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MAY 2007

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

THOUGH HE CRAVED A HOUSE WITH A CONTEMPORARY VIBE, DESIGNER MARK CUNNINGHAM SETTLES ON AN 18TH-CENTURY FARMHOUSE THAT TURNS OUT TO BE THE PERFECT FIT

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SPACE IS A CHALLENGE. Consider the interior designer Mark Cunningham. "I am always shopping," he says. "I buy for my clients, I buy for myself, and I buy for March," referring to the A-list store in San Francisco that sells furniture from the 18th through the 20th centuries (he's a partner in the business).

The one thing the Florida-born New Yorker had never purchased, however, was a house, and Cunningham needed a weekend home if he was to enjoy all the books, photographs, objets d'art, and furniture he had in storage: "There were a lot of things I hadn't seen in a very long time."

He scoured the villages of the Catskills and the Hudson Valley, seeking a secluded contemporary; he ended up buying an 18th-century farmhouse on 23 acres. "I was tired of looking," says Cunningham,

who nonetheless found himself smitten by the unpretentious stone-and-clapboard building's two brick fireplaces (in the kitchen and living room), Dutch front door with its original hardware, and windows filled with wavy glass panes. Less felicitous elements, namely the kitchen's varnished, knotty-pine paneling, he knew could be changed.

Cunningham also wasn't terribly concerned about being historically correct. "The first thing I did was remove all the wallpaper and paint all the walls and woodwork white," he says, adding that he whitewashed the beams so the low ceilings would seem taller and stained the wide-plank floors dark to integrate the mélange of mismatched floorboards. "I wanted a uniform look," says the designer, whose preferred palette is apparent in the day's country wardrobe.

Interior designer Mark Cunningham in the sitting room of his Hudson Valley house; the metal sculpture is by Pomeroy, the rug is Navajo, and the metal chair is vintage Don Knorr. Facing page: In the living room, a 19th-century Scottish wing chair, an antique Chinese low table, and 1950s Zig-zag chairs by Gerrit Rietveld; the table lamp is vintage John Dickinson, and the steel end table was purchased at auction. See Resources.

A painting by Elliott Puckette and an 1830s Brazilian cane bench in the sitting room. Facing page, from top: Cunningham painted the kitchen cabinets and walls with Benjamin Moore's Gray Owl, stained the pine-plank floors, and paired antique benches with a French zinc-top table. Perched on the living-room mantel is a rib bone of a whale. See Resources.



of khakis, white shirt, and heather-gray sweater. "I wanted everything to be very simple."

That includes the handling of his belongings. Cunningham has an enviable knack for composing rooms and creating poetic vignettes, skills honed at Polo Ralph Lauren, where he worked in the creative-services department for 13 years designing store windows and interiors. "It's a mishmash of stuff," he modestly says of the living room, which exhibits his predilection for distinctive shapes and earthy textures. The leather wing chair came from his office at Ralph Lauren. The steel end table has an even finer provenance: It hails from Sotheby's auction of the estate of fashion designer Bill Blass, whose rugged minimalism was akin to Cunningham's own. A plaster lamp by the ever-collectible California designer John Dickinson belonged to Cunningham's mother, and the early-19th-century tilt-top table that occupies a niche beside the fireplace is from his childhood home in Reno. It is part of a well-edited clutch of family heirlooms—the Native American rugs, the turned burl-wood beds used in one of the guest rooms—that are interspersed with a changing assortment of furniture and artworks. "I like to move things around," says Cunningham, adding that he, too, is part of the shifting scheme. "I use all the bedrooms. I like to rotate where I sleep."

With guest rooms like his, who could blame him? They are spare yet visually rich, every carefully chosen item bathed in sunlight from

An Aesthetic Movement chaise longue, 19th-century wing chair, and a Clamp-on lamp by Ralph Lauren Home in the kitchen sitting area; the series of prints is by Agnes Martin, the Navajo rug is a family heirloom, and the industrial table and steel-and-oak bookshelf are vintage. Facing page, from top: The exterior of the 1740s Dutch Colonial house. In a guest room, 18th-century English landscape prints hang above an early-20th-century steel table. See Resources.





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unadorned windows. (Vermeer couldn't have done it better.) In one room, Marcel Wanders's macramé Knotted chair is a surprising counterpoint to those old burl-wood beds. In another, a Native American drum is used as a night table. Cunningham is still searching for a proper bed for the master bedroom, but until then, a length of linen is tacked up as a do-it-yourself headboard. Nearby are two freshly ebonized Dunbar chests of drawers. "I had a pale wood one from growing up, and then I found another, but the finishes did not match so refinishing them dark was my solution," the designer explains.

The back staircase down the hall from his bedroom door leads to the kitchen, where the mantel displays framed prints by the minimalist artist Agnes Martin, and a beefy English Aesthetic Movement chaise longue functions as a divider between the cooking and sitting areas. Meals are served at a skinny zinc-top dining table, and the walls and cabinetry are painted the same soothing shade of olive gray.

The meticulous placement of every water glass, cereal bowl, book, and photograph makes the casual observer wonder if Cunningham is truly as much of a pack rat as he claims to be—and if this lyrically underfurnished house really contains all his accumulated finds. Well, it does. Sort of. Behind the door of the fourth bedroom are stashed moving cartons and furniture that the designer could not manage to use. And he has masses of books in storage. "I would like to have more things out," Cunningham allows. "But I'm very picky." ■



In the master bedroom, a vintage concrete stool, 1920s oak stand, and an RL '67 boom-arm lamp by Ralph Lauren Home; a photograph by Arnold Genthe hangs above the linen-panel headboard, the bedding is Ralph Lauren Home, and the Hudson's Bay blanket is by Woolrich. Facing page, from top: A 19th-century American maple bed, antique pine side table, and vintage Gunnar Nylund table lamp in a guest bedroom; the Knotted chair is by Marcel Wanders, and the Audubon print is 19th century. A 1970s John Dickinson table, Grafton pivot mirror by Restoration Hardware, and Bancroft pedestal sink by Kohler in the bathroom. See Resources.