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Escape from Manhattan

The East Hampton retreat of New York-based interior designer Julie Hillman skillfully blends antique French furniture with contemporary artwork

Words JACKIE DALY. Photography MANOLO YLIERA, PHOTOFOYER



Exterior: The house is set in secluded woodland, where two concrete "Lamp" chairs by Willy Guhl have gathered leaves over time.
Dining area: This looks through to the entrance hall, where red tile has placed a 19th-century French desk. On top of the table sits a sculpture picked up in Thailand. ▶



After graduating from Manhattan's Parsons School of Design, Julie Hillman spent ten years working as a fashion designer before turning to the art of decorating with the launch of her own company in 2000.

Like many successful New Yorkers, Julie and her husband David Israel live in an inner-city apartment that provides a base for their busy lives, but also possess larger properties that include this bolthole in The Hamptons, which was built back in 1996.

Creating the retreat was a life-changing experience for the couple. For Julie, it prompted a departure from the world of fashion. 'I was pregnant with my second child, Puja, who is now 17. We already had our son, Oliver, who is 19,' she says. 'I'd left my job but felt a little lost, so I threw myself into designing this house with architect Farnaz Mansuri. Friends loved the work we did here and began asking if I could do the same for them, which is when the interior design business was born.'

The shingle-clad property is typical of The Hamptons, but its secluded location – the house sits among ten acres of woodland – is unusual. 'We often don't see people for days and we have no neighbours, which is a rarity in this area,' Julie says. The sense of scale inside the home is also surprising. It is amplified on the ground floor by a double-height living room with a 26-foot-high ceiling. The adjoining open-plan kitchen and dining space, plus two guest rooms, are proportioned accordingly. 'Most people who own property here plan for as many rooms as possible, thinking of the resale value, but creating an airy feel was always more important to us,' Julie says. 'The house does have a full-sized basement where we've added a large play area, entertaining space and gym. On the top floor are the main bedroom and bathroom. The children also have their own bedrooms with bathrooms on this level, and there's a sitting room where we can all spend time together.'

The interior of the house is dotted with antique French furniture that dates mostly from the 18th and 19th centuries. The couple are seasoned travellers: they source many of the larger items from Provence and have them shipped to the US. 'I now find pieces all over the world, including Asia. They've become part of my aesthetic. I like objects with a history, a story and a memory,' Julie says. 'Mixing furniture of unexpected styles, from different cultures and periods, is a big part of my work, but I do it subtly. In my own house, the look is classic with modern touches.'

Most of the fabrics that appear throughout Julie's home are obtained from local suppliers, but there are also swatches of Moroccan textiles and linens from Belgium. 'For me, travel is inspiration. That is how I keep my interiors fresh,' Julie explains. 'I don't have a formula that is duplicated from one house to the next – there has to be a mystery. The homes I design are unique because the furniture I source can't be found anywhere else.'

The couple have resisted making radical amendments to the scheme of their own home over the past 18 years, preferring to add pieces that gradually alter the aesthetic. 'The only items that change are the artworks, as we're always moving them around,' Julie says. 'We visit art fairs in London, Basel and New York.'

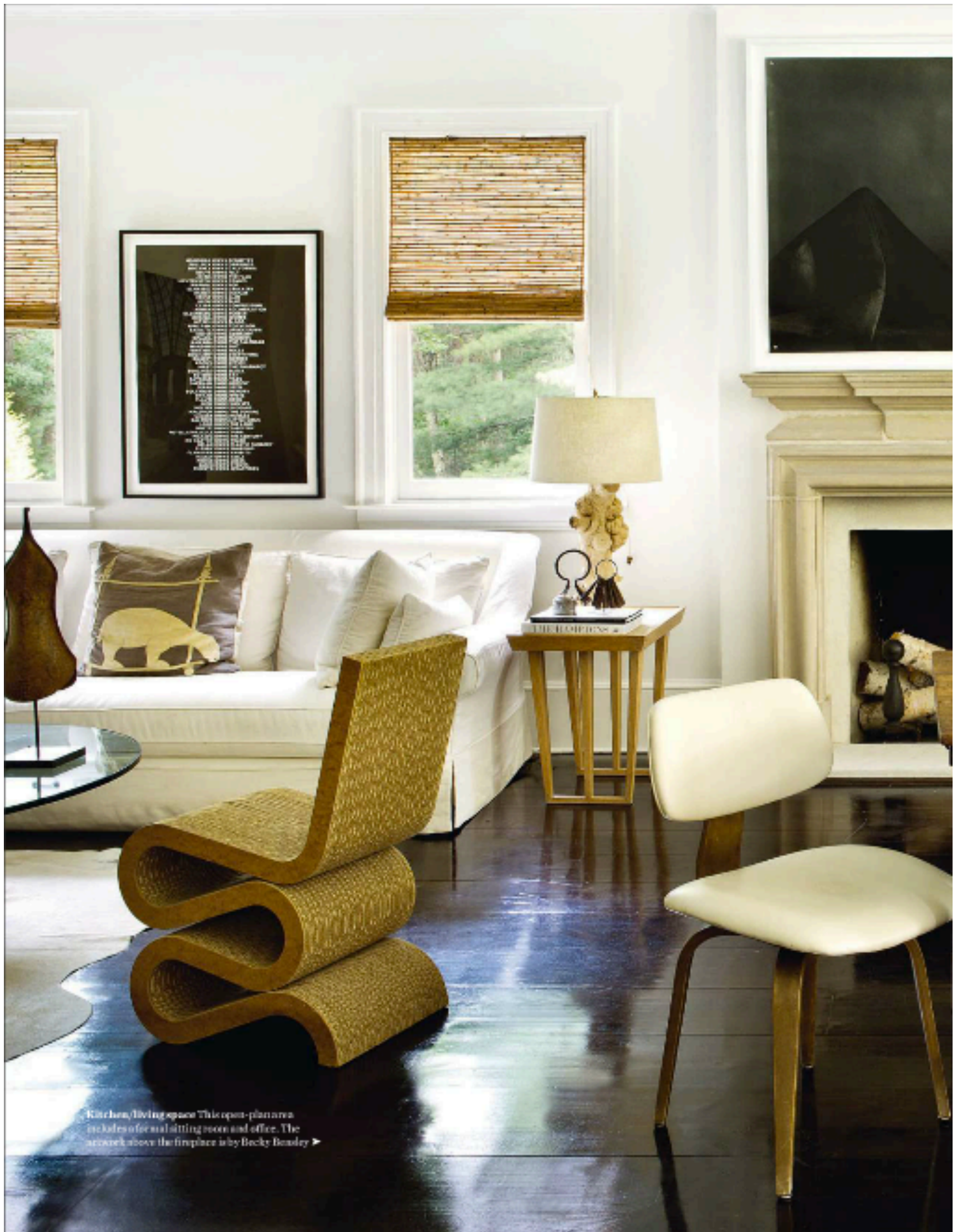
With hectic lives, two grown children and a globetrotting habit, the couple do not invest as much time in their East Hampton home as they would like. 'We'd love to spend all summer here but usually only get a month around August,' Julie says. 'When we do arrive, though, it's heaven. My perfect day involves sipping coffee on the patio in the morning shade. By midday, there's a cool spot by the pool where I have a leisurely lunch and then it's back to the shade of the terrace by late afternoon. I could spend all day, every day just hanging out around this house.'

juliehillman.com



Living room The fireplace and coffee tables are classic pieces shipped from France, surrounded by design classics including Sori Yangu's "Butterfly" stool for V2 and a vintage Charlotte Perriand "Pash" chair. Photography by Arno Mikkinen (shon on an ease)

Kitchen A pendant light by Serge Mouille hangs above the dining table and Thonet chairs (for similar seats, try Chaplin). [Stockist details on p. 297](#) ▶



Kitchen/living space This open-plan area is a blend of a sitting room and office. The artwork above the fireplace is by Becky Beasley ▶





Bedroom The design is classic with luxurious touches, including a fur rug and a sleek white chaise. A stellar antler light can be found at Universal Lighting. [Stockist details on p297](#) ▶





Bathroom The built-in bath tub is the focal point of the room. The chair, made from animal horns, was brought at an antique store.
Bedroom American artist Joe Andoe's work, *Medusa Dog*, hangs above the desk.



MY STYLE

I love this house because it makes me feel at peace.

My biggest must-haves in a home are large rooms with enough space to entertain – quite the opposite of a Manhattan flat.

My home betrays the fact that I love my family. Nothing about the design of my house is too precious; it is a warm and welcoming place.

I would always spend money on art and furniture with provenance.

My style advice is not to follow any rules. There are no rules. **KB**