

the art of
layering
color

BRIGHT OR MUTED, SHINY
OR MATTE...WHEN IT COMES TO YELLOW AND
GREEN, IT'S THE VARIATIONS THAT CREATE DEPTH



For a family house in Woodside, California, designer Benjamin Dhong concocted a rich palette of greens, yellows, beiges, and whites. "Fabric has more texture and warmth than paper," says Dhong, who covered the dining room walls in a toile, Waverly's La Belle Campagne. A set of Louis XVI chairs, whose seats are upholstered in a leather from SH Frank and backs in an Arabel velvet, surround a custom pedestal table. The midcentury chandelier is by Gaetano Sciolari. Armchair, Hickory, Mirror, Formations. **OPPOSITE:** A resin artwork from Ironies glows over the living room's marble mantel.

Working with soft neutrals, Dhong created an airy living room. Walls are papered in a palm fiber wallcovering from Kneeder Fauchère. The 1927 Carl Malmsten daybed is from Lerebours Antiques; the yellow pillows are in Kravet's Smart silk. To add a touch of glint, Dhong gold-leafed a pair of console tables made of hand-carved acacia wood with cement tops from Myra Hoefer Design, then paired them with simple rectilinear Bistro mirrors from Restoration Hardware.



MIMI READ: You've cooked up such a relaxed mood in this house—but it's got a fancy factor, too.

BENJAMIN DHONG: I have an obsessive passion for textures, and when I layer them, I like to juxtapose rich with plain. What I want is a Goldilocks not-too-hot, not-too-cold feeling. I spend a tremendous amount of time figuring out how to get things balanced in a room.

How do you do it?

To me, silks and velvets are great, but they need to be played against linen and sea grass, which is a wonderful platform to build on. Bringing in humble or natural textures allows you every now and then to have an exuberant piece, whether it's something heavily gilded or an over-the-top antique, without it seeming vulgar or pretentious.

Who are the homeowners?

A Japanese couple and their two children. He's a businessman. She's ethereal and loves sewing, being in her garden, and hanging out with her dogs. When I met them, I was so charmed by how worldly and sophisticated they are, but at the same time, relaxed. He travels around the world several times a month, so this home is a relief from all the travel.

And the house?

It was built in the 1930s. Think of *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*. Even though this is California, it's that sort of iconic East Coast farmhouse with painted shingles on the outside and exposed beams on the inside. It's an oasis surrounded by a beautiful garden. The gardens do infuse my decorating. In the dining room, I was bringing the green in from outside. And in the living room, which has French doors everywhere, I didn't want to detract from the greenery outside.

Are lush garden views the reason behind the neutral living room?

Truthfully, I don't need an excuse to do an all-neutral room. When done right, they can be as gloriously rich as any color-filled space. The woodwork somehow evoked the hull of a boat, so I wanted the whole room to be this dreamy boat. Layering on a multitude of creamy colors seemed like the best way. There are so many



different textures, sheens, moods, and facets—they keep it from being boring. The daybed is Swedish—a beautiful sculpture with beautiful inlaid woods, floating there. It's like you're drifting away. You've got the gauziest linen sheers on the windows to soften the light and add mystery. We specifically asked for the cloud painting to be in a round frame so it almost feels like a porthole into another world. So everyone's becalmed. Why throw in a flaming yellow painting?

At some point I realized the room was too polite. I knew I needed a nice piece of bold art that felt happy, modern, and graphic—a punch. The art piece is actually resin, so it has translucent layers in whites, yellows, and oranges, and very soft hints of green. It takes it from a pretty room to a powerful room that doesn't lose its softness or elegance. How did the dining room evolve?

I ran across this mossy-green toile that had pastoral scenes of frolicking nobles and peasants and thought, How perfect! But everyone's seen

ABOVE: Because his clients were born in Japan, Dhong wanted an East-West vibe. A Saarinen table is topped with a fragment from a Buddhist temple, and the chairs are from Bliss Home. **OPPOSITE:** "Libraries are like powder rooms—you can go a little crazy!" says Dhong. He designed the green ottoman with Moorish-style legs, covering it in Varese velvet from Designers Guild. The mirror above the fireplace hides a TV. Long mirrors on either side have frames in Arabel's Brussels velvet.

toile before. How do I shake it up? If you present things in the same old way, people's eyes glaze over. So I balanced the toile with bold strokes—a strong, sculptural dining table, a gilded mirror, and a modern Italian chandelier. It's kismet when you turn it on. Those glass spheres make the light seem like fire.

It's intriguing how you've put drab green leather on the seats of those French dining chairs next to shinier green velvet on the chair backs.

As with strawberry shortcake, you can't appreciate the sweetness unless you experience the dryness of the cake. So in rooms, I create areas where it's dry, starved of light, starved for glitter—and then I throw in the glitter, the velvet, the shine, the counterplay.

Is that what you were up to when you added that emerald-green ottoman in the library?

Absolutely. I was layering all these green tones—duller ones as my base. And then I strategically placed these high notes. To me the ottoman is the natural place to draw your eye, to center the room. Even though it's so bright, it makes the room feel serene and calm. We call it the jolly green giant!

Were there any spaces you had to work hard to bring to life?

The poolhouse looks like it has great bones, but it was actually sad and forlorn when we found it. We covered its plain white walls with my favorite faux-bois wallpaper from Nobilis: instant character. It's so believable, people think it's wood—even after touching it! We added drama with an enormously tall wood cabinet. The rafters of the room remind me of my favorite church in Venice, Santa Maria dei Miracoli. The room feels like a chapel, so we anchored the far end with a dreamy painting. People walk in now and gasp.

What's the importance of decorating? I'm creating a stage for your life. It's not necessarily for other people to see but for you to really live in and really use. Nothing makes me happier than having clients who have a new room with a game table call me and say, 'I just played chess with my father for the first time in 30 years.'





1. In the son's bedroom, Chesterfield headboards from Restoration Hardware take on a gentlemanly air in the company's Vintage Velvet. 2. Wicker chairs from Janus et Cie surround a custom farm table from Mecox Gardens in the breakfast area. 3. A faux-rock console creates a focal point in the master bedroom. Pillows in Brunshaw & Fils' Rubaiyat linen on the custom chaise. 4. A Frank Gehry chair is paired with a 1790s Swedish desk in the living room. 5. Restoration Hardware headboards in the daughter's bedroom are covered in Belgian linen. 6. Benjamin Dhong. **OPPOSITE:** Dhong wanted the master bedroom to feel like an elegant tree house. Restoration Hardware's Josephine bed is curtained with Sahco's Lara linen. Valance, Classic Cloth's Nottingham II cut velvet.





In the poolhouse, Dhong conjured an otherworldly calm with a colossal painting of clouds by Wade Hoefer. For a rustic feeling, he used Nobilis's faux-bois wallpaper so that the trompe l'oeil "boards" run horizontally. The media console is from Restoration Hardware. **OPPOSITE:** Dhong added scale with a reclaimed-lumber hutch from Custom Furniture, crowning it with oversize ginger jars for more height. The Plank dining table is by Global Views, and the Isola wicker chairs are by Artesia. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES