

SIMPLICITY



NANCY BRAITHWAITE

An American Story

Our house in Atlanta is a lesson in the history of American architecture, art, furniture, and objects—each with its own tale to tell. An American eagle, forty-two inches tall with a wingspan of five feet, proudly holds court in our sunroom. He is a masterful work in gilded tin, each feather hand cut, all with a shaded golden patina. He originally resided in an Ohio courthouse and dates to 1840. The artist is unknown. Quite by accident, we came upon him and could not believe what we had found! Discovering him was one of the highlights of our collecting career. He is a true work of American folk art.

Our home holds our collections of American antiques. We choose our pieces with the insight and approval of Deanne Deavours Levison, one of this country's foremost consultants in American antiquities. Deanne is, in fact, the guiding light of our collection and my dear lifelong friend. She and I met years ago, not long after my husband and I moved to Atlanta and began to collect. I searched for an expert in the field and found Deanne. While visiting her antique store, I was intrigued by a white swan decoy and I just had to have it! It was the first piece we purchased, and that marked the beginning of our collecting. That was thirty-five years ago.

When I met Deanne, she was acquiring pieces that were being sold to museums as well as to collectors. That intrigued me enormously. I thought if we were going to collect, we should be guided by an expert. Whether an object is of museum quality or not, it is essential as a collector to be able to evaluate what you see. The ability to perceive integrity in an object depends on knowledge and a keen eye. All pieces may not be museum worthy, but you still need to be able to judge their strengths and weaknesses.

I credit Deanne with teaching me how to see, not just to look. I also credit her with instilling in me an unwavering regard for integrity and authenticity. It was Deanne who introduced me to the world of great objects and taught me that these objects are great for a reason. She would show me an object, make me examine it closely, and probe me about what I saw. She taught me to see the purity in distinguished objects, to understand their form, to comprehend why they are beautiful, what their finishes reveal, and why and how that all works together to make a piece unique and a superior example of its type. If the intellect has been stimulated and the eye has been satisfied, the object is successful. Deanne also introduced me to Albert Sack's *Fine Points of Furniture: Early American*, one of the bibles of American antique dealers. Along with Deanne's tutelage, Sack's book led me to a major turning point in my understanding of the decorative arts. In the book, Sack posited that there are ideal forms and standards for judging an object to be either good, better, or best of its type. The clarity of those standards appealed to me enormously. The more we see and study, the more we refine our alertness and comprehension of an object's intrinsic worth. Not surprisingly, this aesthetic translates into design and decorating.

Our collection of American country pieces suits and enhances our American country home, which was originally designed in 1965 by the late James Means, a prominent twentieth-century architect in Atlanta. Means worked carefully to bring a sense of history to all the houses he designed. He based this house on the vernacular style of the New England farmhouse. At a time when everyone was in thrall with the new, he was repurposing elements of older buildings—paneling, timbers, floorboards—and incorporating them into his designs. Our house exemplifies this, as its beams, flooring, and roofing materials have been recycled.









Acknowledgments

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your eye for color, and your true passion for collaboration elevate the everyday to the exceptional. Doug Funkhouser, you are a visual artist par excellence. Linda Ridings Rubino, it was a gift to know you and embark on the adventure of artistic collaboration. As well, working in metal with Andrew T Crawford Ironworks was creatively inspiring. Kevin Reilly, the lighting you have created for me absolutely illuminates my clients' worlds and my own. Bud Galland of Premier Woodworks, I am constantly amazed by your ability to fit together seamlessly the pieces of every design puzzle I generate.

There are three Atlanta galleries that I return to again and again for fine art photography, contemporary craft pieces, and superb framing: Jackson Fine Art, The Signature Shop and Gallery, and Myott Studio.

The design of a home is one thing, building it to realize its intended beauty is another. Thank you to Bonner Custom Homes, Russ Cooper Associates Inc., Gary Calicchia of Calicchia Construction Company, Larry Head and Associates, and Rafael Galeano of Ragsyl Painting Services LLC for your immeasurable contributions in that regard. With thanks to Karl Beckwith Smith and Victor Scott Vaughn, whose remarkable artistry added immeasurable creative dimensions to our Kiawah house.

No interior comes into being without the help of skilled professional workrooms. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with a number of them around the country that are as demanding of excellence as I am. My thanks to William Pitt Curtain Makers, R. Hopkins and Co., Zirlin Interiors, Judy Pratt and Associates, and Marteca Landers for your dedication to your craft. For comfort, I rely on Craig Swenson Inc. and Tecnosedia, superb upholstery workrooms. Great thanks to the professionals in the showrooms at the Atlanta Decorative Arts Center (ADAC)—many of whom have become friends—for their expertise in helping our office complete our projects.

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In memory of Joye Hirsch, who is often in my thoughts.

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