

# Sophisticated Eye

STORY BY DIANE DORRANS SAEKS

San Francisco-based interior designer Heather Hilliard discusses some of her favorite recent projects.

In a Manhattan apartment, Hilliard dressed the windows in a Brunswick & Fils silk and added refurbished antique settees upholstered in Dedar linen.



An entry hall features studded grasscloth wallpaper by Philip Jeffries. A San Francisco living room (right) includes a sculpture by Stephen De Staebler, refurbished art deco chairs covered in blue leather, a round table by Candace Barnes, and curtains in a horizontal stripe from Michael Smith's "Jasper" collection.



A library (left) with a custom Scottish hand-stitched boiled wool felt rug with leather border, custom upholstered chair in Holland & Sherry wool, and English antiques. (Below) A light, airy Swiss aesthetic was introduced during a renovation to a pied à terre in the St. Regis Residences tower.



PHOTO: MICHELLE LEE WILSON



Hether Hilliard is admired for the sleek, modern lines of her interiors, and for the harmony of rooms she designs throughout California. Her polished and superbly detailed décor, with custom-craftsmanship of rare quality, feels very much of today but holds a deep connection with design history and elegance.

"My clients request relaxed interiors and more casual rooms," notes Hilliard. "I always plan décor that is comfortable, but at the same time refined. I make sure that the beautiful textiles I select are family friendly—there must be functionality in the design of a family home. I also collaborate and edit so that rooms are tailored precisely to their preferences."

The calm, calibrated, and subtle classicism of her interiors is not surprising, given her background in art and design. After

studying art history at LaSalle University, she worked at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and later studied interior architecture and design studies at Drexel University and earned an MFA in interior architecture and design at the Academy of Art University.

"I've always been passionate about the history of classical architecture and twentieth-century design and find these a constant inspiration for the correct placement and proportions of rooms," she notes.

Hilliard, originally from Pennsylvania, is currently working on a variety of projects, including an ultra-contemporary new house in Montecito, a classical residence in Presidio Heights, and a modernist estate in Los Altos.

After taking courses on the history of modern design in London, and studying in Paris, she joined The Wiseman Group design studio in San Francisco and then worked as a senior designer with the highly admired Paul Wiseman for five years.

A master bedroom (below) with contemporary art pieces, including *Rip Cut Column 1998* by David Nash through Haines Gallery, the painting *Storm King* by Robert Kingston through Dolby Chadwick Gallery, a custom Scottish boiled wool felt rug with leather border, hand-painted striped walls, and a Vladimir Kagan sofa covered in soft blue suede.



PHOTO: MICHELLE LEE WILSON



Hilliard designed the living room of this Victorian on Alamo Square in San Francisco with a light-hearted mix of mid-century modern furniture and custom classic pieces mixed with a contemporary photography collection.

PHOTO: ERIC PIASECKI

*“I’ve always been passionate about the history of classical architecture and twentieth-century design and find these a constant inspiration for the correct placement and proportions of rooms,” Hilliard says.*

“Paul was a fantastic mentor and I was extremely fortunate to work with him and his incredible team on a wide variety of projects,” says Hilliard. “From Paul, I learned the importance of context in design. The interiors must be appropriate for the site, the location, and the architecture. There should be a sense that rooms relate and resonate with the setting and the landscape viewed beyond the windows.”

From Wiseman, she also learned the design maxim, “just because you can, doesn’t mean you should.”

“Working with restraint, even with a large budget, is always essential,” says Hilliard.

Since launching Heather Hilliard Design in 2009, she has been a popular participant each year at the prestigious San Francisco Decorator Showcase to benefit University High School, creating a series of rooms for historic houses in Pacific Heights and displaying her versatility.

In a paneled study with views of the bay, she planned an exceptionally subtle color scheme with pale taupe cashmere upholstery for the sofa and chairs, and an unusual sand-colored leather carpet bordered with hand-stitched, tobacco-hued suede. Her roster of specialist craftspeople—embroiderers, decorator artists, hardware specialists, and upholsterers using traditional hand-tooled methods—gives her rooms a feeling of luxury without obvious flourishes.

“Each project is unique and very specific to the owners,” says Hilliard. “The key today is knowing that clients are very knowledgeable about design. It’s a pleasure to have lively dialogues about every aspect of design, right down to handcrafted door handles or trim on an embroidered pillow. Great design results from all of these details.” ♦