

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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If you're an intelligent designer, everything you do is a reflection of your experience," says Thomas Britt, who has been transforming experience into design for almost forty years. "Inspiration comes from every place. I'll see a picture or a color, and my mind will start wandering to different parts of the world." Inspiration for a summer house on Long Island Struck one misty afternoon as Britt wandered through Lazienki Park in Warsaw, Poland. He turned down an allee of trees and there, reflected in the stillness of an ornamental pool, was the romantic eighteenth century White Cottage, a wood-and-stone wedding cake of a building designed by architect Dominik Merlini as part of a summer residence for Stanislaw II.

"I loved the magic of the grounds," Britt remembers. "I noticed the French doors and the way it was a box on top of a box. It was a wonderful jewel surrounded by water. There's always this excitement of discovery at a moment like that."

If the inspiration for the outside of Britt's design was Lazienki Park, the inspiration for the inside was nothing less than a great globe itself. Britt's abundant, diverse, interiors for the house reflect the peripatetic passions of a lifetime: These include a Burmese temple, a French costume ball and the kitchen of a palace in Sweden.

"The look is taken from the whole world with all of its cultures," says Britt, who enlisted architects Peter Cook, with his former associate Doug Moyer, and Wojtek Rutkowski, designer Valentino Samsonadze and artisans Peter Napolitano and Ryszard

Chmielewski to help him transport his eclectic iconoclasm from a palace in Warsaw to a potato field on Long Island. "It's a totally international house. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries things were brought from all over the world to the great houses of Europe, and now I'm bringing this tradition into the twentieth century and on to the twenty-first."

A great part of the house is filled by the soaring space of a double-height library with clerestory windows; four French doors let in the smell of summer and the sounds of fountains playing in the pool laid out between Egyptian obelisks and sphinxes. Inspired by the opulent library in Charles de Beistegui's Chateau de Groussay, outside Paris, the luminous room is anchored by wrought iron spiral staircases whose curves are mirrored in ornate chandeliers and baroque white-marble urn on an octagonal table.

"I started seeing pictures of the Beistegui's library with its two staircases when I was ten or twelve," says the New York designer. "He gave a great ball in the 1950s, everyone came in lavish costumes, and it went on for days. I didn't know people did such things."

Instead of the coffered ceilings and mahogany paneling of Chateau de Groussay, Britt created a study pale yellow and white with flashes of warm red, where low tables and scaled down chairs give an illusion of infinitely high ceilings. Mantelpieces at each end of the sweeping space were suggested by the classical niches in the royal ballroom at Lazienki, but to replace Lazienki's statues of Greek gods, Britt installed a fanciful pair of



"It's a calm study in natural rattan, bleached wood, ivory and white," Britt says of the master bedroom. The pair of lounge chairs and the ottoman are French, the night tables and bookshelves are German, and the bed's antique columns are from India.

golden statues from Thailand. "They throw the room into a whole East-meets-West fantasy," Britt remarks. "It's all different, but all belongs together." Chinese end tables. Indian pillow fabric and inlaid Burmese tables share the dark wood floor with a set of eight red-leather-upholstered Louis XV-Style chairs. "I always wanted to do a library with two staircases and a wall around the top," Britt says, sinking into one of the sofas and gazing up at the three white sunbursts on the ceiling. "Do you think those sunbursts should be red? Maybe they should be red."

Eastern influence spills in to the dining room, designed around a pair of faceted, mirrored Burmese temple doors. The mirrors reflect Piranesi engravings hung on deep red walls, three bullseye mirrors and an Italian table with Portuguese tooled leather chairs. Three life size Burmese temple guardians stand on marble consoles and a mantel. High interior windows fitted with wrought iron let light from the

belvedere windows at the top of the house filter down past the upper stair hall and onto the glistening surfaces of the dining room.

Across the hall, a Swedish sitting room seems to float on shades of the color blue - blue striped fabric, blue paneled doors and Indian engravings of ships matted in blue on blue walls. "This gives the feeling of European design moving into a lighter palette," Brit explains. "It's a Baltic look."

The kitchen and informal breakfast room, where blue-and white Oriental figures and scenes surround rustic Mexican chairs and tables, were influenced by the kitchen of Sweden's Thureholm palace. Eighteenth Century Baltic palaces, such as Lazienki and Thureholm, were often built by Italian and French architects imported by the royal patrons. "These places have a Mediterranean feeling, but they're built for a northern climate," Britt says. "They're perfectly suited to the East end of Long Island."

The master bedroom has a draped

four-poster made from antique Indian Columns, with a round Neoclassical plaque mounted at its head. In attendance are two rattan lounge chairs from Paris. Upstairs, in the yellow bedroom, Napoleon himself stares down from a wall of engravings at the glowing fruitwood and ebony of nineteenth-century American tables and mirrors.

Thomas Britt's designs are an interpretation of everything he has seen on his travels. Even More important are his excursions into the past. "Any designer should have a thorough knowledge of history," he says. "I can't emphasize that enough. Here we have the contrasts between all these centuries and cultures combined in this house. It has the elegance of Europe but with a twist."



The house was inspired by this Thureholm palace in Sweden.

"I conceived of the plan of the house after seeing the Lazienki palace in Warsaw. Peter Cook and his former associate Doug Moyer realized it for me," says Britt. "Wojtek Rutkowski was responsible for the rusticated wood façade, while Ryszard Chmielewski created the obelisks around the reflecting pool."

