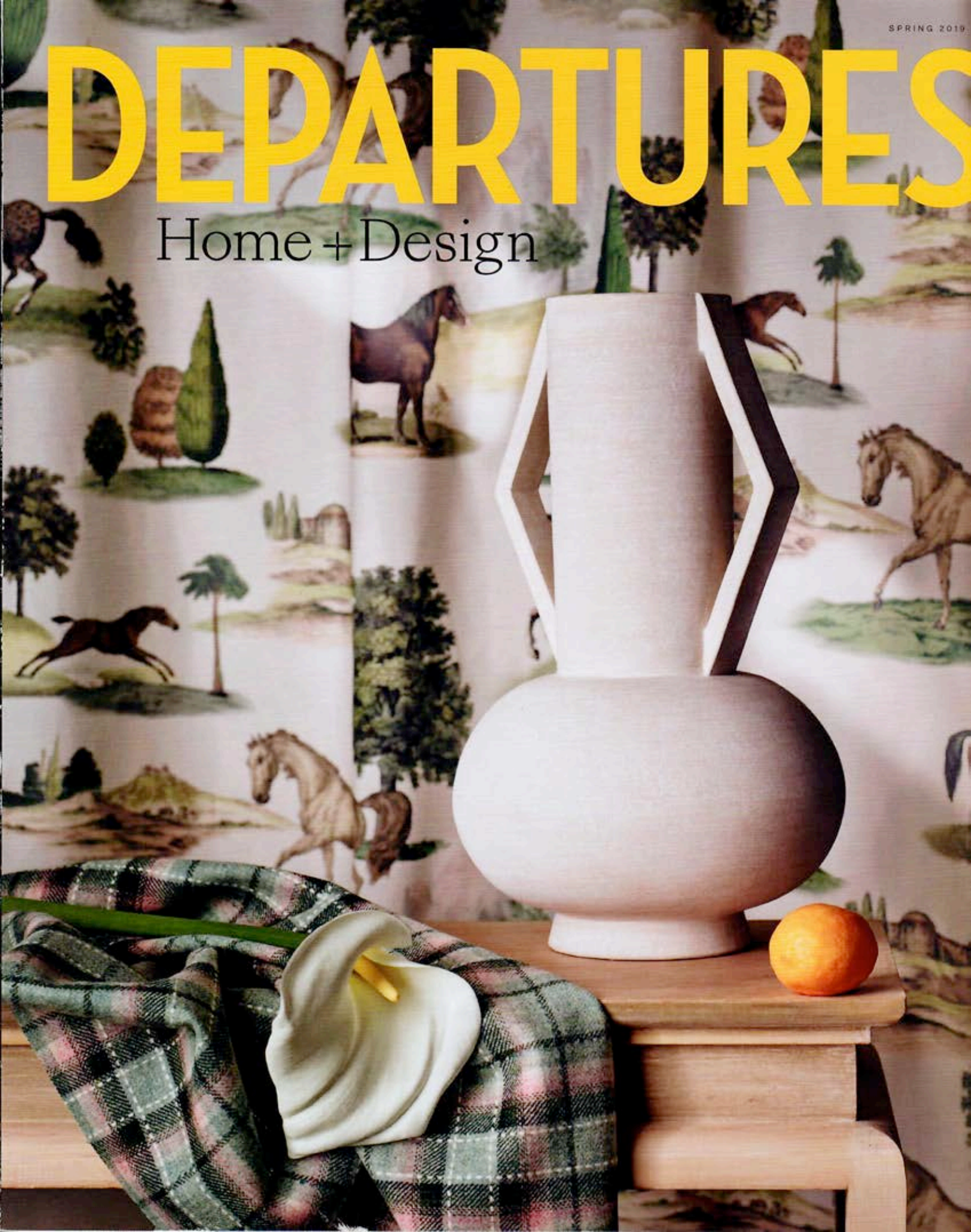


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Home + Design



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A centuries-old oak tree marks the entry to Amy and Michael Bennett's South Carolina home.



Southern Revival

Once a rice plantation and then a Girl Scout camp, an 18th-century estate outside Charleston, South Carolina, gets its best life yet thanks to one courageous family hell-bent on saving it.

THE RESURRECTION ferns that creep up the branches of the live oaks have greened again. In the dry season and in droughts, they turn grayish-brown and fade into the bark of the trees they cling to. Then, almost miraculously, water and sunshine return and bring them back to life. The live oak allée leading to Richmond Plantation, on the east branch of South Carolina's Cooper River, 40 miles north of Charleston, is vibrant with these ferns, green from the rain and crisp fall air. I'm standing at the end of the approach, where a 1930 Tudor Revival brick manor crowns the property, itself revived from dormancy and neglect thanks to its new residents, Charleston developer Michael Bennett, his wife, Amy, and their 25-year-old son, Jack.

When Michael Bennett began hunting, in his 20s, he would often drive by the old plantations in

BY CHLOE MALLE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON UPTON
PRODUCED BY ANITA SARSIDI

this area. "I loved the way the brick columns looked, loved the gates, loved the oak allées, loved the mystery that was behind that gate," says the Charleston native. When Richmond Plantation came up for auction in 2013, his interest was piqued. When he placed his bid, his original intention was to tow the house a mile away to Quinby, his 2,000-acre hunting plantation, which didn't have a proper place to spend the night. After spending some time at Richmond, however, he and his wife—herself a bowhunter and prizewinning fly fisherwoman—realized it would be crazy to move it. Instead they decided to renovate it

and leave it where it had always been. Other bidders would have likely torn the house down. "I knew I was probably the only man in the world willing to buy that home and save it," Bennett tells me. "My wife loved it, and I said, 'Okay, let's go for it,' and I raised my hand one too many times and I bought it." They decided to use Richmond as their country home and take day trips across the river to Quinby for duck, quail, and deer hunting.

Bennett renovated his first building when he was 20 and has gone on to become one of the most prolific developers in the Charleston area (in January he opened Hotel Bennett, a 179-room luxury property in downtown Charleston). But even he was not prepared for what would ultimately become a 42-month overhaul. "I thought this would take about a year," he says. In the end, though, he's glad he did it: "I think of it as one of the grand homes of America, not just as a nice little plantation that I happened to fix up."

Like most of the estates in the area, Richmond was originally a tidal rice plantation. Purchased by Colonel John Harleston in the mid-1700s and passed down to family members for another century, the original two-story white clapboard burned down in 1900 and the land lay fallow until the 1920s, when it was bought by George A. Ellis, a cofounder of the brokerage firm EF Hutton. One of the wave of





wealthy Northern “Wall Street planters” who purchased antebellum plantations (Vanderbilts, Du Ponts, and Guggenheims all owned property in the area), Ellis enlisted the New York architecture firm Clinton and Russell, better known for what were at the time considered skyscrapers, such as the Hudson Terminal and the Apthorp, to build the property’s central residences. Because Ellis wanted to emulate the Tudor mansions of the British countryside, the architects incorporated elements salvaged from

an English castle that Ellis had acquired purportedly for the sole purpose of dismantling it and shipping pieces across the Atlantic to use at Richmond. The office, dining, and living rooms of the main house are still lined with the castle’s centuries-old cypress and English oak paneling and anchored by stone mantels.

When the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company purchased all 4,500 acres in 1962, it set aside 153 of them, including those with the house and outbuildings, for the Girl Scouts of the USA, who famously bought them with Thin Mints money. The Girl Scouts converted the main house into a dormitory that hosted thousands of campers until Hurricane Hugo damaged the roof in 1989. For the next 24 years the home languished, and the camp was put up for auction in 2013.

When the Bennetts purchased it, they enlisted architect Glenn Keyes, interior designer Tammy Connor, and landscape architect Sheila Wertimer—“the A team,” as Bennett calls them—to help with the resurrection. Keyes, the leading preservation architect in Charleston, had worked with Bennett on many projects. As for Connor, Bennett was so taken by the “rich

Above: The living room features sofas and armchairs sourced from Amelia T. Handegan, Inc. and a jute carpet from Keivan Woven Arts. The 19th-century French stool is mahogany with hair on hide from Holland & Sherry. *Opposite, from left:* The entry hall includes an antique settee using silk from Claremont Furnishing and an antique oak console, both from English Accent Antiques; a stuffed fox in the dining room. *For details, see page 142.*

but lived-in” sensibility of her designs that he hired her to renovate his Tradd Street home in Charleston and his seaside cottage on the Isle of Palms, and, subsequently, asked her to help with the Richmond project. “You know, down here we want to live nicely, but we also want our dogs around,” explains Bennett.

Jack Bennett, who works with his father, leads the way into the house through a side door, accessing what was once the servants’ quarters, next to the kitchen. Keyes and Connor have turned them

into a cozy warren of living spaces, with the walls of the family room wainscoted in sinker cypress. Tea-colored Rose Tarlow Melrose House wallpaper and Schumacher chintz suggest an English country inn. I go to pet what I think is a house cat curled on the mole-gray velvet George Smith sofa but discover it’s actually a taxidermied fox, the first of many creatures I encounter during my tour. Somehow, though,

the room doesn’t feel like a trophy hall, which is a testament to Connor’s design talents. Many of the mounts, like the German boar above the oversized stone mantel, were inherited with the house. The red fox standing at attention at the center of the mahogany dining table is, however, roadkill that Bennett picked up while driving one day.

Indeed, the house is an homage to the surrounding wildlife, with the family’s personal collection of Old Master animal paintings presiding over the dining room and an 18th-century Aubusson forest-scene tapestry in the entry hall. In the great room, the various styles of antiques come together. Midcentury faux-marble malachite cubes face a Baroque 1820s Bajan secretary housing Amy Bennett’s Staffordshire collection. Sisal carpeting is layered with antique Persian rugs.

MacKay, Jack Bennett’s English cocker spaniel, seems right at home as Jack and Keyes lead me on a tour of the gardens and many outbuildings (these parts of the property will be renovated in phase two of the project). There’s a brick-walled garden filled with pink and white camellias, which begin to bloom in late November and continue through the spring. On the lawn that slopes down to the banks of the Cooper River, the history of the property comes alive: Two mammoth oak trees at least 250 years old stand above the small cemetery where Colonel John Harleston is buried. There’s a kennel where 15 of George Ellis’s hunting spaniels lived with their handler, which will be repurposed as a guest cottage.





The Brownie Bungalow, named by the Girl Scouts and commemorated with a plaque over the door, will also provide accommodations for visitors. The Bennetts are still considering what to do with the pool—a Girl Scout legacy, which is municipal in both size and style—but they do plan to add archery bales and fish in the property’s freshwater ponds.

If Jack Bennett’s dream comes true, the carriage house where Mrs. Ellis kept her car collection—complete with a Welsh-slate roof and a dovecote—may one day become a pub. “Having a little Irish place to have a Guinness would be special,” he says, his lips curling into a smile. His father laughs. “The fruit doesn’t fall far from the tree,” he says. “That dream makes sense!” ☺



Above left: A detail of owner Michael Bennett’s office. The oak paneling is original to the home. *Above right:* An antique iron bed from Amelia T. Handegan, Inc. and an antique rattan rocking chair from Foxglove Antiques & Galleries on a wool flat-weave rug by Eve and Staron Studio in one of the guest rooms. *Opposite:* The family room features wallpaper from Rose Tarlow Melrose House, curtains using Schumacher linen, and a custom sisal rug from Merida. The sofa is from Amelia T. Handegan, Inc. and the antique armchair is from the Bennett family’s own collection.

“I think of it as one of the grand homes of America,” says owner Michael Bennett. “Not just as a nice little plantation that I happened to fix up.”

Where to Buy

PEACEABLE KINGDOM

PAGES 84–88 Interiors by Melissa Bowers, 433 W. 21st St., NYC, 917-664-9155, mabowersinc.com. **PAGE 84** Custom Peyote **chair** from blackmancruz.com; custom **window bench** using silk velvet **fabric**, to the trade from angelabrownltd.com. **PAGE 86** In the living room, polished-plaster **walls** by John Opella of Minium, 212-206-8361, miniumdesign.com; custom **ceiling mirrors** from Darren Vigilant, 201-432-3900, vigilant.design; custom wool-shag **carpet** from therugcompany.com; vintage Milo Baughman Circular Sectional **sofa** for Thayer Coggin from This Place, 22 Desbrosses St., NYC, thisplace.us; vintage Sputnik **chandelier** from 1stdibs.com. In the dining area, vintage brass Frank Mariani Lugano **chairs** for Pace Collection from This Place; brass-and-chrome **table** by Ferruccio Laviani from Bernd Goeckler Antiques, 212-777-8209, bgoecklerantiques.com. **PAGE 88** In the master bedroom, vintage brass Gabriella Crespi **table lamps** from Michel Contessa Antiques, 305-761-5243, michelcontessa.com; vintage brass Danish **chandelier** from Bernd Goeckler Antiques; vintage Japanese **screen** from Naga Antiques, 518-828-8585; naga antiques.com. In the master bathroom, vintage Boris Tabacoff Sphere **chair** from JF Chen, 323-463-4603, jfchen.com; **tub** from americh.com.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

PAGES 96–100 Interiors by Brendan Ravenhill, 2122 Cypress Ave., L.A., 323-977-8532, brenndanravenhill.com. **PAGE 98** In the living room, from left, Pivot Boom **floor lamp** at brenndanravenhill.com; Eames Aluminum Group **lounge chair** and **ottoman** at hermanmiller.com; cotton Yucca **rug** at blockshoptextiles.com; Long Church **chandelier** at brenndanravenhill.com; custom **sofa** from brenndanravenhill.com, using Swathe **fabric** in Jungle at maharam.com; Ripple **pillows** at blockshop textiles.com; Case Study **plant stand** with pink **planter**, to the trade from mayesh.com; wool **rug** from ecarpetgallery.com. In the dining room, 13-inch Grain **pendant light** and Grain **table** at brenndanravenhill.com. **PAGE 100** In the master bedroom, Angle **stool/side table**, Pivot **lamp**, and Cord **lamp** at brenndanravenhill.com; wool **rug** from ecarpetgallery.com; **curtains** using linen **fabric** in Silver from mood fabrics.com; Nantucket Fog **wall paint** at benjaminmoore.com.

NATURE TAKES ITS COURSE

PAGES 108–113 Architecture by Jasmit Singh Rangr, 212-727-9911, rangr.com. Interiors by Bryant Keller, 920 Riverside Dr., #39, NYC, 917-334-8620, bryantkeller.com. **PAGE 110** In the dining room, Met Foyer **chandeliers** from Lobmeyr at avenue-road.com; custom **table** using an **oak base** from andriannashamarisinc.com and a **marble top** from Richard Anthony Millwork, 914-922-7141, ramillwork.com; Philippe Starck 248 Passion **chairs** at cassina.com. On the screened porch, aluminum **ceiling fan** from haiku home.com; Gyrofocus **fireplace** at focus-fireplaces.com; Daniel Pouzet Swingrest **hanging lounger**, using Warm Gray outdoor fabric at dedon.de; Philippe Starck Rayn **sofa**, using Warm Gray outdoor fabric at dedon.de. **PAGE 111** In the master bedroom, vintage **chairs** from Van Den Akker Antiques, 646-912-9992, vandenakkerantiques.com, using Jacob chenille **fabric** in Pink Grapefruit, to the trade at christopherhyland.com; teak-and-lacquered-steel Magnus Löfgren Tablo Tray **table** for Design House Stockholm from Clic Gallery, 212-966-2766, clic.com; grayed-oak-and-linen Pont Des Arts **bed** by Christophe Delcourt for Avenue Road at avenue-road.com; linen **duvet** and alpaca **blanket** from areahome.com; bleached-maple Lake **side tables** at bddw.com; cowhide-and-sheepskin Diamond Trellis **rug**, to the trade at pattersonflynn martin.com. **PAGE 112** In the kitchen, custom plywood-and-ash-veneer **cabinetry** and Corian **counters** from St. John's Bridge, 860-927-3315, stjohsbridge.com; **ovens** and **range** from subzero-wolf.com; **hood** from mieleusa.com; polished chrome **faucet** from hansgrohe-usa.com; black-lacquer-on-ash Gio Ponti Superleggera **chair** at cassina.com.

A COLLECTOR'S DREAM

PAGES 120–125 Architecture by Luc Svetchine, 37 Ave. Primerose, Nice, France, 33-4/93-96-79-79, svetchine.com.

SOUTHERN REVIVAL

PAGES 126–131 Interiors by Tammy Connor, 12-A Vanderhorst St., Charleston, SC, 843-405-2166, tammyconnorid.com. Architecture by Glenn Keyes, 12 Vanderhorst St., Charleston, 843-722-4100, glennkeyes architects.com. Landscape architecture by Sheila Wertimer, 171 Church St., Ste. 350, Charleston, 843-577-3360, wertimer.com. **PAGE 128** In the entry, antique French **tapestry** from William Word Antiques,

404-233-6890, williamwordantiques.com; antique oak **console** from English Accent Antiques, 404-351-9433, englishaccent antiques.com; antique English **settee** from English Accent Antiques, using Drap de Soie silk **fabric** in Seaweed, to the trade at claremontfurnishing.com; antique Turkish **rug** from Keivan Woven Arts, 404-266-3336, keivanwovenarts.com; ceramic **table lamps** from Christopher Spitzmiller, 212-563-1144, christopherspitzmiller.com. In the dining room, oil-on-canvas **painting** from Amelia T. Handegan, Inc., 843-722-9373, athid.com; antique **sideboard** from Parc Monceau, 404-467-8107, parcmonceauatl.com. **PAGE 129** Sofas and **armchairs** from Amelia T. Handegan; jute **carpet** from Keivan Woven Arts; antique French mahogany **stool** from Briggs House Antiques, 914-933-0022, briggshouse.com, using hair-on-hide, to the trade from hollandandsherry.com; custom **curtains** from Willard Pitt Curtain Makers, 404-355-8232, willardpittcurtainmaker.com, using Prima Alpaca wool **fabric** in Olive from sandrajordan.com. **PAGE 130** Fleurette **wallpaper** in Wine on Wheat from rosetarlow.com; **curtains** using Indian Arbre linen **fabric** in #175780 Tea, to the trade from fschumacher.com; custom sisal **rug** from meridastudio.com; antique woven-leather **stools** from English Accent Antiques. **PAGE 131** In the guest bedroom, antique powder-coated iron **bed** from Amelia T. Handegan, Inc.; flat-weave wool **rug**, to the trade from eveandstaron.com; custom **curtains** from Willard Pitt Curtain Makers, using Balmoral cotton **fabric** in Rouge, to the trade at lemanach.fr.

MANHATTAN RHAPSODY

PAGES 132–135 Interiors by William Sofield, 380 Lafayette St., 3rd Fl., NYC, 212-473-1300, studiosofield.com. **PAGE 133** Custom blackened-steel **bath fittings**, to the trade from peguerin.com. **PAGE 135** In the master bedroom, a custom rosewood **bed**, using Majestic **fabric** in Snow for the interior and Estrella silk **fabric** in Perle for the exterior, both to the trade at cowtan.com; custom cashmere **bed cover** from loropiana.com; custom **bolster cushion** using Virgile **fabric**, to the trade from angelabrownltd.com, and Aurora **fabric**, to the trade at clarencehouse.com; custom rough-hewn stone **table lamp** by Alexander Lamont, to the trade from angelabrownltd.com; custom wool-silk **rug** from josephcarinincarpets.com; custom **curtains** using wool **fabric** in Frost, to the trade from hollyhunt.com.