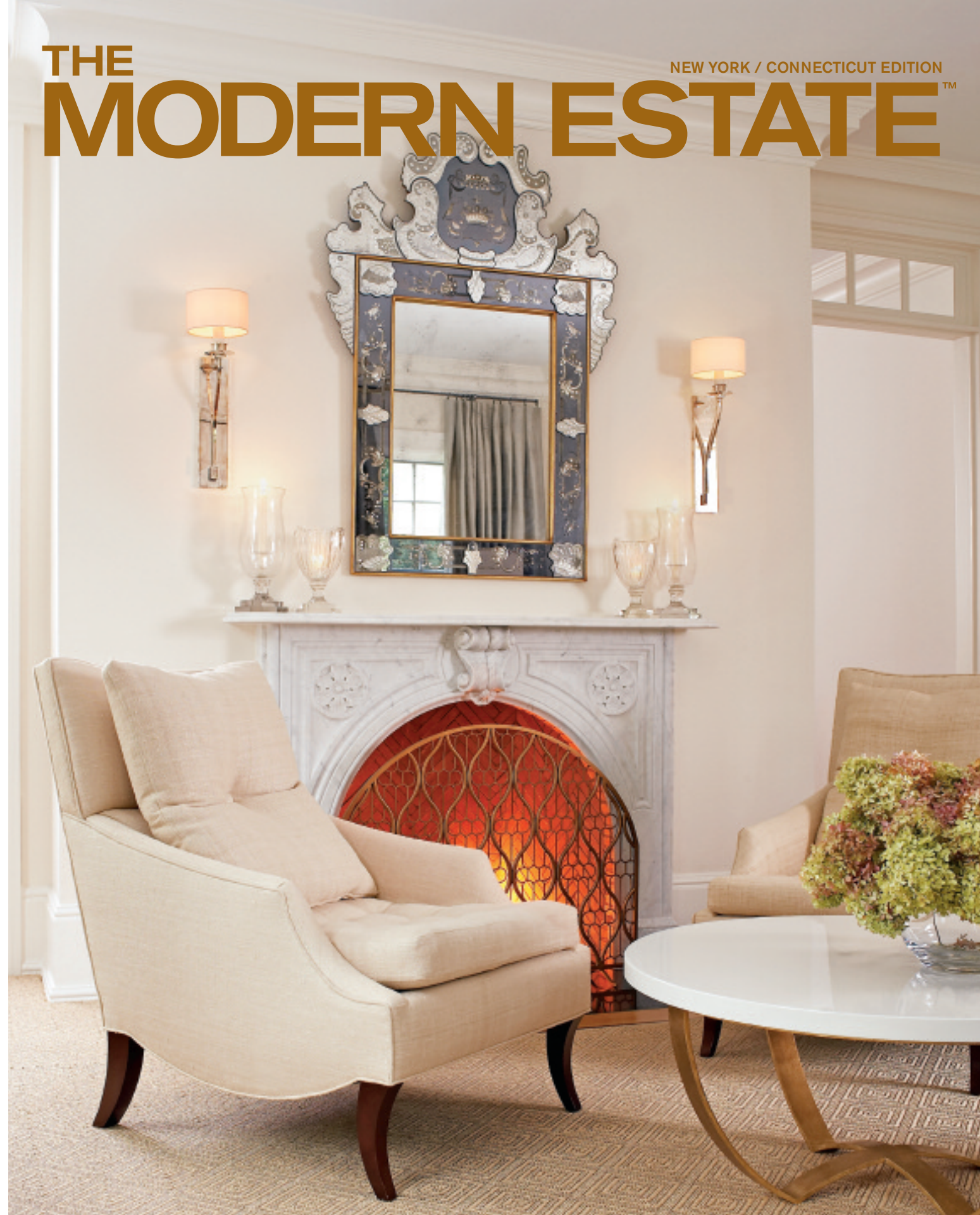


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THE  
STRENGTH  
OF *Subtlety*

By Lynne Scalo | Photography by Phillip Ennis

I believe in the power of understatement—the capacity of subtle hues like gray, beige, and cream to create feelings of restfulness, harmony, and peace



OPPOSITE PAGE: Scalo designed the kitchen to have a clean feel. “I wanted it to be fresh and upbeat, but all the materials had to be kid-friendly.” The island’s white, granite countertop and ebonized base help achieve that look. THIS PAGE: Scalo gave a modern twist to a traditional table. “I designed the dining room table for entertaining and family gatherings. The table, made in England, is a hand-planed mahogany. It’s an elegant look, but the table is also very, very easy.”





#### PRACTICALITY

We wanted to make the kitchen kid-friendly, so I designed a kitchen table—a simple farmhouse design—to be made of hand-planed oak in a dark, ebonized finish. I juxtaposed this plain table with chairs I designed that are a modern interpretation of a curvy Louis XV chair. They are upholstered in durable, dark-white leather that can be wiped clean if they're ever soiled. This leather gave a fresh, modern look to these classic shapes. Since my client has young children, we had to make everything in the house not only beautiful but cleanable.

The décor of the grand, Normandy-style residence is understated, but still dramatic. And the beauty of the plan is that this stylish and elegant house is a family residence. That's what I always aim to do—give each of my clients a tasteful, classic, and sophisticated home with a big *wow* factor. ❖

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**T**ailored, classic, understated, but livable—that’s my design philosophy. But, though “understated” is the look I prefer, my top priority is to make the interiors I design reflect my clients’ personalities and lifestyles.

Some of my clients, I’ve found, find it daunting to try to articulate their taste; they need encouragement just to explore what decorating styles they actually like. (A client for whom I designed a classic, yet timeless, interior once told me, “Before we talked, I didn’t know so much about myself. I would have gone in another direction . . . I’d never have known I could live in a house like this.”) And, just as they don’t yet realize what kind of décor they’d find most pleasing, clients often don’t know much about scale, proportion, and out-of-the-ordinary ways to use color and texture to create a striking interior. But every client, I’ve discovered, responds to beauty.

As for me, I’ve never doubted what styles appeal to me. A passion for arranging rooms struck me when I was very young. Even as a child I was always redesigning my room and mixing paint colors. Indeed, when I was 12, I had the professional who was painting my room redo his work four times; I wanted a custom raspberry color, but he couldn’t seem to create it. Finally, I simply mixed the colors myself. As I was growing up, I also liked to refinish furniture and paint designs on it. We’d find little French pieces (a little bureau, a chair) and I’d paint things on them. I guess my mom, who is a wonderful artist, was my inspiration.

Before I opened my retail studio, Lynne Scalo Design, in Westport, in 2000, I spent much of my creative energy doing oil painting, and now I approach each project as an artistic endeavor. These days, to my great pleasure, I get to style other people’s homes and design furniture for them.

My first step is to get to know my potential clients. We sit down and have a conversation. It’s like a first date—either there’s chemistry or there isn’t, and if there isn’t, the relationship won’t work.

When my clients come in, I’ll ask about their lifestyle—how many children they have, and whether they entertain or are homebodies. Sometimes I’ll ask people to tell me about favorite places they’ve traveled to, or to show me their favorite fashion magazines or inspirational pictures. I encourage them to tell me what they’d like their lifestyle to be, even if it doesn’t match the look (casual, tailored, Bohemian) they are presenting to the world. I’ll say, “If I could wave a magic wand, where would you want to be?” They may say they want to live in mid-20th century England, or maybe they picture themselves living in Paris. I’ll ask them, “Why Paris?” After they’ve given me as many clues as I need, I’ll put a decorating plan together. >>



#### FITTING IN

I design my own coffee tables, end tables, buffet consoles, dining tables, sofas, and chairs, because by doing so I can give my clients just the right look and furniture size for their rooms. I often need to create custom because antiques are usually smaller than the furniture fashioned today—people were smaller in the old days. On the other hand, furniture made in America today is often overscale.

Overscale items are usually grotesque; smaller-scaled items are very pretty to look at, but not very comfortable. I want my clients’ furniture to be proportioned properly and to be the right scale for the room they’re in. My goal, in a nutshell, is to make furniture pretty and comfortable. Designing furniture, like decorating a residence, is a great artistic outlet for me, and while I don’t design in every style, I think my furniture fits my clients’ needs. My line is best described as comfortable, classic furniture for modern living.

#### THE RIGHT TOUCH

Materials like raw silk, linen, leather, and velvet are of contrasting textures, but they can nevertheless go together beautifully. In this project I also used steel, acrylic, mirror, mercury glass, and sterling silver, along with lizard skin and petrified tree bark. The contrasts are amazing. To create harmony and balance in a room, one needs to make combinations of all of these soft and hard textures. Of course, not every texture suits a particular environment. So you must make the right choices. >>



THIS PAGE: Scalo wanted to give her clients—collectors of photography and avid readers—a master bedroom where they could relax and be surrounded by the things they love. A marble fireplace provides an added dose of comfort.

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: The room also features an aqua linen sofa and seafoam-green silk and velvet curtains. BOTTOM: Scalo used the same color scheme (a white terrycloth chair and sea colors) to make the master bath a visual extension of the bedroom. The bath is highlighted by an Italian Murano glass chandelier.



PRECEDING PAGE: Designer Lynne Scalo uses quiet colors and natural raw silk to achieve a look of subtlety and grace in these custom English chairs. For added elegance, she accentuates the room with an antiqued mirror and 1940s-inspired sconces.

THIS PAGE: The focal point of the living room is the English-charcoal-velvet Chesterfield-style sofa, which Scalo custom designed and flanked with two French Bombay chests.





To create a natural vibe in the family room, Scalo chose a natural, basket-weave linen fabric for the sofa and accented it with a hand-knotted, Afghan rug. For a modern twist, she incorporated a traditional settee, also in natural linen.



#### THE USES OF COLOR

I am attracted to understated colors because of the calming effect they can have on a space. Colors like charcoal and cream, I believe, create feelings of restfulness, harmony, and peace. Of course, I don't want the spaces I design to be boring. Every home needs a little bit of bling. But, for the most part, people don't want to live in show houses. They want to come home and have a feeling of serenity. That's what I give my clients with the color palettes I choose. This house was no different.

For the living room I designed a large, elongated, Chesterfield-style sofa and covered it in luxurious charcoal-gray velvet. The muted color is classic, but the reinterpreted dimensions give the sofa a fresh look. We continued the charcoal palette throughout the house in hues from pearl to midnight. I covered the floor in a sisal rug accented with a pattern in charcoal and natural raffia. I picked up that essence with the natural raw silk in the raffia-colored upholstery of the living-room chairs. And, picking up from the gray and blue color of the entry wall, I chose a gray-green for the draperies in the living room; I like having a continuity of color from one room to another. When the color palette is picked up from room to room, the transition from one room to another is not jarring.

And so in the family room, which is visible from the foyer, there's a continuation of the same color tonality. But for the family room we chose to go with a warmer color than the cool, blue-green combination: linen in a flax color and natural tone, accented with a lot of cream. I made sure that the cream-colored material was a washable, kid-friendly fabric. I also interjected a touch of raw steel in the coffee table. This look could be construed as industrial-looking, but I softened it with a gorgeous honed-travertine top. Against the fine, hand-knotted Afghan wool carpet, this combination looks great. >>



RIGHT: For a soft feel, Scalo used layers of fine Irish linen to envelop the guest-bedroom windows and desk (Opposite Page). "I covered the walls in a Wedgwood blue silk to create an environment for sweet dreams," she notes. The custom bedding is a white cotton and silk combination with bold, dual-toned stripes. BELOW LEFT: She accented the bedroom of one of the owners' twin daughters with an apricot-pink chair and "joyful artwork." BELOW RIGHT: Scalo placed a colorful painting and a periwinkle-blue chair in the other daughter's room. "I created similar spaces, but acknowledged the girls' individual personalities."







#### SOFTENING A GRAND SPACE

A happy project for me—because the homeowner's taste meshed with mine—was designing the décor for a newly built modern estate in Greenwich, Connecticut. This grand (15,000-square-foot), Normandy-style residence is architecturally unique: I'd never seen anything like it. Large though it is, there is nevertheless a Hansel and Gretel feel to it. Technically, it's a shingled, center-hall Colonial with nine bathrooms, five bedrooms, a beautiful library, a living room, a family room, a kitchen with expansive butler's pantry and access to a formal dining room, a large children's play room, and a photography studio.

My client came to me because she had seen another project that I had finished; she told me that she loved my style and wanted to create something with me. She wanted her home to have a fresh, classic, tailored look. Right away I could see that the home was lovely, even in its empty state. Together we decorated throughout, and made it even lovelier.

The first issue we had to address was scale. The client wanted a homier feeling in this huge house. We started with the foyer—certainly a hominess challenge, for it is 24 feet high by 29 feet long by 15 feet wide. We wanted to establish in this vast entranceway a friendly, welcoming tone that we'd carry throughout the house.

To warm up this cold, empty space, I started by softening the texture and color of the walls. To create a delicate, inviting feeling, I covered one of the white walls in a pale gray-blue (almost aqua) raw silk. On that wall I hung the husband's collection of black-and-white photographs taken by Alfred Eisenstaedt and other well-known photographers. The color palate of the foyer went from a stark white to pale blue against white, with ebony accents. We also softened this entryway's very grand feeling by covering the oak floor with rugs hand-woven in linen-colored wool. And, to add a golden glow to the walls, we introduced ten beautiful French sconces, made of iron and gold leaf, that I had picked up on my last trip to Paris.

Softening the space with furniture was our next step. We moved into the foyer the black Baby Grand piano that the client's two daughters play. It looks beautiful in juxtaposition with the high millwork, which is a creamy white. We also added a 1940s chair that had belonged to the client's grandmother; we had re-covered it in cream-colored leather, which gave a fresh look to a dated piece.

The chair stands next to a large writing desk/armoire that I found on one of my trips to Italy. Its curves mimic the curvature of the piano, the stairs, and the upper landing, creating a harmonious flow of energy, softening the foyer's sharply rectangular shape. We added glow by hanging a beautiful French chandelier and placing a mirror from Belgium under a sconce. >>

OPPOSITE PAGE: To achieve an ambiance of understated elegance in the entry hall, Scalo combined organic wallpaper, a crystal chandelier, and French torchère sconces. ABOVE: An ebonized walnut door and side chair with curvature mimicking the Baby Grand piano help set the tone.