Collected Interest

Mark Phelps



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Surrounded by favorite finds and an abundance of texture, Mark



Simple bamboo blinds team with a sea-grass rug to send designer Mark Phelps' living room down a casual path, despite the regal lines of the furniture.

Phelps lends a tailored, masculine touch to classic Southern style.



This Photo: Matching gilded sconces hang on either side of a commanding four-panel mirror, just above the Georgian-style fireplace mantel.
Opposite: This canine-inspired corner features an English oil painting atop a handsome English mahogany chest and a collection of Staffordshire pottery dogs.



Mark Phelps doesn't just get excited about the gathering of personal treasures. As a longtime collector of antique furniture, pottery Staffordshire dogs, and English transferware (among other things), the Charlotte, North Carolina-based designer also loves helping clients build their collections. Often leading them through showrooms and far-afield antiques shops, he gently guides, listens, and informs before finally introducing the tenets of his collectors' credo.

For starters, multiple objects needn't create a visual distraction. "I prefer the idea of clean clutter," Phelps says. "I like to keep collections grouped together in a very specific area rather than spreading them all over." In the designer's 1940s Georgian-style dwelling, a few dog-themed items do ramble from room to room, but other collections—including his prized assortment of Blue Willow porcelain—are generally confined to distinct spaces. "They have more punch that way," he says.

Editing is also key. "For a long time, I just kept buying and adding," Phelps admits. "But I realized there really is a point where you need to focus on quality over quantity. Otherwise you'll fill every square inch of space."

Through the years he has pared down considerably and finally convinced family and friends to craft their collections, rather than add to his. "A collection is personal and it may not be appropriate for others to buy for you," Phelps says.

By keeping a close reign on cherished objects, Phelps is able to explore a wide range of textures. Well known for his lively intertwining of lush fabrics and opulent trims, this consummate Southern gentleman imbues his designs with a graceful yet relaxed air, deftly building layers of interest and beauty. "My look is traditional, tailored, and maybe a bit masculine," he explains. "I like details but they have to be clean."

Simple wood furniture, especially of the antique European variety, speaks strongly to Phelps, who tends to avoid pieces with heavy carving, ornate features, or over-the-top gilding. "I could probably use an old English chest with a nice worn patina in every room," he says. Draperies are also a favored choice for the designer, as are sea-grass rugs, which he considers a "timeless, classic base."

"I'm not very into trends or fads, because I think a well-decorated home should look good even 30 years down the road," Phelps says. "You can change out the drapery and upholstery over time, but as far as wood pieces and antiques, I encourage clients to buy well right from the start. Buy once and enjoy forever—that's my philosophy."



"I try not to repeat a lot of fabrics, because I definitely don't think that everything needs to match exactly."

—DESIGNER MARK PHELPS



Opposite: Bamboo trellis-print wallpaper adds oomph to the casually elegant dining room, where mahogany furniture (both new and old) is teamed with an 1890s bronze chandelier and a large oil painting. "I had admired that wallpaper forever," Phelps admits. **Left:** Buff-colored trim makes the light-filled foyer seem even more open, while original red oak floors ground the space and add character. **Below:** A collector of Blue Willow porcelain since college, Phelps says the pattern is based on a Chinese love story and was also made in pink and white. "I think I'll always love Blue Willow," he says.

