



From left: Robert Stilin Interiors (\$60, Vendome Press) edited by Mayer Rus, photographed by Stephen Kent Johnson; Robert Stilin. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: A bright pop of color complements the home's furnishings; Stilin's East Hampton home is filled with his extensive art collection; the interiors have a mix of antique, vintage and modern pieces; Stilin built and decorated his 5,000-square-foot abode from scratch.

An Artful Life

FOLLOWING THE RELEASE OF HIS FIRST BOOK, DESIGNER ROBERT STILIN OPENS UP ABOUT HIS LIFE, HIS WORK AND THE KEYS TO CREATING BEAUTIFUL, LIVABLE ROOMS.

BY JEAN NAYAR, PORTRAIT BY ERIC STRIFFLER

Ensnared in a plush upholstered chair in the living room of his East Hampton home, designer Robert Stilin (robertstilin.com) sits contentedly amid the things he loves—a pair of vintage wooden chairs with rush seats, a contemporary abstract work of art by Adam Henry, a vintage Brueton coffee table. The only rule for anything that comes into his spaces? “I don’t buy it unless I love it,” he says. Yet any object or piece of furniture that’s here today might be switched out to another room and supplanted by something new—or quite old—tomorrow. “I rotate things around a lot,” he admits. “Even though I love everything in my life, I’m not attached to it—it doesn’t define me; everything is replaceable.”

This laid-back attitude and view that none of his cherished possessions is too precious to live without goes a long way toward explaining why the interiors he creates in homes across the country—from a farmhouse in Sagaponack or a prewar pad on Park Avenue to a Tudor-style home in Kentucky or an equestrian-inspired dwelling near Palm Beach—always feel warm and relaxed. Though no particular signature style defines his work—“my inspiration comes from my clients, the essence of their lifestyle, the site—and none are ever alike,” he says—there are common threads that recur in every room he touches. “Comfort and function are



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constants," he says.

These fundamentals have been integral to his point of view ever since he left his roots in Wisconsin to move to New York in the '80s (forgoing a role in the family business as well as a career in finance that he'd once considered) and moved to Palm Beach with his then-wife and opened a lifestyle shop. "People would come into the store and ask me if I could help them with their interiors," Stilin explains. And thus it was that, without any formal training, his brilliant career was born.

Years later, after his marriage amicably ended and he moved to New York with his young son, Stilin settled in East Hampton, where he built his 5,000-square-foot home from scratch and filled it with his extraordinary collection of antique, vintage and modern furnishings and objects as well as a plethora of postwar and contemporary art. "I have a large collection of vintage and contemporary photographs as well as a lot of paintings and drawings," says the designer, a seasoned collector who serves as a member of the director's council at the Whitney Museum of American Art and who often works with his clients to build their own collections. Here—as well as in New York City—



Stilin gradually built the formidable portfolio of finished projects and unerring eye that has landed him on *Elle Decor's* A-List every year since 2010 as well as on the prestigious AD100, a list of 100 top designers each year. "I'm not a decorator so much as an editor, a curator or a lifestyle creator," says Stilin of his distinctive approach to crafting very personal and often spirited interiors for his clients.



After 25 years in the business with an extensive body of beautiful work behind him, the designer also recently decided the time was right to work with Vendome Press to share a curated glimpse of some of his finest projects in *Robert Stilin Interiors* (\$60, Vendome Press), the first monograph of his work, which was just released in October. Brimming with images distilled through the lens of photographer Stephen Kent Johnson and words crafted in collaboration with design journalist Mayer Rus, the book is not only a beautiful and inspiring reflection of Stilin's unique ideas and visceral vision, but also a fitting midcareer tribute to the extraordinary work of one of the contemporary design world's most original leading lights. ■