

GULFSHORE LIFE.

HOME

THE DIARY OF A MEANINGFUL + WELL-DESIGNED LIFE



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Many aficionados have become acquainted with Hunt Slonem's colorful work through Harmon-Meek Gallery, which has represented him for more than 25 years. His paintings—inspired by the tropics and featuring motifs like birds and butterflies—are perfectly suited for the region's aesthetic, notes interior designer Judith Liegeois. Spirituality is another running theme in Slonem's work. Rabbits, his Chinese zodiac sign, are a trademark—whether painted or sculpted. From left: Hunt Slonem's *Prota Bunny 1/9*, bronze sculpture; *The Countess Passport Photo*, 2005, oil on panel, shown in a home designed by Judith Liegeois; the artist with one of his pet birds.

Courtesy Hunt Slonem; Judith Liegeois; Design

Artistic Vision

CREATIVE VISION

Hunt Slonem

Each winter, when Hunt Slonem travels to Naples for his annual exhibit opening at Harmon-Meek Gallery, assistant director Barbara Meek picks him up from the airport and the duo go antiquing in Fort Myers and downtown Naples. The artist is usually hunting for carved, gilded frames for his vibrant paintings—dozens of which fill his Brooklyn studio at any given time. “I wake up and paint myself into a coma,” says the 69-year-old prolific painter and sculptor, who splits his time between New York and Louisiana.

Slonem, who lived in Hawaii as a child and Nicaragua as an exchange student, reflects tropical motifs prominently in his work, as well as in his personal life (he has between 30 and 40 pet parrots and cockatoos). “I’m very involved with tropical and exotic subject matter—butterflies, flowers—things that resonate with people in Florida,” he says.

As a child, Slonem collected butterflies, and though he has

long incorporated them in his paintings, a visit to a butterfly farm in Naples 20-odd years ago added to his enthusiasm for the winged creatures.

But Slonem is especially known for his *Bunnies* series—the theme took on a deeper meaning after learning the animal was his Chinese zodiac sign. “Since my pieces are derived from nature, there’s a lot of spiritual energy,” Slonem explains, adding that the rabbit is a symbol of fertility. “People seem to love living around my work.”

His whimsical pieces often show up in local homes. Judith Liegeois notes that several of her clients have an affinity for Slonem. “The sense of whimsy in his work—with the lavish colors and imaginative subject matter—lends itself perfectly to our Southwest Florida aesthetic,” says the interior designer, who first encountered Slonem’s work at Harmon-Meek 25 years ago. She recalls one piece in particular, titled *The Countess Passport Photo*, which she secured for a local client whose family called her by the same moniker. “It was almost like it was made to order,” Liegeois says.

Carrie Brigham, who also met Slonem at Harmon-Meek, appreciates the intricacy of his work, pointing to his cross-hatching technique of layering paint. “It looks simple, but it’s really quite

involved—the color comes through from the background,” she says.

In the past decade, he’s also been incorporating diamond dust into his oil paintings, a technique he first witnessed from his brother’s former boss, Andy Warhol. Slonem has also been delving deeper into his sculpture work.

The artist is represented by more than 50 galleries across the globe, but Harmon-Meek Gallery has featured him the longest, for more than 25 years. Slonem first sent the gallery one of his catalogs in 1994, when Harmon-Meek was emerging as one of the more reputable names on the national art scene. The gallery started representing him one year later, and hosted his first solo show in Naples in 1996.

Gallery director, Kristine Meek, says her parents bonded with the artist over their mutual love and respect for antiques and American craftsmanship. Today, the gallery sells nearly every one of his pieces they receive. “We introduced Naples residents and visitors to Hunt Slonem’s contemporary, neo-expressionist work at a time when many people were just being introduced to Naples. The city and Hunt’s popularity have grown with the same exponential trajectory.”



Vintner's Corner Design West's lead designer Caroline Ficquette worked with her clients to turn what would have been a study into a wine room. Nearly every detail is custom in this space that holds close to 2,000 bottles between the display, racking system and closed-crate storage. Of particular note is the feature wall flanking the twin storage towers with 3D honed marble for interest. It was done by Design Studio by Raymond, who also created the stonotop tasting table with its striking, metered edge.

Straight Up Homes bars have taken on a new dimension in this age of heightened at-home entertaining. Inspired by hotel lounges around the world, the homeowners tasked Judith Liegeois with creating a sleek lounge area in their own home. Hand-blown glass vases and premium liquor sit on cable-suspended glass shelves that float in front of a massive back-lit slab of Onyx. Form and function hold equal weight. To allow for better flow and conversation, the bar is set a step down, allowing the lounge seating to be at a convenient 30-inch height, parallel with the stools. Cheers to that. ✂



BUILDING ON THE PAST

THIS REGAL BAY COLONY HOME—DESIGNED
AROUND THE HOMEOWNERS' VINTAGE FURNI-
TURE—IS ONE FOR THE BOOKS.

By
Michael Korb

Nick Slight



The 200-year-old, 13.5-foot bookcase in the living room came from the Palais Schwarzenberg in Vienna. "They had a long-term passion for a specific style of furniture and collected it just like artwork," designer Judith Liegeois says of the homeowners. Previous page: Note the Biedermeier secretary that started the couple's antique collection on the far left corner of the room; a 1780s crystal chandelier hangs from the center of the room.

Designer: Judith Liegeois, Judith Liegeois Designs **Architect:** Rob Herscoe, Herscoe Hajjar Architects **Builder:** BCB Homes.

Robin Hill

It all began with a birthday request. When Mark Rubin asked his wife, Anne, what she would like for her birthday, instead of some tech device or a piece of jewelry, she mentioned a Biedermeier secretary that she coveted.

With that purchase, the Naples couple began a love affair with vintage furniture. They started collecting Biedermeier, art deco, and midcentury pieces while they were living in their former residence in Bay Colony's Trieste high-rise.

That was before they started a family.

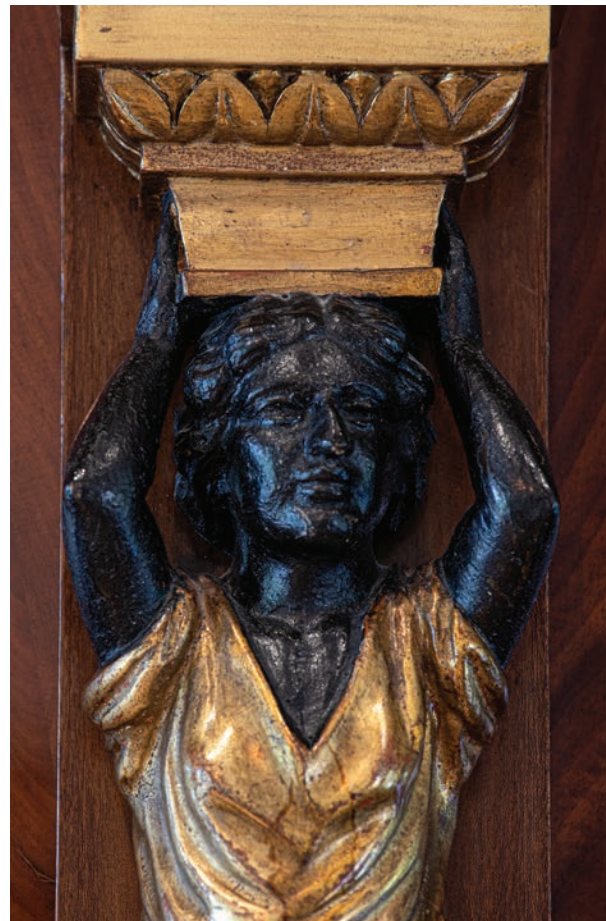
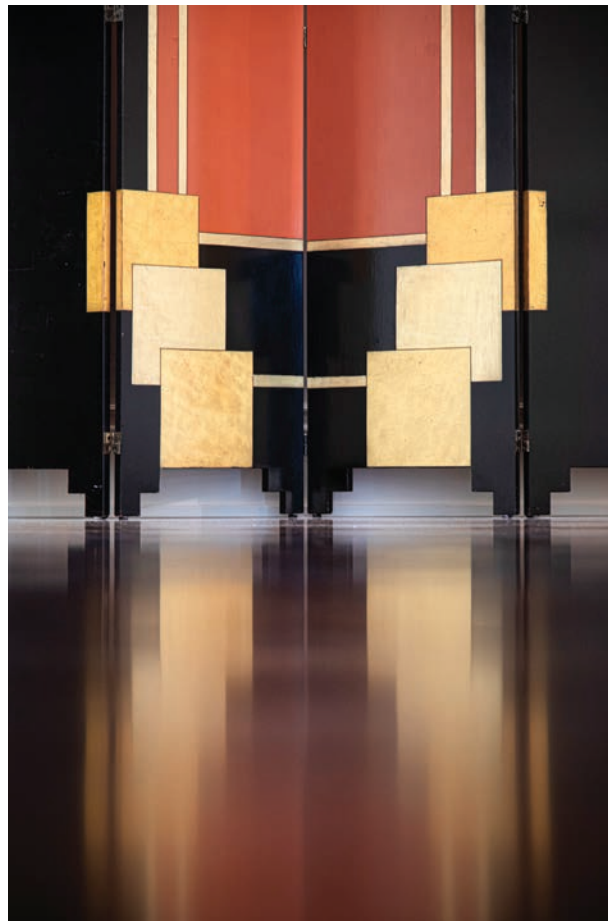
And, before Mark decided to buy a 200-year-old, 13-plus-foot, museum-quality bookcase out of a castle near Vienna. It fit in the service elevator with a millimeter to spare. "We did have to give it one final shove to get the doors closed," he says.

In time, they found the condo didn't fit the quality of life they envisioned for their family. "We wanted the children to have outdoor exposure and be in a home more in tune with how we both grew up, me in Toronto and Anne in Chicago," Mark says.

That meant avoiding the open-concept layout that has taken Florida by storm. The couple preferred spaces that were comfortable, functional and welcoming. They wanted each room to have its own aesthetic and character.

With their collection of antiques—and family—growing, the pair found an older French Norman-style home in the neighborhood. "It had the basics of what we needed," Anne says. But, it wasn't exactly their dream space. The couple brought in interior designer Judith Liegeois and architect Rob Herscoe to complete the vision.

Liegeois, having worked with the couple before, understood the need for clean lines that wouldn't compete with the furnishings. Herscoe saw immediately that the home's layout didn't capture its full potential.



Robin Hill | 3



Even the small details throughout the house reflect the homeowners' taste in furnishings. The library (left) was expanded from its original footprint, and the room's dramatic flourishes were dialed up with black walls and a red ceiling. The colorful, yet elegant, decor was partially inspired by a Parisian restaurant.



Robin Hill

The simple-but-striking master suite embraces art deco design. "This is the elegance of this house—these spaces," Liegeois says. "You don't go through a door, and you're there. You go through an opening, a niche, a second smaller foyer. Some rooms have no doors, but there is still privacy." This his and hers dressing room designed with silk and linen covered panels won a Sand Dollar Award for Best Closet/Organizational System Design.



Robin Hill (2)



Who knows what era you might be transported to when you walk into any room in the French Norman-style Bay Colony house? Each has its own aesthetic and character. You may encounter an art deco bedroom set or bar console. Everywhere, the mix of decades and styles works together beautifully, while remaining entirely functional.

Among the major changes Herscoe implemented was moving the front entryway to what was once the dining room. “Once Rob and I walked the house and got a feeling for the space, it was obvious that the front entry and the dining room needed to be switched,” Liegeois says. “By doing so, the house took on the elegance it was missing.”

For Liegeois, the family’s furniture collection was the guiding force in her design. “They had a long-term passion for a specific style of furniture and collected it just like artwork,” she says. “It needs to be displayed and presented thoughtfully.”

She and Herscoe carefully designed the rooms to accommodate specific pieces. Details, such as the crown moldings and baseboard, were selected so as not to conflict with the furniture. “It’s a more classical and neutral setting and doesn’t try to dominate the room,” Herscoe says. “It’s a supporting member for the artwork and the ambiance of the rooms.”

Upon entering the home, guests are greeted by the secretary that started it all, as well as a crystal chandelier that dates to 1780 and had to be electrified.

Lighting is a key element throughout, and the team utilized antique fixtures the family had previously collected with newfound pieces that seamlessly blend in: from the matching glass chandeliers (which came from a German opera house) in the dining and living rooms to the vintage desk chandelier with the owl of wisdom perched within in the library.

With its black walls and blood-red ceiling and bookshelves, the library is a wonderful turn from the more subdued elegance shown in much of the home. But the excitement starts before you enter the space. “This is the elegance of this house—these spaces,” Liegeois adds. “You don’t go through a door, and you’re there. You go through an opening, a niche, a second smaller foyer. Some rooms have no doors, but there is still privacy.”

To enter the library, you first walk through a small foyer plastered in black with a tiered ceiling covered in gold leaf. Once inside the library, an urbane sense washes over the space, which was partially



Robin Hill

The original dining room was located where you'll now find the foyer, while the new dining room moved toward the front of the house. Here, the chairs were regally re-covered in Champagne-colored silk. The chandelier above the table came from a German opera house, where it was one of 50 pieces that hung over the lobby.

inspired by a restaurant in Paris. Art deco leather seating was purchased to create a wonderful area for reading and conversation.

Some of the dramatic elegance also finds its way into the master suite, where Herscoe redesigned the layout of the master bath and dressing room, making everything more user-friendly and proportional. The shared dressing room features dark wood cabinetry that matches the flooring and doors covered in woven silk and linen. It leads directly into the master bath that utilizes the same wood for a floating vanity over a Thassos white marble sink with a Greek key border.

But it's in the main living areas where the home shines. Each piece of furniture is thoughtfully placed, yet remains functional.

Though some might think designing a modern-day home around vintage furniture would be a major challenge, Mark disagrees. He poses several upsides: “It doesn’t require updating every five years. And, the pieces overall have gone up in value. If we spent the same amount on new furniture, it would be worth nothing today.”

That might be the very definition of intelligent design. ✕

Right as Rain Few things exude the vacation feel like an outdoor shower. Here, Judith Liegeois channeled the concept and translated it with floor-to-ceiling glass walls that point directly to a black bamboo forest (its striations are matched by the pattern of the wall's tile). "The lava rock floor grounds the space, giving one the tactile experience of being in nature," the designer says.

