at Home Boutique, Greenwich, each place setting is a work of art.

(Right) Handpainted Regency chairs from Kevin Cross, Redding, surround the mahogany table. The leopard-printed carpet is from Beauvais.





wallpaper is patterned in shades of lime, Windsor-style chairs painted to match surround a simple wooden table, and gleaming stainless steel accents, including the farm sink, provide a contemporary edge. Warmed up with white beadboard and slatted wooden floors, extra light is provided by ceiling spots and period-appropriate hanging fixtures.

The living room required major work. It was important to establish symmetry and proper scale to provide a classical foundation for his interior design. Whaley reconstructed the wall facing the terrace. He added a pair of French doors with tall cottage windows on either side. The windows were fitted with reproduction glass for historical correctness. "I love how the waves in the glass slightly distort the view. You are always aware these were created by hand." Curtains, café au lait silk embroidered with sinuous flowering vines and shades of brown, ivory and acid green hand from simple gilded poles and rings. (Curtains designed by Michael Whaley, fabricated in the By Design workshop).

The curved and tufted Schiaparelli sofa is covered in cocoa colored linen velvet and trimmed with sumptuous silk bullion fringe embellished with jasmines. The curved back dips in the middle and opens up the room. "It is a gorgeous piece of furniture – sexy from every angle," says Whaley. On the sofa, a pair of 18th century Beauvais tapestry pillows are set off with taupe silk velvet and trimmed with fringe (David Duncan Antiques). The rug is a copy of an 18th century Axminster (Beauvais Carpets) whose soft brown ground is strewn with dusty pink and red flowers. "So often I'll show a client a flowered fabric or carpet, and they'll say, 'too flowery.' But you can use flower patterns successfully throughout a room and not have it look fussy or feminine."

The original stock mantel was replaced with an 18th century-style one with stop fluting and a frieze of carved paterna. Centered on the wall above is a painting by Tete, one of Georges Braques' contemporaries. "When you bring a touch of modern art into a traditional room," confides Whaley, "it can add an

element of surprise that can be quite exciting.” “Chairs have different personalities. They’re fun to design—adding a skirt or showing the feet will change their character. We’ve noticed they attract different types of people to them. It is always interesting to see who sits in which chair at a party,” says K.T.

Lining one wall is a grand bookcase carved at the top with Whaley’s riff on a Chinese pagoda, the lower quarter a cleverly designed storage area. The masses of books lining the shelves are lit with hammered brass picture lights picked up in England.

While relatively small in size, the dining room is big on style. The hand-glazed walls shimmer, their butter yellow ground stenciled with fleurs de lys painted a soft yellow with nearly imperceptible touches of blue and gold. Swirling along the walls are some of the blue-and-white Staffordshire plates collected by Whaley over the years. “Rather than arranged in symmetrical groupings, I thought it would be fantastic to see them swirl around the room, like a wave or leaves in a gust of wind, looping over doorways and around furniture, which creates movement and energy around the dinner guests.”

Centered on the leopard-printed carpet is the circular mahogany table surrounded by hand-painted Regency chairs. Gleaming above is the 19th century Baltic crystal and bronze chandelier, its candles held in place by cobalt-blue bobesches. An engagement present given K.T. by Whaley, it has hung in every home the couple has shared.

The master bedroom suite is a sanctuary done up in a palette of blue and white, its walls upholstered in toile, the floor laid with a rug Scandinavian in feel with its simple graphic of blue squares against white, it feels airy and serene. The centerpiece of the room is a four-poster bed, hand-painted with classical figures. “In this age of catalogs and on-line shopping, it is a joy to work with skilled artisans to create something unique. It is one of the great pleasures of my profession to work with and support such highly talented artists, and enjoy their work each day.” For Whaley, history combines with originality to bring the kind of harmonious design seen in the work of the icons of design who continue to inspire him: Sister Parish, Renzo Mongiardino, and Madeleine Castaing.

(Left) Homey touches in the sunny kitchen include warm woods, a Stark rug and K.T.’s favorite green.

(Above right) Adding more green to the mix is a wooden plate rack above a small sideboard in the kitchen.

(Right) Efficiently utilizing the space between kitchen and foyer is a small office area.

(Following page left) Upholstered in toile, the master bedroom’s focus is the four-poster handpainted with classical figures. The mix of furniture includes antique bamboo and painted pieces. On the slipper chair is a bead-work pillow from KM Antiques, New York.

(Following page right) The Victorian chair with needlepoint upholstery provides textural contrast to the serene blue-and-white scheme of the master bedroom.









"I often think of myself as a busy portfolio manager for my client's homes: I want to ensure they get a good return on their purchases and decisions at every level, not only in terms of the monetary value of their investment but also, in terms of the pure pleasure they'll have in the years ahead, living in the surroundings I have created for them. After a hectic day, racing around from client meeting to client meeting, overseeing installations, and checking in on workrooms, it is gratifying to walk into my own home and think that they, like me, are settling into a comfortable, beautiful chair, having a glass of wine with their spouse, and enjoying the pleasures of home." ■

Previously a bathroom and closet, the new master bath is spa-like with candles in suspended blue-glass-and-metal votives, and Venetian plaster walls washed a pale blue with handpainted ferns. Accessories from Waterworks, Greenwich.