

In 1938, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga published the treatise *Homo Ludens*, which translates as *man playing*. The concept is one that I think of often when I'm engaged in designing, whether for myself or for my clients at McMillen. Of course, my revered mother, Betty Sherrill, longtime president of McMillen and an *Interior Design* Hall of Fame member, would scoff at decorating according to philosophies, and my clients would probably be horrified if I inflicted an abstruse theory on their homes. However, Huizinga's notion—along with his related concepts of beauty, battle, action, rules—goes a long way toward explaining what I did to my little slice of Southampton, New York. My house, barn, and cottage lie just down the street from the 1902 Carrère and Hastings house where I spent my childhood summers, finding an introduction to interior design in the cheerfully eclectic style of my mother, who has never redone any of her original schemes but just keeps on adding.

To return to Huizinga, though, could design actually be associated with *battle*? It seems to me it could, for a successful room is an aggressive room, a bit of a bully pushing away whatever extraneous colors, objects, or arrangements might try to enter its space. And could interior design, three-dimensional and plastic, be considered as *action*—without

summer school

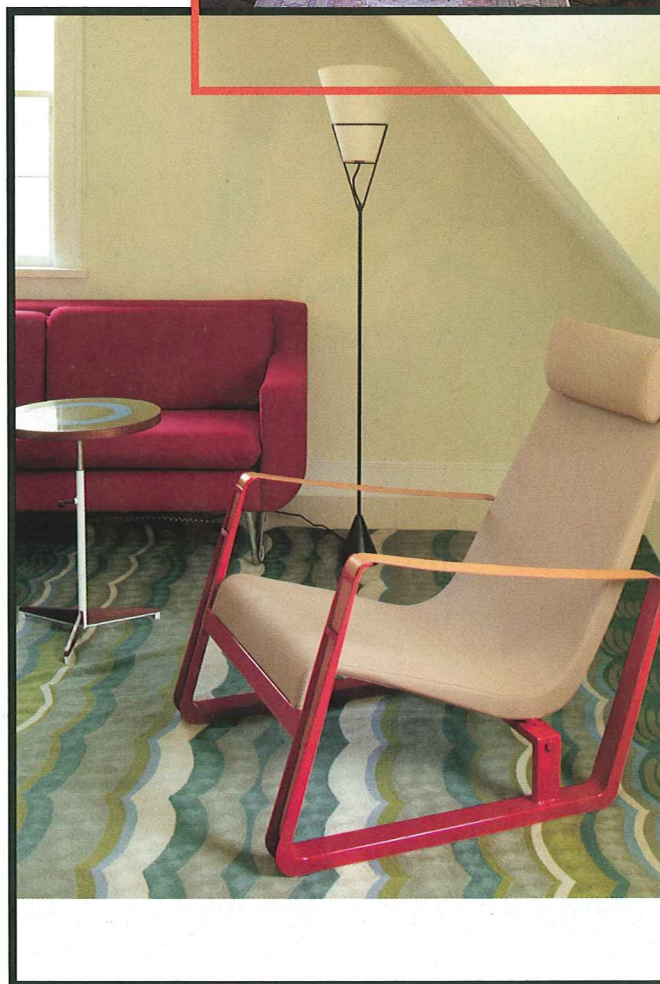
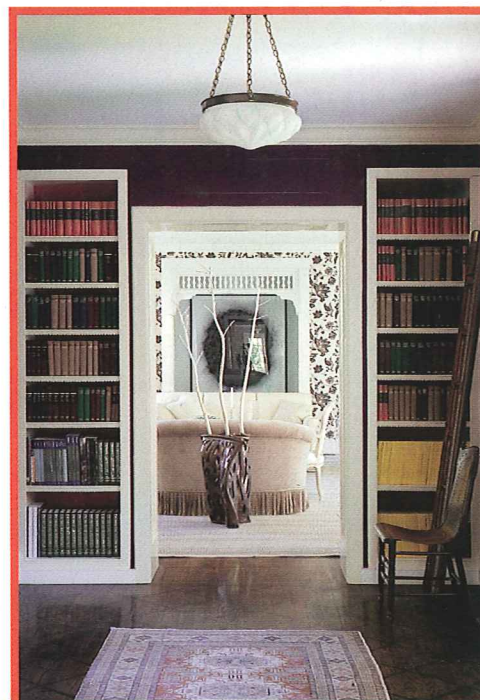
A McMillen partner's cottage in Southampton, New York, reads like a lesson in modern history

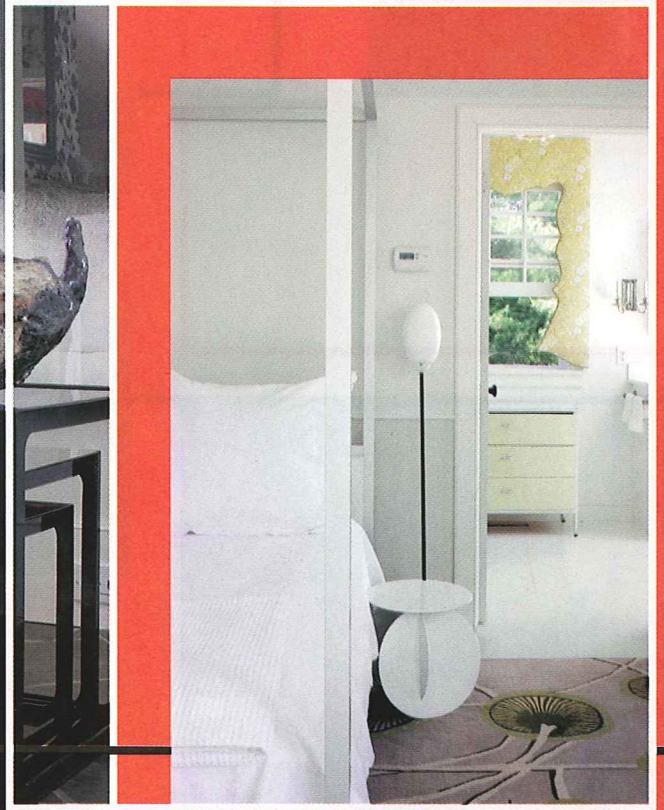
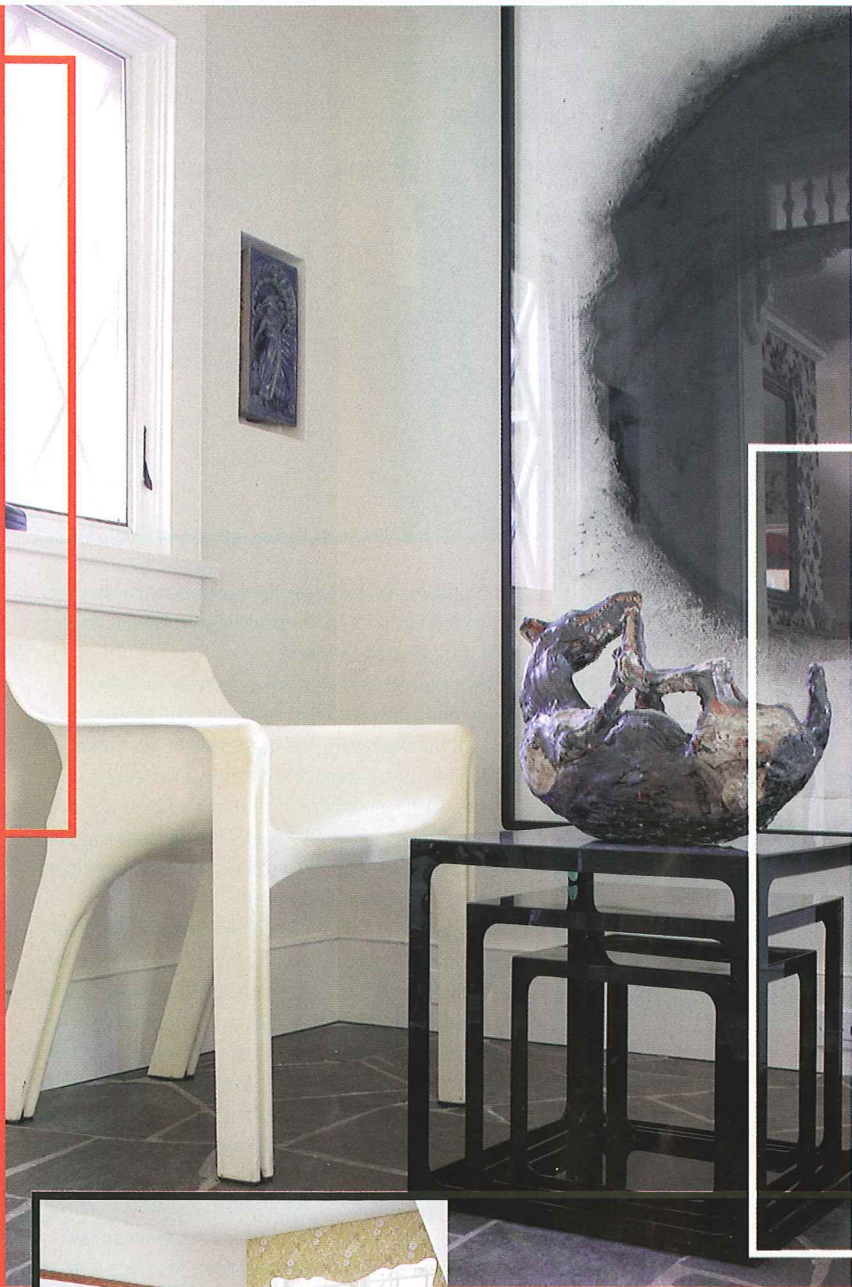
which, Huizinga insists, "There is no play"? Again, it seems to me possible. What lies around corners, past closed doors, up staircases? Are spaces not always shifting as one moves? Indeed, isn't interior design the most kinetic of all the three-dimensional art forms, demanding that one has journeyed through

each part before understanding the whole?

The *Homo Ludens* idea began in the front house, which I chose to fill with American late 19th-century furniture, period as opposed to "decorator." Every Victorian genre would be represented—a bit of a cranky notion, given that most of my fellow collectors focus on rococo or Gothic or Renaissance revival or aesthetic-movement objects, high-end or low-end, but rarely all of them. The barn, directly behind the house, quickly became the place to display overflow as well as my aesthetic ceramics. According to the rules of this game, no "decorating" was allowed: no covering or re-covering, no painting, no hanging curtains, just the arrangement of seemingly found objects in what had to appear as the inevitable space for them.

It was more of an adventure to play at *Homo Ludens* in my 1899 shingled cottage. I imagined coming upon it suddenly in a woodland. One would be quite confused about where the door was, would follow a stone walk, casually laid. Inside, I moved out of the 19th century and into the 20th. To someone appreciative of the rules of the game, my victory (or my defeat) lies in the extent to which I successfully incorporate as many different styles as I could find. They range from art nouveau, art deco, and mid-century to contemporary, not to mention McMillen's de rigueur Louis XV-style open-arm chair. Not strictly modern either, ➤





Opposite, from top: The view from the foyer into the living room, where an example of contemporary American art pottery stands behind the sofa. A bedroom's Jacques Adnet–esque chair, Scandinavian 1960's lamp, and rug by Federica Tondato of Fedora Design.

Clockwise from top left: Vico Magistretti's 1965 chair and Alessandro Albrizzi's nesting tables with a ceramic dog sculpture by Agenore Fabbri and an oil on paper by Donald Sultan in the alcove off the living room. A bedroom's Bruno Fattorini four-poster accompanied by a Peter Watson disk table and an Achille Castiglioni lamp. Billy Haines chairs and a Californian 1960's painted wooden lamp gathered nearby, beneath a pastel by Dora Frost.



Clockwise from top left: A Greek steel chair in a corner of the master bedroom. The living room's Philippe Starck chair, Nina Campbell wall covering, and Elizabeth Eakins rug with an aesthetic-movement desk and a Georges Jouve sconce. A mid-century Magnus Olsen chair in a bedroom. Harvey Probber's cocktail table in the living room, juxtaposed with a French 1920's concrete stool in the shape of a tree stump.

there's a forward-looking ebonized cabinet by Phillip Webb for Morris & Co., circa 1870—predating the Wiener Werkstätte by more than 30 years!

I force my visitors from room to room by including something slightly jarring in each one—the bluish burgundy of the foyer walls, the deep-amber light coming through the glass shades of sconces by the stairway, a strangely shaped, decomposing ceramic vase. All are clues that one will continue to discover different landscapes as one is obliged, in order to gain one's bearings, to proceed. Advance three spaces. Go back one.

The insertion of natural “woodland” patterns and traditional “cottage” materials was also part of my game. I chose objects, fabrics, etc., to represent flowers and leaves, stone and wood, but I transformed them into contemporary versions of themselves. Naturalistic florals cover the walls or ceiling in the living room, dining room, and master bedroom, but none of the blossoms are in naturalistic colors; they're all grisailles. The juxtaposition of newer and older counterparts is just as important. In the living room, a Harvey Probber coffee table, its oval polished-marble top penetrated by a severely cubist block of veneered wood, confronts a French 1920's stool shaped like a tree stump. The laundry room's art nouveau wildflower wallpaper gives way, in the bedroom above, to a deco-inspired lotus-flower rug.

Heeding Huizinga's call to *action*, I organized the cottage so that color moves outward concentrically. The central foyer, which I changed twice, is now that bluish burgundy. On either side, the living and dining rooms are white and gray. And bedrooms upstairs offer hints of color: a pale lavender, a barely citric yellow, a diluted green. My history of the decorative arts of the 20th century moves out from the center, too, the foyer being the most traditional. In an alcove at the far end of the living room, farthest from the foyer, a Donald Sultan painting burns like a black sun over a pair of white plastic chairs by Vico Magistretti and a set of black acrylic nesting tables by Alessandro Albrizzi. The most contemporary rooms are upstairs.

I like to imagine our unwitting guests, having made the long journey from the front house's Victorian rococo parlor, with its fussy and fragile-looking suite of furniture, to the second floor of the back cottage, suddenly encountering a Billy Haines club chair, which looks like a partially deflated soccer ball, or a recent Jacques Adnet-inspired chair, its seat curving almost to the floor. No doubt, they're thinking to themselves—especially the big-bully men, “Where the heck am I going to sit? And how?” —Ann Pyne