



{The darling of the smart set was the undisputed king of 20th-century decorating}

# Billy Baldwin

DAPPER, INTELLIGENT, AND REFRESHINGLY WELL-MANNERED, BILLY BALDWIN HAS always been considered one of the world's greatest interior designers, and his famous rooms look even better today, from the dramatically graceful Villa Fiorentina in Cap Ferrat, France, to his own little house on Nantucket. Every stylish decorator we know worships at the altar of "BB," praising his nuanced, symmetrical, soulfully surefooted interiors and analyzing and reanalyzing the easy sophistication that was his trademark.

What a paradoxical talent! Born in Baltimore in 1903, Baldwin was a modernist who revered the past, a luxury lover who abhorred conspicuous consumption, and a booster of stylish glamour with a predilection for what was "correct." He first started kitting out rooms as an assistant to decorator Ruby Ross Wood; once on his own, and influenced by an all-star cast including Madeleine Castaing, Van Day Truex, Syrie Maugham, Frances Elkins, and Jean-Michel Frank, Baldwin quickly became a polished original. Maybe that's why his discerning coterie of clients—which included Bunny Mellon, Babe Paley, Cole Porter, Diana Vreeland, Kitty Miller, Jacqueline Kennedy, and Deeda Blair—pretty much let him have the run of their rooms. They knew then what we know now: Billy always did it right. ●

## Baldwinisms

- Printed cotton ■ Understated silks ■ Paper lampshades ■ Tailored plain valances ■ Twisted-rope stools and chairs ■ Straw, rattan, and bamboo
- Painted furniture ■ Brass bookcases ■ White plaster lamps ■ Cogolin carpets ■ White lacquer ■ Chinese export wallpaper ■ Louis XV and Louis XVI ■ Needlepoint carpets ■ Venetian chandeliers ■ Blackamoors
- Tented walls ■ Saarinen tables ■ Geometrics ■ Tidiness ■ Symmetry



[top, left to right] Baldwin's "sunny Matisse palette" pervades the Dallas living room of Harding and Mary Wells Lawrence. A Spanish lantern hangs in the entry of a house in Old San Juan. [above and right] A portrait of Baldwin from his book *Billy Baldwin Remembers* and a pen-and-ink profile.



PORTRAIT AND SKETCH FROM BILLY BALDWIN REMEMBERS; COURTESY OF HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH; SKETCH BY HENRY KOEHLER; HOWARD GRAFF (2)

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