

Interior design by
CARLETON VARNEY

Interview by
MIMI READ

Photographs by
MIKKEL VANG

FROM CLASSIC TO WILD

Holding
nothing back
in a
lake cottage

The entry of this 1929 Wisconsin cottage is signature Dorothy Draper with its black-and-white-striped walls and oversized architectural mirror. Carrying the torch for her hotter-than-ever design legacy, principal decorator Carleton Varney and senior designer Laura Montalban painted the walls with two Benjamin Moore colors, Black Jack and Decorator's White. Landry & Arcari's Zebra Print runner adds pizzazz to the stairs. Mirror from wisteria.com; steel console from Room & Board.



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: Varney mixes pattern gaily and deftly. The sofa is covered in Lysette Reverse in magenta from China Seas, with pillows in pink-and-white Lysette and green-and-white Lysette. Black-and-white needlepoint pillows are from Gracious Home. Armchairs by Hancock & Moore are covered in Madhya Woven Stripe by Brunswick & Fils. Walls are painted Farrow & Ball's Calamine. The checkerboard floors are painted Farrow & Ball's Lamp Room Gray and Benjamin Moore's Decorator's White.

MIMI READ: You're definitely Mr. Color. You must have a lavish paint box in your head.

CARLETON VARNEY: People do come to me for color. One thing I do is give them a confidence to not be afraid of it. I find that a lot of people are reluctant to express their personalities for fear of offending. They want to part of the group, and it's easier to dress down than to dress up. But I say if you want to wear a beret and red pants, wear them! You should always dress and decorate for yourself. I like flowery, springlike colors—buttery yellow, soft green, ocean blue, happy apple red. I don't worry about what the neighbors think.

What did this house look like before you gave it such a colorful makeover?

It's a 1920s Norman-style cottage with good bones, substance, and solidity overlooking Green Bay. But it was dark, with small rooms and small windows.

So you opened up the rooms...

I did weigh in about opening up the living room and dining room and giving them one sweeping view of the water, but all the architectural work was done by the owner, Edward Martin. He's a builder and he knows how to bring houses out of an obsolete era and make them relevant again.

You've decorated the cottage with such boldness and exuberance. It has Dorothy Draper's signature all over it. It's been Draperized, as people used to say.

I worked with her for seven years at Dorothy Draper & Co. Inc.—it's the oldest established interior design firm in America. In the late 1960s, I bought the company and kept the name. Dorothy was an icon because she created a look. She put together rooms you couldn't miss.

Why exactly made them unmissable?

They were dramatic and extremely colorful. At design meetings with her staff, she always waved her gloved hand and said "Show me no gravy!" She meant she didn't want to see anything beige or cream. She adored bold color and high contrasts. She loved tufted bar fronts with buttons. Big Rococo chandeliers all in white. She wrapped them like Christmas packages in dark green-and-white-striped wallpaper—big, thick stripes—and then put hugely

overscale red rose chintz on a sofa against it. Sometimes she put wallpaper on the ceilings, to cheer herself up. Her rooms were like walking through beautiful gardens. We still do pretty much the same look. Well, why not? It's fabulous! It has glamour, magic, an air of happiness.

You and Mrs. Draper spread that style through many spectacular resorts, like the Greenbrier in West Virginia, which has vast and dramatic public spaces. But this is a stucco cottage in Egg Harbor, Wisconsin!



There's nothing wrong with creating a colorful, glamorous, theatrical cottage! In the foyer there are many Draperisms, like the black-and-white zebra runner on the stairs. She liked the look of animal skin, the nighttime-ish glamour of it. We also striped the walls in black and white paint. Most people think black and white aren't colors at all, but Dorothy considered them two of the most important ones.

What about in the living room?

We softened the look a little. We did blush pink walls. Pink is a wonderful color. Dorothy loved it. Instead of doing black-and-

white floors, we bleached the wood and painted it a gray-and-white checkerboard. Then we laid zebra rugs on it. There's lots of pattern and color in the upholstery for liveliness. The pattern on the sofa is sort of like pink cherry blossoms, and it comes in positive and negative versions. I used the positive pink one on the sofa, and negative of the same fabric in green and white on the pillows.

The dining room flaunts all the same colors.

Because of the flow of the house, it's really more or less the same room. Besides, I always say decorating a house is like creating a symphony. Throughout the house, you have to repeat the melody. See how the chairs have that black-and-white-checked fabric on the seats? It keeps the black and white moving through the house.

You certainly kept the black and white moving in the breakfast room.

I love the idea of mixing cultures. I ordered those African baskets online from Macy's, and they're not expensive. For me, decorating is never an exercise in spending money. It's more a quest to get the details right—the fringe and the braid and the lampshade and the pillow that's cut just right. Details give a room soul. You'd be surprised how many rooms I walk into that are soulless.

The master bedroom is another room where the spirit of Dorothy Draper is kicking up a storm, isn't it?

The bedroom is done in her famous rhododendron fabric, directly from the walls of the Greenbrier hotel.

There are certain things we reduced to suit a domestic scale, but not this. There's a big punch in it. It's so happy.

Is happiness the point of decorating?

Let me tell you a story. I was decorating an apartment in Trump Tower for Fay Wray, who played the damsel in distress in the original 1933 *King Kong* movie. I said, 'Fay, why do you want me to do this apartment when you're 94 years old?' She said, 'I love seeing colorful flowers every day. New things make me know I'm alive when most people think I'm not!' And she lived happily for three more years in that newly decorated, colorful apartment.

PRODUCED BY ROBERT RUFINO



ABOVE: The living room's happy colors—light pink, chartreuse, magenta, black and white—are repeated in the dining area. OPPOSITE: Ficks Reed's Castle Peak Extension dining table in ebony and Catalina side chairs make a bold black statement. The pair of French amethyst crystal hurricanes and the large viridian bowl are from Treillage. On the shelves are flower cups and saucers from Brass Scale Antiques and antique ceramic cabbage tureens from Hoffman Gampetro.



“I ordered those baskets online, and they’re not expensive. For me, decorating is never an exercise in spending money. It’s more a quest to get the details right. Details give a room soul.”

CARLETON VARNEY

Varney created a “young and snappy” kitchen by Draperizing it in black and white. Walls painted Benjamin Moore’s Decorator’s White set off by Unity and Embrace baskets made in Rwanda, from macys.com. The table was made by H.J. Martin and Son, the nationwide interior contracting company owned by the homeowners, Edward and Terri Martin. Catalina chairs from Ficks Reed. Through the doorway is an African wall-hanging from Hemingway Gallery. Striped bowl and pitcher, Crate & Barrel.

“The bedroom is done in Dorothy Draper’s famous rhododendron fabric. We used it for the drama of the overscale floral print. There’s a big punch in it. It’s so happy.”

CARLETON VARNEY

Here’s fabric-driven decor at its splashiest—an entire master bedroom worked around Carleton V’s exuberant floral print, Rhododendron. The reversible quilt is Carleton V’s Rossway in two colorways, soft red and green. The painted green Lisle headboard is from Ficks Reed. The soft yellow walls are Pale Hound by Farrow & Ball. Alexis lamp in cardinal from Pottery Barn.





THIS PAGE: "Orange is one of the hottest colors," says Varney, who splashed it around one of the boys' bedrooms via wood tones and fabrics. Quilt and pillow are Ziggurat by China Seas. Ficks Reed headboard and side table; Crate & Barrel lamp; starburst mirror from Andrew Martin. OPPOSITE: **1.** Ranunculus in pink, a favorite color of Dorothy Draper's. **2.** The sunroom is furnished with Ficks Reed painted wicker and Dash & Albert's Tattersall rug. **3.** Green vases from Treillage flank a seascape. **4.** A girl's bedroom has a tentlike painted ceiling; the blue is Borrowed Light by Farrow & Ball. **5.** Andy Warhol's glowing pink Chanel Ad. **6.** The guest bath is covered in Cliff Walk wallpaper from Carleton V. Inlaid bone mirror from wisteria.com. **7.** The study is radiant with color: Walls are Cook's Blue by Farrow & Ball, the sofa fabric is Potalla by China Seas. **8.** Ficks Reed Regency chairs with seat cushions in Carleton V's On Safari.

FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES.

TO SEE MORE ROOMS BY DOROTHY DRAPER FROM THE HB ARCHIVES, GO TO HOUSEBEAUTIFUL.COM