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JACKET DESIGN BY RITA SOWINS / SOWINS DESIGN
FRONT JACKET: Watercolor by Isabella Rey, Collection of Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Upperville, Virginia.
BACK JACKET: Trompe l'oeil by Fernand Renard based on a hand-colored engraving from Abraham Munting, *Phytographia curiosa*, Amsterdam, 1783, "Arbutus humilis virginiana" (possibly a chokeberry, *Aronia arbutifolia*), figure 23, folio 125. Collection of Oak Spring Garden Foundation, Upperville, Virginia.
AUTHORS PHOTOGRAPH: © 2021 by Holden, Lloyd, and Huffman



BUNNY MELLON STYLE

HOLDEN, LLOYD,
AND HUFFMAN



BUNNY MELLON *Style*



LINDA JANE HOLDEN, THOMAS LLOYD, AND BRYAN HUFFMAN

FOREWORD BY TORY BURCH

BUNNY MELLON *Style*

Bunny Mellon Style is the intimate story of one of the most unintentionally influential women of twentieth-century design. Her eye for home and garden design began in her youth, and her self-education continued into adulthood. She was self-confident about her own sense of style and what she liked, which empowered her to oversee the design and building of Oak Spring, the main family home with husband Paul Mellon in Upperville, Virginia. Bunny's aesthetic infused Mellon homes in Washington, DC, New York, Cape Cod, Nantucket, Paris and Antigua.

Original research by the authors uncovered Mrs. Mellon's personal writings and correspondences. They talked with people who knew her, who were employed by her, and who spent time in her homes and gardens. From published works, they extracted information about personal relationships between Mrs. Mellon and Jackie Kennedy Onassis, designers Billy Baldwin, Balenciaga, Givenchy, and more.

Blending stories and accounts from such a variety of viewpoints results in a unique perspective of this extraordinary woman who moved in the upper echelon of society but preferred not to be noticed in the public eye. This book reveals Mrs. Mellon's style in furnishings, art, and collectibles; her dietary habits and penchant for picnics; her personal investment in designing every aspect of her homes. Come away with the highest regard for a woman who was self-disciplined and self-taught, who loved learning from historic texts, who was accomplished in myriad ways, and who was utterly unpretentious and down-to-earth.

An abundance of imagery—including professional and archival photography, watercolors, whimsical hand drawings, and sketches—brings the story of a fascinating woman to life. This volume reveals Bunny Mellon's unerring eye and her vast and lasting influence on the world of design.



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There was the “yin and yang of it all,” he remembered. Amidst the casual, informal atmosphere where comfort was key, butlers reported when summoned (there was a bell under the arm of the sofa that rang in the kitchen), the silver was polished to a high sheen, surfaces glistened, and museum-quality art was displayed on walls and chairs. There were eighteenth-century pieces of porcelain fruits and vegetables, wonderfully scented cut flowers, and pots of geraniums.

“As I was taking it all in,” Bryan continued, “I turned to meet Mrs. Mellon, who would come to be my friend Bunny. She had a firm, welcoming handshake and was as inviting and warm as her room—and quite tall. I was so surprised that the furniture was all so low for someone of her height.” As a matter of fact, when Bryan first met legendary designer Mario Buatta, the first question Buatta asked was, “Why did Bunny have all of that doll-like-scale furniture? She was such a tall lady.” Part of it goes back to the fact that she liked French furniture and that she was influenced by Billy Baldwin in the 1960s, when furniture was lower and of a smaller scale. Bryan continued, “In my ensuing visits during the many seasons, I never failed to take in that room and realize what true genius it displayed. There are so few rooms that can be so warm and inviting in winter, yet feel fresh and summery in the warmer months. I know this feeling can be achieved with a change of slipcovers, rugs, etc., but she achieved this without changing anything—same baskets of flowers, same fabrics and straw matting, yet it was transformed into a summer room. In design, this is a hard thing to accomplish. People move from house to house as the seasons rotate to get this effect.”

Bunny was impressed with the work done by Custom Upholstery and Total Restorations, a furniture reupholstery shop located in nearby Marshall, Virginia. Still in operation today, their fine craftsmanship and attention to detail is what she desired in a craftsman. “The Mellons had a particular style, and a particular style of trim that was used on all of her furnishings,” interior designer Gina Krytusa of Total Restorations told me in a phone call. The trim was cut from the same fabric and hand done. No welt prefabricated trim or gimp could be used. A very large 5-by- 6-inch pin cushion, old and worn, still serves as an example, and fond memory, of the work that was done for Bunny.

FACING ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: A Federal-style burl and figured maple table. A 19th-century Napoleon III rope-twist tabouret. A Louis XVI architect’s table (from her Paris apartment). **MIDDLE, LEFT TO RIGHT:** A Louis XV fauteuil dressed in Tillet Textiles butterflies. Carved relief over the door to the living room. Another fauteuil wears butterfly in reverse. **BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** A George III piano stool. Bunny sets her own still life; a hidden upright behind the folding screen offered a special glow. **ABOVE LEFT:** An example of the handmade style of trim that Bunny used on all her furnishings. The trim was cut from cloth and attached by hand-sewing in an uneven way to give the pieces a timeless elegance where nothing would be noticed, nothing would stand out. **ABOVE RIGHT:** This sample cushion remains in the shop to this day, a treasured reminder of Bunny’s appreciation for expert craftsmanship.



OAK SPRING HOUSE WITH PAUL MELLON

IN 1948, RACHEL LOWE LAMBERT LLOYD MARRIED HER SECOND HUSBAND, PAUL MELLON, in the New York City living room of Foxcroft chum and decorator Sister Parish. It was the beginning of a fifty-plus-year marriage filled with great energy and the joy and challenges that any marriage brings. Paul Mellon wrote, “She brought with her two children, Stacy, nicknamed Tuffy, and Eliza, together with a great flair and lifelong interest in gardening, building, decorating, and collecting.” Clearly, for Paul Mellon, “a new influence was at work.”

In anticipation of their marriage, an order was placed for dishes with the British decorator Syrie Maugham on January 26, 1948. Mellon paid \$3,000 for one set of Spode china 1780, which included twelve plates, two oblong dishes, four shell-shaped dishes, one fruit dish, and two sucriers with lids and saucers. Bunny also purchased what became a favorite piece, a Victorian-style étagère, on a trip to visit Nancy Lancaster in London in 1948, according to Martin Wood in *Sister Parish: American Style*. “Never afraid to make a piece her own,” remembered Susan Leopold, an Oak Spring librarian, “Mrs. Mellon lopped off the top to simplify the piece” and then proceeded to paint it for the display of her eighteenth-century hard-paste porcelain vegetable collection.

At first the Mellons were living at the farm with their four children in the Brick House, a formal, neo-Georgian-style mansion designed by famed architectural firm Delano & Aldrich and built in 1941 by Paul with his first wife, Mary Conover Brown Mellon. By Paul’s own admission, the Brick House “never was a convenient house to run and had the added drawback of noisiness, stemming in large part from a central hallway and circular staircase leading all the way up to the third-floor skylight. Children’s laughter and shouts were heard everywhere, and the water running in a bathtub simulated Niagara Falls down the stairwell.”

Bunny’s remarkable eye was on a plum site, the sweet spot of the farm, where she could create a new family home. It was an elevated ridge of land near an old stone springhouse where Bunny found architectural inspiration. “At Oak Spring there was a spring house in the lower part of the lawn, where the milk and cream were kept, and the churning done,” wrote Tacie Fletcher Slater in her family memoirs,



ABOVE: In the living room, a Louis XV green-painted provincial *bureau à gradin*. A carved Louis XVI fauteuil sits at the ready should a note need to be penned. Bunny was quite sentimental, discarding very little. Family photos, auction catalogs, bronze busts, and the ubiquitous topiary fill the surfaces. The small painting to the right of the topiary is another Madeline Hewes. Many of Hewes' works were copied as notecards for Bunny, who was an inveterate note writer. **BELOW:** The view across the bureau looking towards a parcel-gilt and gray-painted bookcase holding more pieces of Bunny's extensive porcelain collection. **FACING ABOVE:** Another seating group at the far end of the living room. To the right hangs *Four Jockeys*, by Edgar Degas. **FACING BELOW LEFT:** Another view of the *Wheat Fields, Auvers*. In the lower right is Bunny's "seat" on the sofa, with her telephone close at hand. To live so comfortably and nonchalantly with world-class works of art was the epitome of the Mellon style. **FACING BELOW RIGHT:** Bunny enjoying an evening with close friend Charles Ryskamp, former director of both the Frick Collection and the Morgan Library. He was a frequent companion to both Bunny and Paul and held the honor of being godfather to Bunny's grandson Thomas Lloyd.









CAPE COD HOUSE

BUNNY DESCRIBED THEIR HOUSE AT OYSTER HARBOR ON CAPE COD AS “A LOW WINDSWEPT SHINGLED BUILDING BY THE SEA” that has “spread with the years, until it has made a courtyard on the north side.” Whimsical weathervanes and finials added a light touch, crowning the pinnacles of numerous rooftops in “a simple landscape created by the sea and wind, rather than man.” Bunny noted, “the silence is broken rarely by anything more than a Sea-Bird’s cry or waves on the outer shore.” From her journal:

August 10, 1980. This first day is a clear—cool blue—with sea and sky all around. A song sparrow sings on the olive outside my window. He is always there from early morning until dark. Beyond the tree the boat is tied to the dock. For the moment the sparrow and slight sound of water are the only things breaking the stillness.

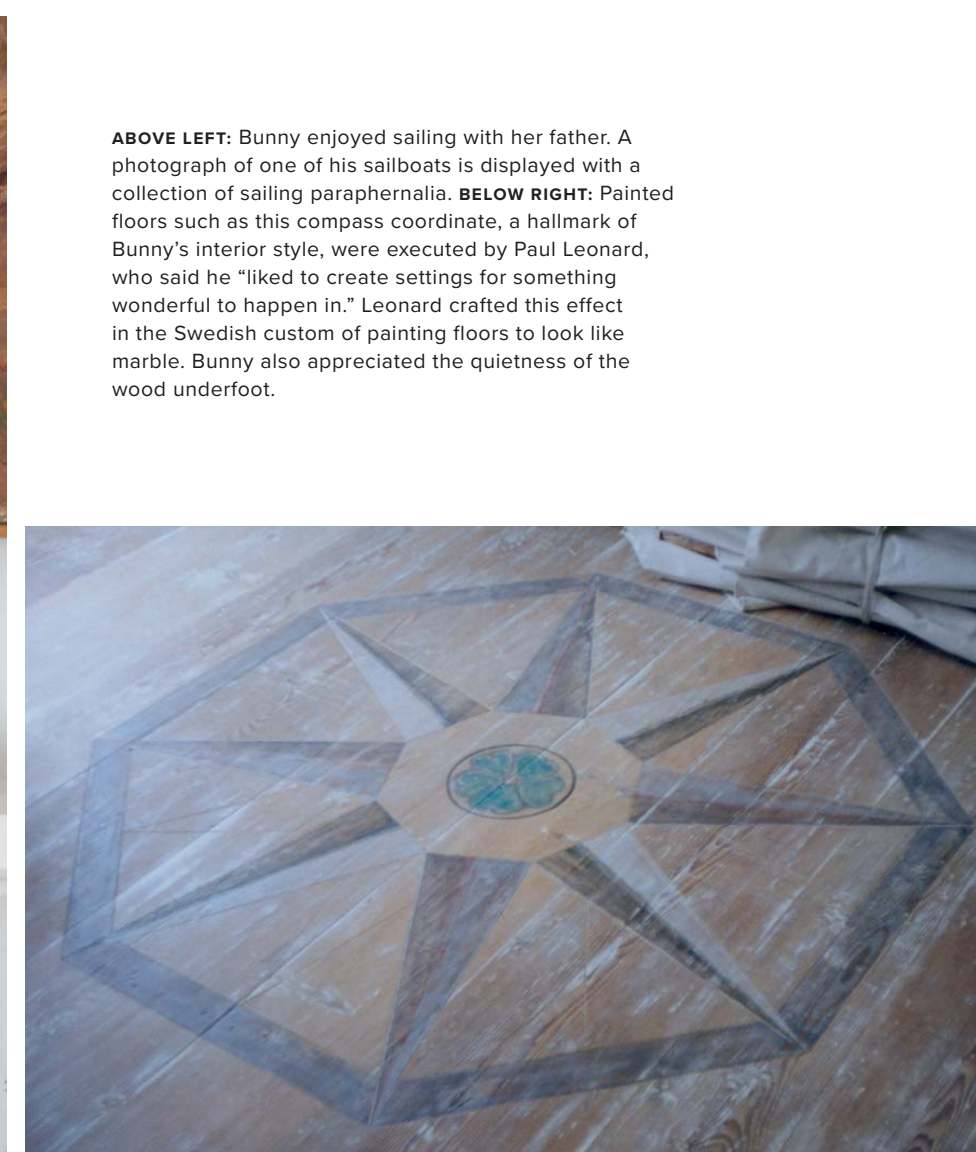
The Main House, designed by H. Page Cross, was built in the 1950s on a bluff overlooking Sepuit River, surrounded by dunes, beach grass and *rosa rugosa*, with views toward Dead Neck Island, which the Mellons preserved as a bird sanctuary, and Nantucket Sound.

Bryan Huffman observed that the interior followed in the typical Bunny Mellon style. Painted and patterned floors ran throughout. The ceilings were kept intentionally low so as to create an intimate, cottage-like atmosphere. Soft and light pastel colors suffused the walls, allowing a perfect backdrop for many works from the Mellon art collection, including a wonderful Dufy above the mantel in the dining room. Many of the floors had soft, nubby and natural rugs, along with plenty of antique hooked rugs.

Bryan also remembered that the foyer boasted the typical Mellon accoutrements of pegs and hooks for hosting the utilitarian umbrellas, baskets, beach bags and hats along with an ever-present croquet set alongside a weathered tall-case clock. Cushions and baskets for treasured four-legged friends were scattered about the main hall.



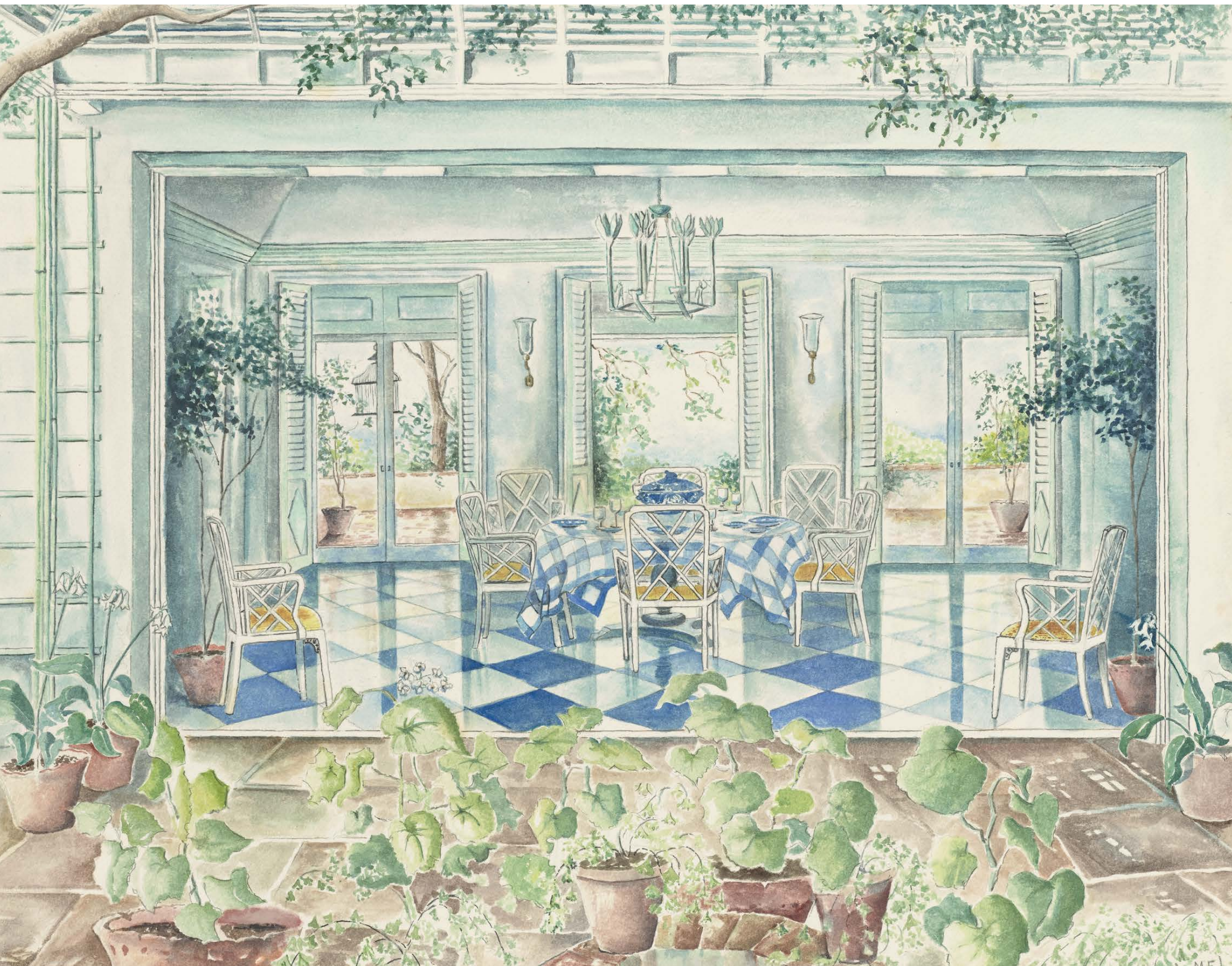
FACING ABOVE: Watercolor by Mellon frequent and intimate summer guest, John Baskett, of his bedroom. **FACING BELOW:** Details of bedside table in Bunny's bedroom. She preferred loose single stems of flowers in small vases to create her own interior garden. **ABOVE:** With her customary shutters thrown open to let light flood in, Bunny's desk is laden with baskets of papers and to-do lists. Angled ceiling and fireplace add to the cozy qualities she enjoyed in her rooms.



ABOVE LEFT: Bunny enjoyed sailing with her father. A photograph of one of his sailboats is displayed with a collection of sailing paraphernalia. **BELOW RIGHT:** Painted floors such as this compass coordinate, a hallmark of Bunny's interior style, were executed by Paul Leonard, who said he "liked to create settings for something wonderful to happen in." Leonard crafted this effect in the Swedish custom of painting floors to look like marble. Bunny also appreciated the quietness of the wood underfoot.

Bunny's picnic house. John Baskett wrote that "Nantucket held a special place in Bunny's heart, as she had bought the plot and built over it entirely at her own expense with monies that her father had left her." Bunny and Paul "often flew over from Barnstable for the day to do a tour of inspection" and enjoy a picnic.





ANTIGUA

LOOKING BACK ON HER FIRST VISIT TO ANTIGUA, Bunny wrote sometime in the late 1980s, “It’s been 25 years since we landed in Antigua” looking for “a warm climate beyond the shores of Florida and [the Bahamas.]” At the time, the West Indies island was a remote, quiet and unspoiled place, boasting a landing strip and a beautiful but dry and harsh climate. Recommended by a friend of the Mellons, the island entranced Bunny.

It was on this first drive across the island that I became aware of its extraordinary beauty. The road wound through the country as if laid out by animals who knew their way back and forth to water or a sheltering place. On both sides sugar cane blew in the wind, a pale yellow-green, its edges swept the clear blue of the sky . . . The midday sun was hot . . . All along our way were the people of the island pursuing their morning tasks.

Bunny commented on the elegance of the women, with “beads wound around multi-color turbans,” whose “style would be the envy of a French lady of fashion. Rarely has anyone ever captured with pencil or brush this elusive gift of charm. I wish they would try.”

The new house, whimsically named King’s Leap, was designed by Bunny in collaboration with H. Page Cross and built by the local Clarence Johnson Construction Company. Diana Vreeland, editor of *Vogue* magazine, sent staff writer Allison Harwood to scout the Mellons’ Antigua home while it was still under construction for a potential feature story. Harwood reported that Mrs. Mellon was “in love, passionately in love with this beautiful creation.” Noting that “everything is right,” at the conclusion of her lengthy report found among Mrs. Mellon’s papers, Harwood summed up the details:



FACING ABOVE LEFT: Slatted-roof garden room with a pineapple finial. **FACING ABOVE RIGHT:** A slatted roof covering small reflecting pool off the guest quarters. **FACING BELOW:** View of courtyard entrance to the main house. The second story leads out to the front path of the house, where guests would be greeted by all the employees upon arrival. **ABOVE:** Romantic view of the coral walkway bench and courtyard between the great drawing room and dining room.

Thomas Lloyd reminisces: "The most indelible aspect of Antigua, fostered by Granbunny, was a place that allowed each family or guest to experience something wholly unique to take with them. Whether it was a quiet moment at the pool feeling the ocean breeze, a retreat into her separate library to read, or a stroll at night down the pathway to the beach, listening to the waves. She allowed you to have your own space and not feel obligated to always be present."



THE PARIS APARTMENTS

PAUL MELLON, THE SON OF AN ENGLISHWOMAN, embraced all things English, while his wife Bunny was a Francophile. She had two apartments in Paris—Rue de l'Universite and Avenue Foch, where she later moved in an effort to downsize. John Baskett, the Mellon curator, and his daughter, Samantha, often spent time at Avenue Foch. Samantha Baskett described the experience with what her father called “an almost photographic memory, despite the lapse in time”:

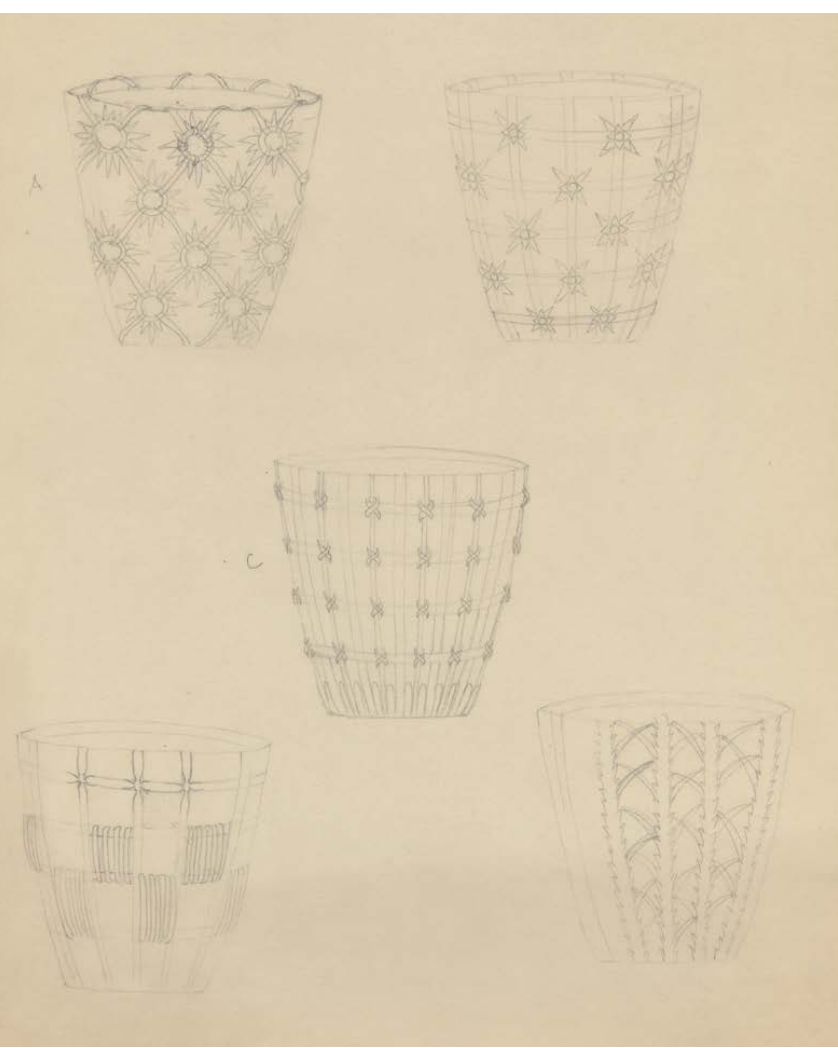
There were wrought iron gates at the front and you walked into a hall where the floorboards were decorated with diamond shaped squares in distressed blue, gray and ivory. Out of sight, but providing an agreeable smell, were burning pine cones, and there was also lavender. The door on the right led into the living room dominated by a large Rothko painting. Next to it was a painting by Bunny's daughter, Eliza, who was a competent artist. We had dinner in this room seated in armchairs and it was brought in on trays—an arrangement that Bunny chose to do for all of us from time to time.

A wide staircase with a wrought-iron banister led upstairs, where Paul and Bunny had bedrooms side by side, as they did in all their houses. In Bunny's room, the walls, Samantha wrote,

were decorated in fabric with deep blue block-printed flowers on an ivory background. There was a four-poster bed with long windows on either side. Beside the bed was a tiny pot of sweet peas. On the far wall was a little fireplace and above it a small painting by Pissarro of a peasant girl in a deep blue dress (like the fabric on the walls). She was surrounded by emerald green verbiage (the only item in the room that wasn't blue). A little corridor with a built-in cupboard on one side led into the bathroom. There was an enamel bath and above it a shelf of cut glass with bottles containing bath suds.



Bunny's beloved pastoral toile de Jouy fills this bedroom with a soft backdrop for objects, art, and topiaries. **FACING ABOVE LEFT**, A Mary Faulconer painting rests atop a Louis XVI stool. **FACING ABOVE RIGHT**: The door being prepared for its toile covering. **BOTTOM LEFT**: A necessary evil, the television, retreats with its white surround. Bunny used white televisions so as not to have them noticed. **BOTTOM RIGHT**: The lit à la polonaise before its transformation. **ABOVE**: The lit à la polonaise dressed and ready, with its bright red giving a pop against the blues and whites. Another Bunny "signature" was her ability to achieve scale and balance with extraordinarily small objects like this painting, which works perfectly in the large space.



Schlumberger sketched various versions of terra-cotta pots from Bunny's greenhouse with different applications of gold and jewels before selecting the simple basket weave in 18-karat gold.

FACING LEFT: *Flower Pot* comes to fruition, c. 1960. It originally featured a rare Kashmir sapphire which was later replaced with this massive amethyst as the center of a gold flower planted in a terracotta pot. It had a detachable diamond clip mounting so that the stone could be removed and worn as a brooch. This piece perfectly expressed the creative collaboration between Bunny and Schlumberger. It yet again encompasses the yin and yang of Bunny's style, her brilliant ability to mix the humble with the grand.



