



GEOFFREY BRADFIELD

EX ARTE





Ex arte adj. [eks är'-tā];
derivation of the Latin
expression 'according to the
principles of art'.....
.....'beauty through art'...

—Glossary of Latin Words



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FOREWORD

Every good story has a beginning, middle and an end. Geoffrey Bradfield's story begins in South Africa where he lived a rather privileged life and enjoyed a classic education, which likely formed the foundation for his Neo-classic point of view.

The middle of his story begins in New York City, where he quickly found a place in the studios of a handful of well-established designers, leading to his fortuitous meeting and subsequent professional partnership with the late, legendary Jay Spectre. At the time, Jay was about as famous as an interior designer could be. *Architectural Digest* had shown his work many times throughout several decades. For Jay to choose Geoffrey Bradfield as a partner was more than a vote of confidence; it was the equivalent of being knighted. They worked very successfully together for the rest of Jay's too-short life.

We are further along now, approaching the point of climax in the arc of Geoffrey's exceptional tale. I admit that, at first, I simply didn't know whether Geoffrey had the enormous talent it would take to live up to Jay's reputation. But I was fond of Geoffrey and hoped for the best. That's what I got...and more. With each new commission, Geoffrey Bradfield's design viewpoint became stronger and stronger and more unique to his extraordinary talent.

That talent created quite a stir in the design world, a stir to which I was happy to add momentum by publishing his work again and again in *Architectural Digest* over the years. I also like to think that our confidence and support helped bring about a major plot development in Geoffrey's story too. Stark brought his look to their showrooms with the Geoffrey Bradfield Collection of furniture, carpets, wallpaper and fabrics—a grand slam with the Neo-classic designs so on-target for today. His work with heavy acrylic that is molded into traditional furniture forms was spot-on for the many who had tired of heavy brownness and endless beige.

Geoffrey's work is inspired and original. Its historical references are clear, yet the contemporary vocabulary renders it absolutely unique. He has accomplished a design tour de force. As this book makes clear, the end is not here and not near. Geoffrey Bradfield's story will never end.

—Paige Rense
Editor-in-Chief of *Architectural Digest*

INTRODUCTION

“Great artists have always influenced and inspired my work. I admire their ability to look at the world from fresh and daring perspectives. An unconventional way of synthesizing their genius in both word and art challenges the soul and opens the door to entire universes of new thought. At times the simplicity of this vision has a profound elemental grace and beauty. The truest of these is a summation I am wont to share with Constantin Brancusi: ‘Don’t look for obscure formulas or mystery in my work...It is pure joy that I offer you.’ ”

—Geoffrey Bradfield

Geoffrey Bradfield’s rooms truly are like Piet Mondrian’s exquisitely calibrated paintings. Move a single block of color in that artist’s irregular grids and the harmony of the composition falls completely apart. Similarly, Bradfield’s designs are so clearly conceived and executed that there really is no other way to think of them. One would be hard-pressed to find an alternative spot for those priceless Jacob divans, or better suited fixtures for a particular wall than the Ruhlmann sconces, or a more appropriate setting for the monumental Frankenthaler painting, or the Nevelson, Schnabel, Marden, Newman or Lichtenstein...

The designer’s A-list clients return to him repeatedly for each new project, entrusting him to deliver a perfectly crystallized, consummately luxurious vision. In the eloquent words of one longtime client: "He is, in his field, like Frank Lloyd Wright was in architecture, or Picasso in painting, or Thoreau in literature. His work is transcendental. He takes you into his world and you are engulfed by a different sensibility. It changes the way you see. I think of Geoffrey as a great artist."

To equate Bradfield with fine artists is not mere grandiloquence. His work employs the same tools, aptitudes and concepts artists utilize in the creation of their own masterpieces: color, texture, form, composition, intellect, art reference and historical allusion. Since the very beginning of his career he has championed the oeuvre of a vast coterie of painters and sculptors, many of them emerging at the time he began acquiring their works for clients. Indeed, the audacious use of bold contemporary art in his interiors is widely recognized as one of Bradfield’s signatures. He is an inveterate collector of quotations by artists that explain their view of the world. Many of them head the chapters of this book.

Excerpt Only



*“This period of blue monochromes
was the product of my pursuit of the
indefinable in painting.”*

—Yves Klein







When Paul Bowles arrived in Morocco in 1931, he described its intoxicating exoticism in literally surrealistic terms: "If I said that Tangier struck me as a dream city, I should mean it in the strict sense...I relish the idea that in the night, all around me in my sleep, sorcery is burrowing its invisible tunnels in every direction...Spells are being cast..."

Like an alchemist extracting attar from rose petals, Bradfield has distilled that dreamy Maghrebian allure to its pure essence for this Palm Beach apartment. In a series of evocative rooms, he picks up the preferred blue-and-white palette of the clients and runs it through a mesmerizing gamut of fantasy. Most interestingly, his scheme illustrates how very few elements are required to create a modern tour de force.

The entire hypnotic composition is basically a masterful variation on four themes: the indigo-and-white color scheme, Moroccan fretwork, Moorish arches, and the reflection and refraction of light through the use of mirrors and acrylic furnishings. These elements are repeated again and again in various elegant guises throughout, cross-referencing each other from room to room, at once offering a unity of lush experience and lending an individual character to each space. "There was a tremendous amount of discipline and editing," says Bradfield...and it shows!

OPENING PAGES: A Moroccan pierced metal star curtain tie (left) gathers the drapery at the point where its ivory panel meets its blue skirting. An elegant enfilade through Moroccan arches (right) looking from the media room into the living room.

SECOND SPREAD: The foyer (left) with its custom Hand of Fatima rug and Luigi Benzoni's massive canvas reflected in the mirror. The pristine white living room (right) with Benzoni's counterpoint at center and (above) the apartment's floor plan.

THESE PAGES: A rendering of the living room (above) and the exceptional finished product (right), which looks out into a canopy of lush tropical palms.

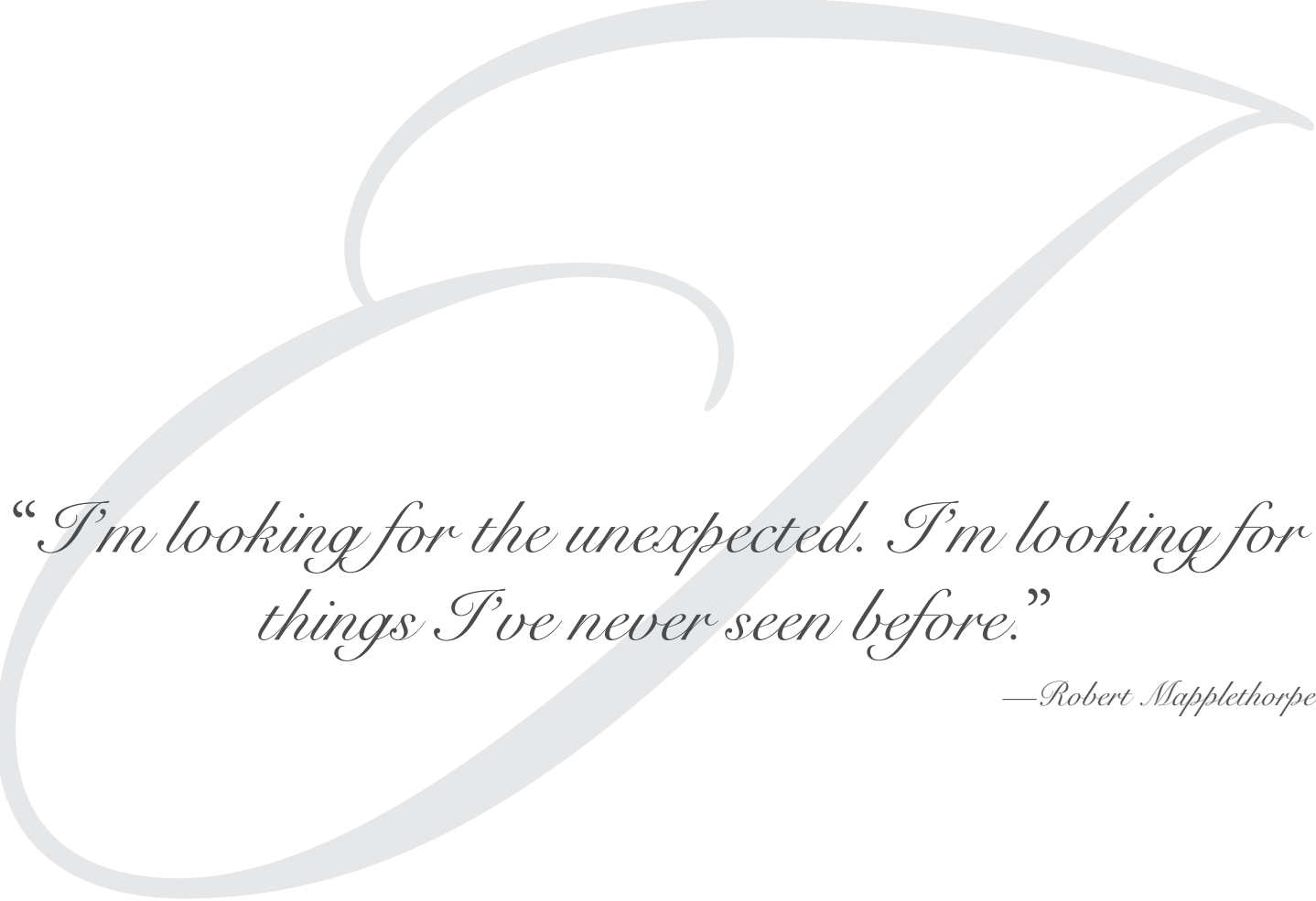












*“I’m looking for the unexpected. I’m looking for
things I’ve never seen before.”*

—Robert Mapplethorpe

Purples signify many things: bravery, valor, a certain style of ornate prose. Douglas Lloyd, principal of the company that designed violet ads for Estée Lauder's Sensuous fragrance, chose the color, he recently told *Time* magazine, based on "its royal connotations, a richness that conjures the idea of religion and incense."

Yet, few designers have tackled purple in interiors, notes Bradfield, except as an accent color. He remembers some of those more intrepid souls: "Its last big impact was in the '60s," he recalls. "Mary Quant used it with orange. David Hicks used it with green. Yves Saint Laurent turned purple and olive into the great fashion fusion."

Bradfield's own opportunity to explore the many shades of purple arose when he was asked to design this Manhattan apartment. Because of the owner's violet tendencies, he knew he would need to plunder its spectrum—from pale lilac to plum—and invent a few other shades along the way.

Subscribing fearlessly to the schools of Quant, Hicks and Saint Laurent, Bradfield took up the challenge. But, he chose to cleave to the more understated, up-to-date sophistication that dwells at the paler end of the spectrum, achieving variety by unearthing a startling array of textural contrasts. In doing so, he bowled over the owner of this glamorous 4,000-square-foot duplex at 500 Park Avenue, an award-winning building designed by Skidmore Owings & Merrill, overlooking Central Park. "I was so moved," says the client. "I couldn't believe he could find so many fabrics in my color. And, he brought me variations on a theme, not repetition."

OPENING PAGES: Helen Frankenthaler's awe-inspiring "Crete" is the backdrop for a corner vignette in the drawing room. "Dan" by Boaz Vaadia is on the coffee table.

SECOND SPREAD: Among the objects gathered in the living room is a spectacular aluminum and black lacquer baby grand piano and French *bergères* lacquered in vivid pink.

RIGHT: Louise Nevelson's black "Column" at left is a strong presence in an otherwise soothing anegre-paneled room with accents of ice blue, mauve and hot pink.







*“The artist is the hand that sets the
soul vibrating...”*

—Wassily Kandinsky



The history of the Russian *dacha* is steeped in romanticism. The term originally meant "something given," and during the 17th-century reign of Peter the Great, that is precisely what they were: country estates bestowed by the Tsar upon loyal vassals. Later, this architectural form was closely associated with writers (Chekhov's White Dacha in the Crimea, Boris Pasternak's in Peredelkino), many of whom set scenes of their elaborately plotted novels at these familiar country homes (who could forget Dr. Zhivago writing his Lara love poems at Varykino?). Today, the term refers to luxury estates built for the Russian elite near cities and in the posh waterfront communities of Odessa.

OPENING PAGES: The open pattern of the Gilbert Poillerat-inspired front door with gilded scallop shells (left) allows free passage of light and a visual invitation to the Caribbean beyond. An aerial view (right) of Mauricio Lenari's multi-building compound. The colonnaded façade stretches beyond the full length of a New York City block.

BELOW: The arch of the front entry echoes the archway beyond that leads to deep verandas with spell-binding ocean vistas.

RIGHT: Canopied chaises overlook the serene infinity-edge pool.







This home, which its Russian-speaking owners call La Dacha, adds a spectacular new chapter to that history, one that re-imagines the idea of the form for a contemporary international culture. It is, first of all, located far, far afield of the couple's main residence, an expansive Hudson River estate that Bradfield also designed (see *A Hudson River Estate*, page 168). That location would be Terres Basses, an ultra-exclusive enclave on the Caribbean island of St. Martin that is anchored by the renowned La Samanna Hotel (which has attracted everyone from Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Richard Nixon to Oprah Winfrey and the designers Dolce and Gabbana). This *dacha* for the 21st century, attests to the power of modern transportation and considerable wealth to render the world a smaller place. Rather than traveling by horse-drawn carriage to the forests outside St. Petersburg, this family flies to their beloved tropical *dacha* by plane.

Instead of being surrounded by woods and cultivated fields like Varykino, La Dacha gazes out over liquid vistas of the Caribbean Sea and the island of Anguilla. In this context, says Bradfield, "The choice of aqua and turquoise was obvious. Otherwise, nothing about it is expected. Like their main home, the influence is very French 1940s, but with a completely different feel."

Originally built by Mauricio Lenari, the multi-building compound was completely renovated by Bradfield to convey "pure escapism," says the designer. "It is open and spacious and embraced by the sun." Like many examples of this vernacular, it serves as a relaxed, kick-your-shoes-off retreat for this couple, their two lovely and adored young daughters, the wife's forever fastidiously groomed mother and a large coterie of friends and relatives. Barbeques and lazy days in the sun are clearly the norm here. Unlike the rustic look of many *dachas*, however, this one is cleanly modern and anchored by classical references.

In the main building, four simple unfluted Doric columns stand at the center of two perpendicular axes, each representing an elegant enfilade. One moves through a custom Art Moderne-style wrought iron front door through the entry hall to the living room, under a wide segmented arch and onto the veranda with the sea beyond; the other proceeds gracefully from the living room, to the hall, into the game room and another outdoor seating area. The four columns support a low ceiling, on either side of which tray ceilings in the living and game rooms soar to 18 feet.

LEFT: The central hall leading out to the verandas bisects the great room into a living room (foreground) and a game room with the Moroccan *bhou* beyond.

Excerpt only





*“I just wanted to find out where the boundaries
were. I’ve found out there aren’t any.”*

—Damien Hirst











Every artist at one point in his or her career creates an homage to his age. It could be said that this white-glove, L-shaped New York apartment is Bradfield's paean to the preternaturally inspired 1970s. It was designed, in fact, for a young couple he met when the decade was reaching its zenith.

"I arrived in New York in 1977," says Bradfield. "It was absolutely the perfect time to move here...brilliant! It was a period of such total confidence—the Bee Gees' music, Studio 54 night after night, Regine's, Doubles, Le Club and Elmo's per kind favor of Ludovic Autet's JICs (Junior International Club). Baryshnikov had just jumped ship and was on the cover of *Time*. My first Thanksgiving here was spent with Mary McFadden at the peak of her celebrity. It was a miraculous moment, and so ephemeral in a way."

The apartment's current incarnation deliriously conjures the era's genie from its bottle. The miracle of this project is that, while the '70s references are identifiably intact, the whole collage of its ingredients is not at all dated. Bradfield has interpreted ideas that first took root in the kinetic days of Warhol and the Factory and fast-forwarded them to the next millennium. In fact, there is a futuristic mood to things here.

Take, for instance, the way black lacquer and the Japanese influence were incorporated into interiors back then—too much of the former and lack of nuance in application of the latter led to rooms that often looked slick or faux Asian. Black lacquer has its presence here too, but it is measured. And, Bradfield tweaks an iconic Japanese staple, the shoji screen, riffing on it cleverly in a custom rug that he installs on the diagonal. The trick instantly expands the space. "It's all about illusion," explains Bradfield. "Because of the diagonal you really feel there is far more volume to the space."

OPENING PAGES: Bradfield grounded the room with a custom rug (left) sporting an abstracted grid that echoes the surrounding windows and the mirrored shoji screens. A dress sculpture by Sophie De Francesca (right) approaches "Ghost Tree [Malevich]," a wall-mounted piece by Katy Stone.

SECOND SPREAD: The baby sculpture atop the 1960s Roberto Gabetti table from Karl Kemp is by the Luo Brothers. The diagonal pattern on the rug creates the illusion of a larger volume.

LEFT: "Dripping," a painting by Hideaki Kawashima, hovers above a custom sectional sofa. Nicola Bolla's crystal-covered "Puma" below.

A wall of authentic shoji runs between living and dining areas. Its traditional paper has been replaced by mirror, continuing the play, while also serving to conceal storage for the dinner china and services. The prevalence of grids (recurring on the windows) establishes geometric order at the same time that it skews one's sense of the room's shape and configuration. And just to throw us another curve, Bradfield deployed a 1960s Roberto Gabetti dining table. The black palisander and tubular chrome pedestal appears to pick up a strand of one of the rug's delineations and take it for a sensual joy ride.

The art here also sustains connections to a fascinating era without pandering to it. "It's eminently daring," says Bradfield of the collection. It's hard to look at Nicola Bolla's 2005 Swarovski crystal-skinned "Puma," for example, without also contemplating the mirrored ball and its place in 1970s disco culture. Yet, Bradfield faces it off with a 14th-century Venetian lion, injecting tension and timelessness that swings it far away from glitz or kitsch. The Luo Brothers' sculpture of a mischievous babe atop a hamburger, though dating only to 2007, would never have been possible without Warhol's Pop Art ironies. ("It astounded me," says the client of the piece. "It screamed 'Buy me!' And every time I look at it, it makes me smile.")

RIGHT: "Puma" faces off with a Venetian lion sculpture from the 14th century. In the background is "Marked Trees," an oil on canvas by Hugo Bastidas.





The Japanese ukiyo-e prints that were all the rage back in the day are replaced with art that has an up-to-the-second relevance: "Dripping," a manga-inspired acrylic on canvas by Hideaki Kawashima, looks over the leonine confrontation. A sexy disembodied dress made of galvanized wire mesh by Sophie De Francesca seems to approach "Ghost Tree" [Malevich], an acrylic, Duralor and nylon wall-mounted sculpture by Katy Stone. The selections are edgy and alive in a consummately contemporary way. There's no sense at all of being in some sort of time capsule.

"Geoffrey has a great eye when it comes to art," says the gallery owner Nohra Haime, "and not only 20th-century masters, but also younger artists. He's willing to take chances."

In fact, if anything is responsible for creating the youthful vigor the apartment exudes, it is a collection of painting and sculpture that includes emerging artists, with all the experimentation and originality that implies. And, they are cheek-by-jowl with the work of their better-known brethren. "What is fascinating," says Haime, "is when these young artists can stand next to more established artists. It shows that they will go far. It's not a question of age, but more of quality."

"All beautiful things belong to the same age," says Bradfield, borrowing from Wilde.

His client couldn't agree more. "The apartment turned out to be a fantasy for us," she enthuses. "Each piece we chose is special in its own right, and each one belongs exactly where it is." That is, with one foot in the 1970s and another in 2025. In our art-directed world of today, here Bradfield has broken free from the pack and stirred up an inimitable formula and flair for cosmopolitan living.

RIGHT: A Karl Springer table and Bradfield's award-winning "Coco" chair rest on a custom cantaloupe and ivory "cracked ice" rug. Jim Dine's "Dutch Hearts" is on the wall beyond.







*“Art is not what you see, but what you make
others see.”*

—Edgar Degas

The world's royalty has made an art of the grand entrance, orchestrating slowly unfolding pageants of experience unapologetically calculated to elicit awe. It begins with the precise military detail, which is followed by heralds and drums, then carriages conveying courtiers, and finally reaching its crescendo, the monarch. It's all about building expectation and moment, and it has to be perfectly paced to ensure the desired response.

Bradfield understands this. "The secret to being a bore is to tell everything," he says, quoting Voltaire. "You always hold something back." He follows this concept to its logical conclusion in his scheme for the penthouse apartment of a prominent Palm Beach hostess and her husband, his third collaboration with the couple. "What I was trying to achieve here is a sense of procession," he explains. "The space is designed for entertaining. My client is a celebrated hostess and very accomplished. There are those who really take up the social gauntlet and run with it." This lady is one of these.

Excerpt only

OPENING PAGES: A detail of Joan Mitchell's "Dogs Only."

BELOW: An arresting Kenneth Noland target painting makes an intense impact before entering a second set of custom-designed bronze and gilt doors.

RIGHT: These lead into a gold-leafed domed space with a Lalique pendant lamp and a mosaic floor.





*“Although some feeling for beauty is perhaps
universal among men, the same cannot be said of
the understanding of beauty.”*

—Borromini, The Principles of Aesthetics

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For publication inquiries contact:

Julia Hoover, Director of Book Marketing & Distribution

615.519.9966

jhoover@panache.com

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