

welcome

Local Living

WE LIKE TO SAY that all politics is local; any national issue looks one way to a politician from Alaska and another to one from Florida. Where you stand depends on where you sit. I think the same is true about taste. All taste is local: where you sit depends on where you stand. Your environment—whether it is defined by the hard, bright light of the southern summer or the cool, gray mist of a northeastern spring—does have an effect on everything from the colors you want surrounding you to the way the furniture will be placed. No matter how stubbornly you may hold to what you think of as your intrinsic taste, if you are a New Yorker moving your home to New Mexico, you will slowly, inexorably, begin to absorb the customs of that country. They have evolved, over long experience, in answer to deeply felt needs—to stay cool and calm in the face of desert heat; to keep warm in the punishing cold, dry winds of winter; to turn to what is available, and then respect, and support, the materials and craft of the area.

This last impulse is becoming more important these days. Certainly there is a growing movement toward knowing, and honoring, the sources of what we eat. It is deeply moving to me to crack open an egg in the morning and be greeted by a yolk of pure, intense, radiant saffron. I buy my eggs every week from Zezé and Peggy, floral designers here in New York who farm up in Rensselaer County. I think about the jaunty chickens ranging freely through their gardens, pecking at ladybugs and marigolds. Given how much genetic pollution, pesticide, and hormonal tinkering is being inflicted on our meats and milks and fruits, we are better off turning to farmers who cultivate the rich, ripe flavors of natural and healthy beings.

The same thing that is happening in the world of food is beginning to happen in the world of design. Yesterday, Carl Dellatore visited our offices to show us a gorgeous new line of fabrics that integrates his trademark satin ribbon stripe into a linen ground. His passion for his work was evident; his humor, too: “I was working on all these browns and grays and blacks, and suddenly I thought, ‘Whoops, I went right past Greenwich!’ And so I turned down that road, and came up with all these pinks and greens and yellows.” And indeed he had pulled from the beloved, fresh palette of the country club a most sophisticated sort of stripe. I had that “Yes!” moment; I began to think about which chair I would reupholster. In one of my favorite bedrooms I have curtains of a heavy, chocolate linen embroidered

with a creamy pattern; they are one of last year’s releases from Schumacher, designed by Kelly Wearstler from Los Angeles. Again, I love knowing who dreamed up my curtains; I admire her adventurous, lavish spirit; I can hear her voice telling the editors about the evolution of that fabric.

The more I know about the sources of what I am carrying into my house, the happier I am with my choices. It means a lot to me to know that a thick linen, made of flax grown and then woven in Belgium, is being printed according to methods refined over a hundred years, producing the same heavy hand and rich, vibrant hues. It is as wonderful to meet Frances Palmer, whose hands shape the wide-wale corduroy of porcelain pots that give the summer’s wildflower bouquet a charming foundation—or Lucio Romero, the glassblower whose breath created your wineglass.

Among the most important arbiters of taste these days are the shopkeepers; the stores we are drawn to, the ones that seduce and then teach us something about design, are the ones that create a unified world into which the visitor steps. You know within seconds of arriving that you are in a special place. The editing eye is fierce; the bar for which goods will be displayed is held firm and high. The shop may pop, or it may soothe, but no matter what, its impresario is consistent in his or her vision and standards, and innovative—surprising, challenging, tempting—in their expression.

Of course, we shop globally; I can go on to the Web and in five minutes find someone in France to make my next dining room table, or someone in Ecuador who will supply me with a knitted blanket. My eye will respond to colors and textures that will work in

my own, personal environment—but local doesn’t mean simply what is in the neighborhood. Rather, there is a new kind of “local living” at work. It resides in an intimacy with the source of what you buy—no matter where it is shipped from. It matters to me that I am supporting an artisan, or that I know about the materials used in what I buy. It matters that I know something about the personality behind a design. The new tastemakers are people who stand not just behind but inside of what they make. Their fingerprints are all over—and not to be erased. After all, don’t we all want to know who is at home with us?




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