DESIGN & DECORATING

MY FAVORITE ROOM

Grand Central Relaxation

Decorator Todd Alexander Romano finds inspiration in the comfortable and livable opulence of David Hicks' Britwell country house

BY MIEKE TEN HAVE

TEXAS-BORN AND Manhattan-based interior designer Todd Alexander Romano, may be best-known for his signature lacquered walls, but the sophisticated polish he brings to interiors belies his loquacious and coey Southern charm. No matter if there's a Glacometti against the wall or a mantle full of rare Jupaness pottery. Mr. Romano's projects newer fall to include warm lighting, sink-into-it upbolstery and a well-placed cocknail table. "I don't cure how besutiful a room is," he said. "If it doesn't function, it is a failure."

Little wonder, then, that for inspiration, he turns to David Hicks, the designer who, in the 1960s and '70s, was most responsible for retimagining fussy, traditional English style as something colorful, trendy and eminently livable. Mr. Hicks dispensed with anapproachable statellings of the color of the

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furniture; he despised chints, opting instead for simpler geometric patterns. He is also credited with coining the now-ubiquitous term "tablescape". Given a spare surface, he created dense vignettes that redefined the art of the display, often grouping sentimental trinkets with expensive objects d'art that were unified by a aingle coior scheme.

His talent for marrying the highly decorative with the subdued and modern found its apotheosis in Britwell, the 18th-century Oxfordshire country house that Mr. Hicks purchased in 1966, His design for its drawing room, in particular, illustrates how to make a grand space feel accessible. An ornate 1760s chimney-piece with intricate moldings is offset by a nubby oatmeal fabric on the walls, while a tunal, sculptured curpet that sensually mixes high and low pile invites the idea of walking about the space in bure feet. "[it] just epitomizes everything I love in a really heautifully designed room," Mr. Romano said.

He particularly admires the way that Mr. Hicks, despite being known for risky aenthetic choices, decorated this room in soothingly subtle, plush fabrics. "I am so threif of these mid-century houses where you see the Warbol on the wall but no comfortable place to sit down and talk on the phone; it's as though no one actually lives there." Mr. Romano said. "There is a throwaway simplicity in this room) that remains impossibly elegant—it feels contemporary today."

Here, Mr. Romano shares a few tips to help you achieve an equally rafined yet hospitable spare.



HIGHLY EVOLVED British design icon David Hicks used the drawing room of his country estate, Britwell, as a laboratory for his decorating ideas, which means that it charged quite a bit over the years. "It's an occupational hazard," said interior designer Told Romano.



Try a Tablescape

Britwell's subdand polette served as a backdrop for lvtr. Hicks famed vignettes. Said Mr. Ramanai "He masses objects by color"-like the royal blue dossonné anuff box seen here next to a similarly heart cigarette lighter-"and then he'll throw something weird into the mix, rie plays with scale and varies heights and forms." Note how touches of gold and yellow offset the predomiriantly blue scheme.

Put Your Design Within Reach

This classic floor plan—two large sofal flanking the flieplace, Louis XVI beopties and a pair of Gueridon tables—is symmetrical and balanced, said Mr. Rumano: "The chairs and tables are conductably placed, and there is a surface within arm's reach no matter where you are—to put down a book, dronk or cup fee." Adopt the same surface strategy with Global Views Carendon Table, \$2,247, shopcodsfyldra.com



Jain the Pile-High Club

A monochrome, high-low textured carpet brings a laid-back elegance to the room. "It doesn't stewl the show," said life. Romano, "It's plush but offers a restrained, tailored softness [unlike] a bloppy shig carpet." The Ruig Company Stupa Silver Ruig by Suzaine Sharp, \$158 per square froit, the agromponycom.



Sport a Shiner

Mr. Picks used many different types of light in this rooms lamps, can uplightis, natural light and a sleek picture light that shows down on the Bruce. Topeth painting above the fireplace. "The light lin the iscord works on so many different levels down from the ceiling, up the walls and horizontally, it orisites a warm, dynamic fieling." Mr. Romano said: likeminate your own art



Find Your Comfort Zone

Instead of taking a cue from the room's grandlose architecture and choosing compatibly antique (if unwelcoming) seeing Mr. Hicks went for a modern sofa. "While the room is very refined and tailored," said Mr. Romano, "A's plush and comfortable. The sofas and chars look like you want to just plop down anti-

place to sit down and talk on the phone; it's as though no one actually lives there," Mr. Romano said, "There is a throwaway simplicity (in this room! that remains impossibly elegant-it feels contemporary today."

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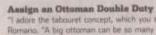
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Create a Calm Context

"Most people would think this is a colorful room, but it's really not," said Mr. Romano. "It is a simple backdrop of creamcolored cotton on the walls. It's nice to come home to something more soothing that allows objects and artwork to pop." For a wallcovering that is a little less neutral, but still recessive, try Albero Floresie in Petal Wallisvering, prior upon request. Schumoches; 800-523-1200



"I adore the tabouret concept, which you see in this room," said Mr. Romano. "A big ottoman can be so many different things, depending on how it is needed. You can stack it with books or objects for display, as [Mr. Hicks] does here, or use it as a large tray to put hors sloeurves on. If you're having a party, you can easily [clear it off] for extra seating." One to try: Denison Mirrored Bench, \$699, neimonmarcus.com



BIO IN BRIEF // TODO ALEXANDER ROMANO

His Résumér After studying architecture at the University of Texas, Mr. Romano initially worked as a buyer for men's clothing brand Paul Stuart, Upon meeting "the prince of chintz," designer Mario Buatta, he switched germ. and eventually opened his. interiors firm and showroom in 1999. Today, he stocks antique finds from Parisian flex markets as well as Christopher Sextamiller lamps in folloop hues. He launched his furneure collection with Schu- cent projects include a macher & Co. last November and will introduce new pieces each season.



His Clienter Discretionvaluing heliesses and self-made scions from Mustique to Milbrook, N.Y., turn to him for updated elegance and a hands-on approach. Rehorse farm in Charlottesville, Va., and a full-floor Park Avenue apartment.

His Look: A contempovary interpretation of WASPY classicism that muts livability first, despite his reputation for bold lacquered walls. He toes the line between muted masculinity and exuberant edecticism while moving aesthetic essa: Vibrant artwork from 20th-century color theorists like Josef Albers might be justapused with a set of Directoire chairs. He attributes his perchant for mélangeminong Op-Art with Louis XVI classicism. for example—to his "schizophrenic tastes."