

House of a Different COLOR

Our New York editor riffs on the Kips Bay look for 2005.

NOW IN ITS 33rd year, Kips Bay has established itself as the grand dame of decorator show houses, and is still, to my mind, the best harbinger of tomorrow's design trends. Each spring in New York, more than 16,000 design sophisticates and wannabes queue up to climb a narrow center hall staircase (no strollers please) and view a series of rooms dressed by both established and up-and-coming decorators. The 2005 showhouse, set in a relatively plain-Jane, federal-style brownstone on 64th Street, between Park and Madison, was notable for two reasons: 1) it had been home to the *New York Observer* since 1987 (giving the space instant IQ points and a cool factor) and 2) it was only four floors. Four floors might sound like oxygen-mask territory to Dallas, but for Kips Bay, which usually is a six- or seven-floor affair, it was almost a ranch.

Compared to previous years, the showhouse was decidedly feminine—a sweet trip to the candy shop. Gone were the high-tech gizmos and minimalist modern rooms; in their place was a simple, more refined sensibility, accented with varied personal collections along with serious and not-so-serious artwork. The



ABOVE: Lady's office entitled "Lady and the Tramp" by Mathew White and Frank Webb.

TOP RIGHT: A young lady's bedroom by Martha Angus.

standout color was black, softened with green apple, white and neutrals. Walls were a blank canvas of choice: Designers covered them in sophisticated white linen, exotic embroidered mirror fabric from Rajasthan, a copper-colored vinyl covering, smooth as patent leather, and a special paint finish made to look like taffeta. Another notable trend included intricate curtain design, a major shift from the simple wooden shades of previous years.

Keith Irvine and Felicity Wilde teamed black and white with glazed green apple walls to create a vivid dining room/music room. Black and white plastic Philippe Stark Ghost Chairs, '40s French modernist standing lamps, and a huge rustic French clock face redefined the traditional paneled room. Framed faux silhouettes of 17th-century characters with determined chins and prominent proboscises lined two opposing walls and created a playful take on the family oil portraits that so often lined the formal rooms of grand European families.

trendspotting

Martha Angus's room for a young lady was painted in a faux blue taffeta; the window was treated with simple sheers suspended by ties from metal knobs across the top, and the floor was warmed by a wide-striped blue-and-white rug. Oil paintings on the wall had an honest if not amateur feel, as if they were the young lady's own works. The ideas of personally created art, and personal objects and collections infused the showhouse. Props ranging from real books in the bookcases to robes and slippers in the bathrooms gave the house a pleasing real-world vibe.

White Webb, of California and New York, garnered a lot of attention with its lady's office entitled, "Lady and the Tramp." The office was obviously for the woman who works best in Pucci capris with bourgeois doggie in tow. White Webb lined the room in white linen fabric, covered the floor in a bright coral velvet, and topped it off with a

soft cantaloupe ceiling. Unabashedly feminine curtains were created from pristine white tulle that was ruffled, pleated, and trimmed with white ribbon. The designers then positioned whimsical furnishings—a dog pavilion (aka a doghouse) and writing table from their new line, Intaglio by White Webb—to balance the formal arrangement of the room.

One look at Nina Campbell's master bedroom and my knees went weak. Walls were covered in her signature stripe fabric with tiny fringe trim. Sheer romans graced the windows. And mirrored furnishings (which I usually don't cotton to) blended perfectly in the busy feminine setting. Floral curtains were hung on Plexiglas rods. A bed from Julia Gray dazzled: Picture a mirrored four-poster bed frame with a shirred canopy top, made up with sumptuous white linens from The Linen Shop in London. Lampshades, canopy, and romans all

played off the bedding. Ah, to be single again with a boudoir like this.

It was the lack of slavish perfection and self-consciousness that I enjoyed most about Kips Bay this year. In design these days we've managed to apply a kind of obsessive coordination to everything. Our light fixtures coordinate with our plumbing fixtures, which reflect the shape of the Jacuzzi. The Kips Bay rooms exuded a confidence that came from their casual playfulness and sense of theater, no matter how formal the room. Each designer gave his or her room a distinct personality, communicated in unexpected paintings and small collections of objets d'art. Even the window treatments had a voice. And there was a delightful overall sense of clutter—yes, clutter. It seemed a fitting, if unintentional tribute to the prior tenants, those iconoclasts at the *New York Observer*. It may not have matched their aesthetic, but they would have appreciated the spirit. **D**



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