

CALIFORNIA HOMES

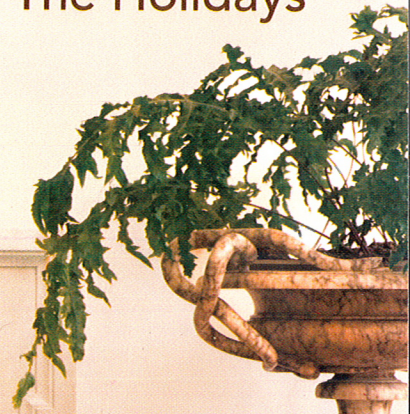
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The Arts & Distinctive Design

DESIGNERS AT HOME

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Gary Hutton

A Refined Point Of View From A San Francisco Designer

BY DIANE DORRANS SAEKS

Gary Hutton, founder of his namesake Gary Hutton Design, has focused his emphasis on elegant contemporary interiors throughout California. Sought out by clients for close to thirty years, this energetic San Francisco designer is known for his modern approach to design and his consistently polished, clean lined and pared down work. Since founding the Gary Hutton Furniture Collection in 1984, Hutton has developed a superbly edited and refined collection of furniture, lighting and accessories, along with sculptural upholstered chairs and sofas that other designers consistently specify in their own interiors. This is high praise for Hutton's keen eye, sense of proportion and highly developed sense of style. "I'm always interested in quiet luxury and the inventive use of materials," he says. "Practicality is important, too. It is not enough to create a space or design a table. There must be an understanding of how a space or item will be used. And, particular attention is focused on comfort."

CH How did you get started as a designer?

GH This could seem like a shaggy dog story. After graduating in the seventies with a degree in Fine Arts from UC Davis with a major in sculpture, the closest thing to a job I could get was working at a bookstore chain in Salinas. After a dreadful year hanging out as a mall rat I decided to return to school and moved north to San Francisco where I enrolled in the design program at California College of the Arts. During my time at CCA I did a student apprenticeship at Gump's. My goal when I was in school was to work for Charles Pfister at SOM, but the week I graduated, SOM unfor-



tunately had laid off twenty five designers and the recession of the mid '70s was in full swing. I worked as a sample boy at Scalamandré, a sometimes janitor at Knoll, and various other part time jobs until I landed a job as a showroom manager. After a couple of years of showroom work, Jerry Jansen offered me a job at Orientations in his newly developing interiors department. I was put in charge of a restaurant project that overlooked Union Square. The restaurant, Todays, was a smash hit, and that was the start of my design career. I also did a short stint at the design studio at Macy's, and was fortunate to see that remarkable show of John Dickinson's work up-close.

CH Where did you learn most about design?

GH I went to school at CCA, but the reality is that I truly studied design by visiting as many beautiful, well designed places as I could: I would sneak into offices that Orlando Diaz-Azcuy had designed, posing as a confused messenger. I once visited a not yet opened bank

designed by Charles Pfister and SOM by posing as a furniture installer. Seeing how these icons did their work and how they put things together was really the core of my education. And, I always went to any event that had a design bent.

CH When did you found your own firm?

GH I started with a live/work tradition in a number of residences and finally in 1998 leased office space for the first time. It became evident that this was a necessary move when it was pointed out to me that there were four of us squeezed into a small space with only three seats! It was like musical chairs all day long. One didn't get up for fear of having nowhere to return to.

CH You are one of the few modernists in San Francisco. And you've maintained this focus.

GH Designers who have made an impact on the world were all "modernists" if one takes that to mean being of their time. It is important to live in

OPPOSITE Designer Gary Hutton with a pair of his handsome new "Havana" chairs, from the Gary Hutton Furniture collection. The chairs are shown in white oak with a clear finish and are also available for custom order in other finishes. BELOW Over the last three decades, designer Gary Hutton has created distinctive—and collectible—furniture designs. His asymmetric "Pool" table, twenty inches high, is crafted from cast bronze. RIGHT Gary Hutton was for several years a featured designer at the San Francisco Decorator Showcase. Here, a study he designed, with a custom-made cabinet by Gary Hutton, and a dining/desk chair covered in goatskin, designed by John Dickinson, from Randolph & Hein.



the present and to take advantage of all the benefits that our place in time allow us. We live in such an extraordinary era with immense technical knowledge expanding exponentially that it seems to me we should strive to embrace that and move forward. I have a great respect for design history, and truly believe that our modernist heritage is firmly rooted in the eighteenth century and the age of enlightenment. I look at antiques as markers on the path to the present, beautiful things that were once the avant-garde of their time. I believe designers should honor those things but why reproduce them?

CH You are also a favorite designer for art collectors.

GH One of the great joys of my career is working with serious art collectors. Perhaps my first degree in fine arts has given me an appreciation for art that is slightly different than other designers'. It is thrilling to create a space for an important work of art. I check my ego at the door and work on creating

an environment that will be supportive of the art regardless of what that art is. Many of my clients rearrange their collections regularly, so this means that the background must be exactly that, background. There is no guarantee that the painting I love the most in their collection will, for instance, stay in the living room, or even that same residence.

CH You design interiors and furniture. How do you run two businesses and continue to create beautiful designs for your own collection?

GH There is an old business adage, "If you want something done, give it to a busy person." I find that the busier we are at the office, the more creative juices are flowing. The energy just builds and the creative part comes rather easily. Keeping on top of the business is a bit more difficult, but that is where I am blessed with a really topnotch staff. They keep me on track and make sure that everything is followed up and followed through.

CH How many pieces are in your own collection now?

GH My furniture collection has thirty one pieces to date. We will be introducing three or four new pieces this fall depending on how the prototyping process plays out. By far my greatest selling piece historically is the Ciao Table, designed in 1986. In the category of upholstery, our Bryant Series is the top seller.

CH Which design movement inspired you most?

GH I love all periods of design for very different reasons. At the moment, and that could change tomorrow, the French and Italian designs of the thirties and forties are my favorite. It was a time of modernist exploration. Serious designers were working hard to generate something new that still paid tribute to the past in some way. Jean-Michel Frank is a standout but there are many others that are just now being rediscovered. Serge Roche has really captured my interest lately. His work is quirky, highly individual and totally unique.