

A Teacher Who Lives His Lessons of Design: No bare walls or tables, just balance and serenity.

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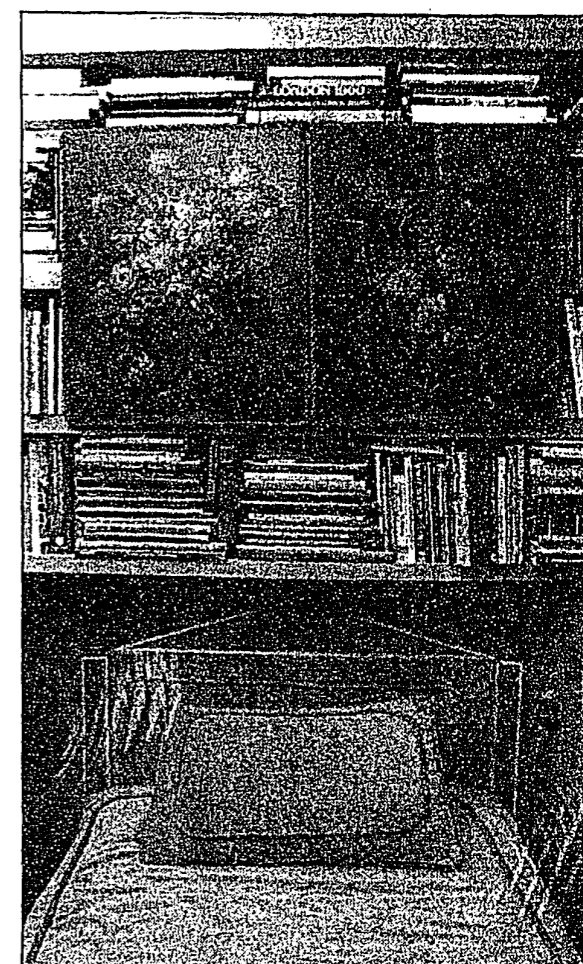


ABOVE Stanley Barrows in his dining alcove with a still life of 19th-century candlesticks and bronze dogs.

RIGHT Tableau of mother-of-pearl objects.



Photographs by Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times.



ABOVE Eighteenth-century Venetian paintings hang over the orange velvet bed trimmed in red silk braid. Three walls of bookcases hold 4,000 volumes.

By ELAINE LOUIE

A BARE table — or wall, or floor — makes Stanley Barrows very nervous.

In nearly 79 years of living, he has collected 4,000 books, 45 framed paintings and engravings, 60 pieces of porcelain and, in various sinuous positions of sniffing and leaping, a dozen small bronze whippets and greyhounds. "It's a difference only of size," Mr. Barrows said of his 19th-century pets, which appear to be chasing each other across the glass dining table.

In his apartment, all objects are visible. But Mr. Barrows does not live amid clutter. There is order in his universe, an 800-square-foot one-bedroom apartment in the Sutton Place neighborhood of Manhattan. Working with deft hands, the critical eye of an interior designer and the ingenuous joy of a child playing with his toys, Mr. Barrows has arranged his objects in a never-ending series of still lifes that teach eternal lessons of harmony, balance and serenity.

In objects, he finds warmth and his own history. "The nice thing about objects is that they anchor in your mind a time and a place," he said. The objects vary: malachite, porcelain, ivory. But several rules prevail, and they have made Mr. Barrows one of the great teachers of interior de-

sign, first at Parsons School of Design, where he was director of the interior design department from 1946 to 1968, and later at the Fashion Institute of Technology from 1968 until his retirement in 1985. At Parsons, his students included Mario Buatta, Thomas Britt, Ronald Bricke, Edward Zajac, Richard Callahan, Albert Hadley and the late Angelo Donghia.

"Stanley taught the history of interior design, from the 17th to the 20th centuries, of France, England, Italy, and America," said Mr. Britt, who took Mr. Barrows's classes in Manhattan as well as his summer tour through Europe, which lasted from May through the end of September. Mr. Buatta said: "Rooms came to life. He made us look at things, notice collections, notice details, and how in decoration, you could defy the space of architecture."

He taught them how to take an 18th-century French paneled room and furnish it in a 20th-century style. He showed them the perfect proportions of buildings designed by Andrea Palladio in the 16th century. "You can't scale a lampshade unless you know about that," Mr. Zajac said.

Mr. Barrows taught other, more personal lessons. "He made me believe in myself," Mr. Buatta said. "He made me express myself."

To walk into Mr. Barrows's home is to glean lessons of interior design that span four centuries.

No bare walls or tables, just balance and serenity.

"You must put alike things together," Mr. Barrows said. "The thing is to balance, or a room becomes chaotic." Balance leads to calm. The happy room, Mr. Barrows said, is the restive room.

It's what Edith Wharton wrote about in "The Decoration of Houses," his favorite book. "American houses were very disorganized," he said. "Edith Wharton called for a return to symmetry and good proportions."

When people arrange their furniture and objects awkwardly — a lonely chair beside a door, a fireplace without chairs — Mr. Barrows sees, and feels, chaos. Although his apartment has an 18th-century ambiance, the lessons apply equally to arranging the collectibles of the late 20th century: outsider art, photographs, movie posters.

Mr. Barrows taught about palaces the better to understand subway design. "If you're taught grandeur, you

can always scale down," Mr. Callahan said.

He also taught the value of eccentricity and fantasy. When he took his students to Europe, Mr. Barrows said, "They saw those ice-cream colors of Italian villas, so perfect for hot weather." At the palace of King Ludwig II in Bavaria, they saw the table that mechanically descended to the floor below so that the servants could reset it for each meal.

In his own home, eccentricity reigns in the colors. The bedroom walls are red; the bedspread is orange velvet, edged with red braid. The living room walls are aubergine. "Tom Britt calls it dried blood," Mr. Barrows said. "Oxblood is a better word."

The chairs and sofas are covered in a ribbed scarlet fabric. Against the deep purple walls, the furniture glows.

"Red gives me a lift in the morn-

ing," said Mr. Barrows, who lectures on antiques and is a contributing editor of Architectural Digest.

Dozens of plates hang on both sides of the kitchen door and cover the walls of the dining alcove. This fashion of plate as decorative object, rather than dining utensil, was born at the end of the 17th century, he explained, when William and Mary of Orange moved from the Netherlands to England. In her royal baggage, Mary had earthenware plates from Delft and porcelain plates from China. At Hampton Court, her architect, Daniel Marot, started a trend that is alive today.

"He hung hundreds of them on walls and cornices and put them on top of chests and armoires," Mr. Barrows said.

Books line the walls of Mr. Barrows's bedroom. To gaze at 4,000 of them might be boring. So Mr. Barrows has broken up the vista by hanging paintings in front of the books. Books on English and American design go above the bed. Design magazines are on other shelves. He has memorized their groupings, and to retrieve a book, he just flips up a painting, and pulls it out.

Table-top groupings — malachite with malachite, bronze with bronze — became popular in London in the 1830's. "In the 19th century, with travel so much easier, people began to have a lot of things and tried to

group them," he said. "Each group became a composition, worked out symmetrically or asymmetrically — or it didn't look very well."

Approaching his 79th birthday, Dec. 5, Mr. Barrows is not happy with the state of interior design as it's taught in New York schools.

"The young faculty doesn't take gracious living seriously, and doesn't understand the life style of people who live all around Central Park, on Fifth Avenue or Park Avenue," Mr. Barrows said. "To ignore these people is to write them off as a thing of the past." But if that were true, he added, Brunswick & Fils, the fabric house, would close tomorrow.

Even if young designers aren't going to decorate palaces, he believes that students have to travel and have to know what constitutes a great house. If a client can't afford fabric by Brunswick, he could use sailcloth or canvas. If a designer is offered a hotel lobby, rather than a grand home, he should still know how to arrange pictures in the lobby.

In Mr. Barrows's landscape, chairs are friends, grouped as if in natural conversation. On the dining table are the 19th-century bronze greyhounds and whippets, sculptured by Achille Mene in small, brilliant detail, with powerful musculature.

And the one toad? "Put it in the center," he said.

Obviously.