

welcome

Dream House

On a bookshelf in my house sits a large Plexiglas box; it is a fairly elegant design, which compensates for its tattered contents. Every few months, after I've ripped and highlighted my way through dozens of magazines, newspapers, and auction catalogs, I throw the clippings into the box. I've been doing this for 25 years. The box is called Dream File. Sometimes, months will go by when I am not in a dream house state of mind. Other times, I'm putting ideas into the box at the rate of three a week. I tear out pictures of rooms whose moods appeal; color combinations that catch my eye; new products on the market—carpets and china especially; antiques I might someday hunt down. I'll save the work of an architect I particularly like, or a picture that shows the way a bank of windows joins a corner and a beam. I'm doing this in a spirit of hope. Someday I'll build my dream house, and I'll need all these pictures to communicate what it is that I see, in my mind's eye, to whoever will help me build my dream house.

I got into one of those moods, a few months ago, to clear things out, and I undertook a purging of bookshelves, which soon led me into a confrontation with the Dream File. I'd been avoiding it for a few years; it was bulging, and I could see through the Plexiglas sides that many of the pages had yellowed. Figuring it was time to get rid of stale dreams, I picked up the box and turned the contents out in the middle of the floor. (There's nothing like making a mess to force the cleaning issue.)

What a shocking excavation. Far from being a Dream File, the box had become an archaeology of my taste.

There were clips, at the very bottom, from the early '80s, from my days as a young wife and first-time homemaker. I was startled to see that I had recently purchased some of the things whose pictures I'd filed away 15 years earlier. I also found a garden picture, from England, I believe, of a long, wide bed of two robustly mounding rows of blue lavender surrounding a thick row of tousled red peonies. I loved the way that looked on someone's estate, 15 years ago, and I still dream that someday, even though I'm pretty certain I won't be on an English estate (or any estate, for that matter), I'll make a garden with a bed like that. (Though how, in the Northeast, I am going to get the peonies and the lavender to bloom at the same time is beyond me.)

I was even more startled to see how startling my taste in those days was to

me now. How could I have ever thought that I would like a bed (sofa, lamp, carpet, dish) like that? This was like looking at old pictures of yourself from junior high, when you started picking your own clothes and could no longer blame your mother for how you were turned out in the morning. How mortifying that you were ever seen in such bell-bottoms. And that leather band across the forehead? I suppose some of the things I liked in those days had to do with the whole cultural milieu in which decorating—and fashion—take place. Things look good because you haven't seen their like for a while, because suddenly someone is using curving, organic lines instead of the strict geometrical ones that have been favored, or someone is using color, when the world has seemed relentlessly black-and-white.

Most surprising of all was to see how consistently I was drawn to certain things. Without being aware of it, through the years I had saved several stories on the work of a couple of architects. There were particular colors and shapes and lines I was drawn to over and over again. I began to see that it wasn't that my taste had changed so much as that I had begun to focus more selectively on certain styles. People frequently ask editors at the magazine how to begin to understand "their style" so that they can find a compatible decorator; I'm of the Dream File School. Look at endless numbers of books, magazines, auction catalogs. Rip out anything that makes your heart sing. Put it in a box, add another layer, spice with slips of paper on which you've written words that describe how you want to live in your dream house. Do you want cozy and social? Do you want orderly serenity? Do you want high-maintenance glam? Then let everything marinate, or bake, or simmer, or whatever method suits your soul. Give yourself time to let things percolate through the silt of desire. The thrill of an instant attraction is hard to resist—oh, the glory of that

canopy! the graphic punch of that headboard!—but you don't want to find yourself wondering how you're going to get out of that relationship before you've even made the bed. You will be amazed at what you learn about yourself, what your eye and heart will tell you before your mind does. I suppose that's how dreams work—and that's why decorating is the stuff of making dreams come true. I may never build my dream house, because the dreaming is such a pleasure.



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