

Intersections: Art and Design

Glenn Gissler's design puts fine art first.

by Allison Malafronte

Throughout Glenn Gissler's 30-year career, the New York City interior designer has earned a reputation for bringing calm, clarity and order into people's lives and the homes. His natural ability to create an environment where disparate elements come together in harmonious dialogue, and where the sum of a space is always greater than its individual parts, is driven by his lifelong passion for "alchemy" — or "turning the ordinary into extraordinary," as he defines it. Achieving this effect in an interior is, according to Gissler, both an art and a science. "The decision-making process in design is driven by intellect and intuition," he says. "There's the analysis, testing of ideas and problem-solving guided by your intellect. But there's also the visceral understanding of how a space feels and how one will experience an environment that is led by intuition. Great designers have both."



BALANCING THE BOLD

For this dining room, Gissler made a late-1970s painting by Jim Dine the centerpiece. He then worked with paint colorist Donald Kaufman to develop a custom red wall color. To balance the boldness of the wall, Gissler opted for understated furniture designs by Jean-Michel Frank.

"There's information here, but not chaos. The built-ins have a taut, graphic quality. The Native American black pot keys off the graphic quality in the magical line of Matisse's portrait. The room is tonal and quiet, but not without interest."

— GLENN GISSLER

FRONT AND CENTER

In designing this room, Gissler utilizes its height by making the focal point a large painting by Larry Poons. The accompanying furniture pulls out color accents found in the piece, unifying the decor and the art.



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The foundational understanding of structure, volume and utility informs Gissler's design principles. He then combines that knowledge with his expertise in decorative arts to create designs that complement his clients' lifestyles, composing furniture, textiles, contemporary art and fine objects into aesthetically pleasing and spatially sound arrangements. For his creative process, Gissler first interviews his clients to learn how they occupy their home and time and how that might change in the future. He next takes inventory of the current architecture to determine what alterations need to be made in order to create the best possible sequence of space. Gissler and his team take photographs and measurements, then create preliminary drawings using computer-aided drafting (CAD). The designer then hand-draws his initial furniture plans over the CAD drawings, first using fine markers, then adding tone and shading to create user-friendly illustrative plans for his clients' review. One of Gissler's collaborators then creates a series of perspective drawings in graphite or ink to show the clients. Once he receives general approval from his clients, Gissler and his team develop the design further for pricing and fabrication.

Fine art is not simply a finishing touch in Gissler's design



ABOVE: Gissler and his collaborators create perspective drawings by hand as part of client presentation plans.

RIGHT: Gissler and his team use quick sketches, perspective drawings and architectural blueprints to conceive and present interior design projects.

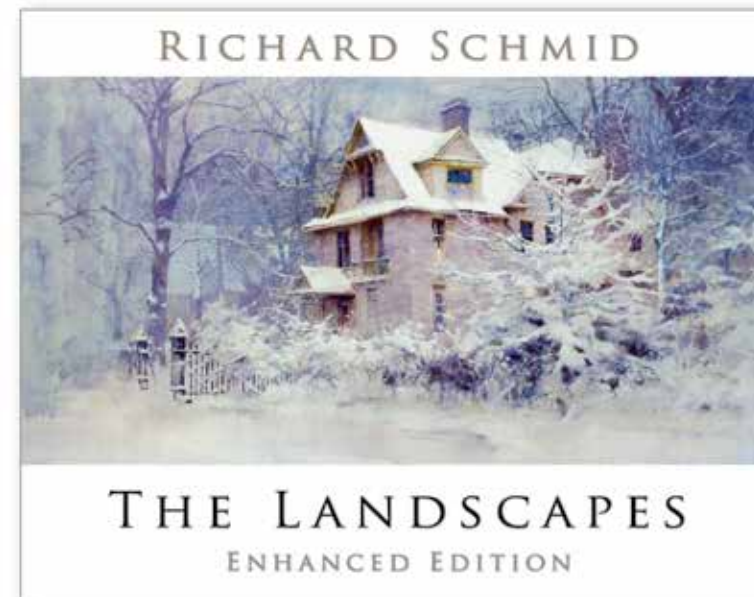


TRAVELING THROUGH TIME
 Gissler strikes a balance between traditional and modern. "There's a play between eras, and the mixture of classic (Persian rug, tailored curtains) and contemporary (artwork, chairs from the 1950s)," Gissler says.



"The two wonderful works on paper are by contemporary artist Brice Marden. I like the idea of having one foot in history and one foot in the times we live in."
 — GLENN GISSLER

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process; it is the cornerstone and often the starting point from which other design decisions are made. "Fine art is the single most important element in the interior," Gissler says. "It sets the tone and character for the space and changes the way people experience their surroundings. You could have the highest quality furniture with top-of-the-line upholstery, but rarely do guests remember the furniture. They will, however, notice and remember the art on the walls. I often say that fine art is the ultimate luxury in a home environment. It allows you to live with another person's expression of what it means to be human and to see the world through someone else's eyes."

When designing the room seen on pages 24–25 (see Front and Center), Gissler wanted to maintain its inherent sophisticated structure, which he compares to an early-20th-century French salon: classic, clean lines with a grand but intimate scale. As in all of his finished projects, fine art takes center stage. "While there are many wonderful pieces of furniture and lighting fixtures in the room, the painting is the single most important element," he says. "The tall ceilings and simple but dramatic height called for a large-scale artwork. In this understated room, Larry Poons' painting creates a rich and quietly colorful drama." The two lamps with their ombré glaze and the jewel-toned chair and ottoman pull some of the green and turquoise notes from the painting into other areas of the room.

Gissler has worked on hundreds of homes, with clients ranging from celebrity fashion designers and urban elites to suburban New Jersey families and couples seeking quaint seaside retreats. He has noticed that in the end, most people want the same thing from their environments. "We live in an increasingly chaotic world," the designer says. "And the home is where we can have some sense of control and balance and encourage visitors to share in that with us." As such, his design philosophy and decision-making center on quality, provenance and timelessness. "I avoid novelty, trends and cutting edge," Gissler says. "At some point the novelty, trend or edge will become dated. Thoughtful decisions endure over time—and that lasting impression is what art and design can offer at their best."

"This room incorporates a variety of cultures," Gissler says. "There's the 1950s Milton Resnick painting [through doorway], the 1940s museum-quality work of Theodoros Stamos [at right], the African sculpture sitting on an Asian altar table and the sculptural chandelier by designer Lindsey Adelman. These pieces are in dialogue with one another, but they're not discordant; they all relate in some way."

Allison Malafronte is an arts writer, editor and curator based in the greater New York City area.



PAST MEETS PRESENT

The focus of this room is Cy Twombly's set of six prints called *Roman Notes*, from the 1970s. Gissler complemented this piece with streamlined, modern furniture and comfortable floor coverings.

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COMBINING CULTURES

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