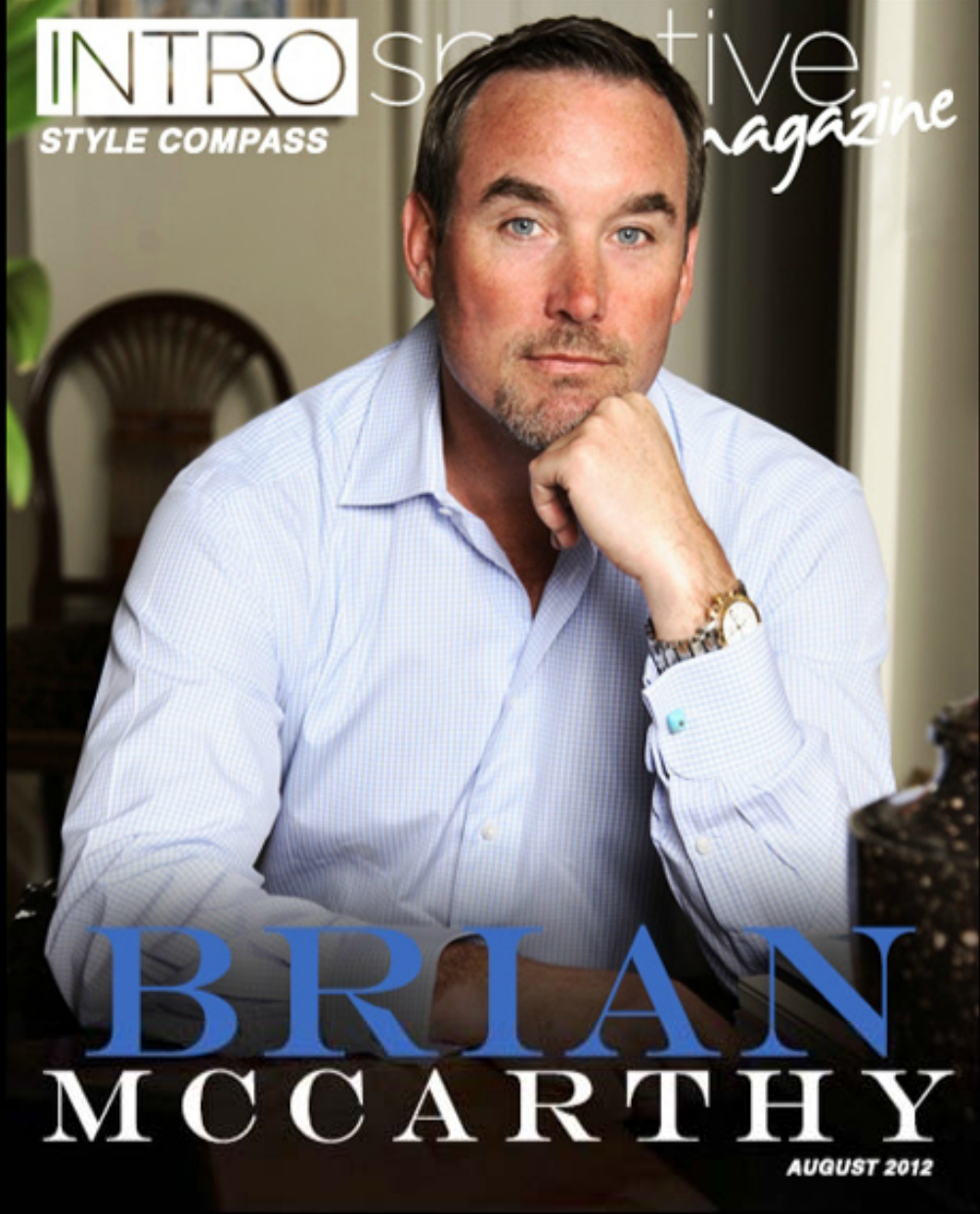


INTRO
STYLE COMPASS

creative
magazine



BRIAN
MCCARTHY

AUGUST 2012

STYLE COMPASS: BRIAN MCCARTHY | by Jorge S Arango



BRIAN MCCARTHY DOESN'T PAY A LOT OF ATTENTION TO SHELTER MAGAZINES.

He does not attend trade shows or keep a calendar generously sprinkled with design soirees. Unlike many decorators, he is not flashy. "I can be inspired by fashion," he says, "but I'm not about living in Prada."

McCarthy's much-lauded participation in the 2012 Kips Bay Decorator Show House, in fact, was a rare foray into the public eye. He only did it, he says, in tribute to his beloved mentor Albert Hadley, collaborating on the living room with two other Parish-Hadley alumni: Bunny Williams and David Kleinberg.

"I'm not social in the industry or market per se," admits the 51-year-old McCarthy from behind a desk in his handsome offices a few doors down from Manhattan's Carnegie Hall, which feature 20-foot ceilings and towering windows. "I'm in my own world."

The designer Brian McCarthy — who's known for his dedication to craftsmanship and meticulous detailing — applied squares of 22-karat gold leaf to the barrel-vaulted ceiling of an entryway in an Upper East Side apartment in New York to create luminosity in a windowless space. Photos by Fritz Von Der Schulenburg

The designer has clean-scrubbed, ruddy-cheeked Irish boy looks and eyes so bright they appear phosphorescent. Across from him sits Danny Sager, 50, his companion and business partner of 10 years. "Our clients are not interested in being published, which keeps Brian under the radar," observes Sager. "What really excites him most is a client who wants to be involved, who has a point of view."

Among the diverse points of view McCarthy has interpreted into one highly personal interior after another are those belonging to such clients as Robert Tuttle (Ambassador to the Court of St. James's) and his wife Maria, the Blackstone Group's Stephen A. Schwartzman and his wife Christine, and NFL commissioner Roger Goodell and his wife Jane. The projects are similarly diverse; everything from an intimate, lushly appointed New York pied-à-terre to a palatial estate in Gstaad featuring a warren of subterranean wine cellars and an indoor pool surrounded by verdant walls planted by famed vertical gardener Patrick Blanc. (Through the skylight overhead bathers glimpse more gardens by Belgian landscape firm Wirtz International, a favorite collaborator of McCarthy's.)

Many of McCarthy's spaces, including this traditional-meets-contemporary living room in a house on Long Island's North Shore, possess trademarks of his training at Parish-Hadley.





It never hurts, of course, to possess a Parish-Hadley pedigree. And McCarthy's rooms bear many of the eminent firm's hallmarks: interiors that mix an erudite grounding in classical styles (usually 17th- to 19th-century English and French) with contemporary genres; bold modern art that brings graphic punch to more traditional spaces; and an intrepidly idiosyncratic spirit that nevertheless values subtlety and taste over glamour and ephemeral statement. "I've never given up the Parish-Hadley philosophy," he says. "There was something practical and sensible and beautiful about what we did, and it definitely influenced my own taste."

But McCarthy's clients come to him for more than that. When asked how he has evolved from his Parish-Hadley days (he opened his own firm in 1991), McCarthy doesn't hesitate: "An insane level of detail in the background" he says, referring to the international artisans he works with on a regular basis to create ambitious and sophisticated finishes for all of his projects. "For the last fifteen years I've immersed myself in French culture and all the workshops there. We have excellent artisans, and we work with wonderful craftsmen here, too."

The owners of an Atlanta townhouse specifically asked McCarthy to channel the look of a French *hôtel particulier* from the first half of the 18th century; the designer spent five years working on the project.



Clockwise from top left: McCarthy traveling in Halong Bay, Vietnam; with his partner Danny Sager in Greece; as a skilled amateur equestrian; the couple's house in Ulster County, New York; the couple's dog, Daisy, at the country house.



These old world-style ateliers conjure plaster surfaces engraved to resemble Kuba cloth, handmade panels inset with leather and rimmed in Palladian silver leaf, carved Rateauesque wall reliefs, jewel-like églomisé, labor-intensive Chinese lacquers and book-matched zebra carpets.

"I've watched Brian for ten years and still always think, 'When do you get to the decorating?'" kids Sager. "I'm amazed at how much time he spends working on the architecture of a room."

McCarthy was born in Maryland to a social worker mother and a naval architect father who built atomic submarines. "They are nomads when it comes to travel, and that absolutely informed my work," he says. "They will ride a camel if it will get them to a historic site they can't otherwise reach. My sisters and I got dragged around to all the great cathedrals of Europe kicking and screaming."

A room of McCarthy's New York office features a chandelier by Patrice Dangel, a bookcase created by the designer and conference tables and chairs by Vooges Inc., the Paris-based handcrafted furniture and lighting house McCarthy cofounded in 2003.

Today that peripatetic spirit manifests in globally referenced interiors, but as a child all the perpetual motion drew McCarthy inward. Being in his “own world,” in other words, is actually nothing new for him. This was a boy who focused on his equestrian skills and quietly absorbed the eclectic surroundings of his family’s mock Tudor home — Danish modern furniture juxtaposed with Japanese, Korean and Chinese pieces, carpets from Turkey, Morocco and Uzbekistan. On visits to his maternal grandmother in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, he would roam her Georgian-style rooms sketching hardware on 18th-century American furniture.

Natural light pours into the elegant master bedroom a midtown Manhattan apartment.





The dining room walls of the designer's Midtown apartment are coated in brown Venetian plaster with flecks of gold; the paintings are by Mel Bochner and Albert Oehlen and the dining room chairs are by Vosges Inc.



I was obsessed with painting and drawing," explains McCarthy, and rather than attend a prestigious liberal arts school, as was his parents' hope for him, McCarthy headed to Pratt with industrial design on his mind. As he met people in interior design studies he says he realized "there was something more spontaneous about what they did. I knew immediately it was for me." It was a certainty that Albert Hadley, who hired him as his assistant straight out of school, must have noted. But even as a rising star in the firm, McCarthy never cultivated the hustle and outsized personalities of some of his colleagues. He has no airs, and one detects he prefers to work with quiet passion.

Few know, for example, that a Paris-based handcrafted furniture and lighting house called Vosges Inc. does some of the highest-end custom work for world-class designers like Robert Couturier, Thierry Despont, Pablo Molineux and Alberto Pinto. But fewer still know that Vosges was actually established by Brian McCarthy and two partners in 2003, the result of McCarthy's immersion in the artisan culture of France.

The veranda of the Atlanta townhouse is arrayed in custom Portuguese tiles and features a panel that slides away to reveal a flat-screen television.



Despite his reticence about publicity, a popular shelter magazine has just photographed the couple's country home in Ulster County, New York, for a future issue. Yet it's doubtful that McCarthy will ever be ubiquitous in the way of a Zaha Hadid, Jacques Grange or Peter Marino, all of whom he cites as inspirations. Instead, McCarthy prefers to hone his personal style, which he says is becoming more modernist and reductive, in relative obscurity. "I like relying on my own life to inspire what I do," he says without a hint of hubris. In that way, his "own world" continues to make its way, resplendently, into ours.

"I'm not social in the industry or market per se," says McCarthy, seen here in his New York office. "I'm in my own world."

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FASHION:

I used to be all about fashion — Charvet, Loro Piana — but now I don't see a lot out there that I like. That said, I spend a great deal of time in Paris on business and directly across from the Pont Royal hotel is a shop called Hartwood. The cut of their pants simply fit me better than any other.

RESTAURANT:

I attend TEFAF in Maastricht every March and I book dinners a year in advance at Ristorante Mediterraneo. The carpaccio with black truffles is outrageously delicious.



TRAVEL:

Villa Skinos, a private home on the **Greek island of Ithaca** in the Ionian Sea. The beauty of the water, the tranquility of the topography and the slow pace of the island are perfection.

FABRICS:

I'm currently working with a textile designer in Kyoto designing a gorgeous fabric based on a Rothko painting. Carol Cassidy of Lao Textiles in Vientiane, Laos, produces the most wonderful custom ikats. For outrageous appliqué, embroidery and beading, we work with Maison Vermont in Paris.



ART OR DESIGN:

I'm in love with the contemporary German artist **Albert Oehlen**, and also Günther Förg.

MUSEUM:

The list is long, but I have to say the **Dia Art Foundation** in Beacon, New York. Where else can you view works by Richard Serra, John Chamberlain, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Gerhard Richter and others in a refurbished Nabisco box factory by a great river? It's completely awe-inspiring.



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COLOR:

I always find this question ridiculous. As a designer, I simply don't have just one favorite color; it's the space and the mood that evoke the color.

GIFT:

I'm a huge fan of the amethyst-and-tortoise-colored glassware from **Gilmore Glass** in Millerton, New York. I have yet to come across anyone who was unhappy when they opened the box.



MUSIC:

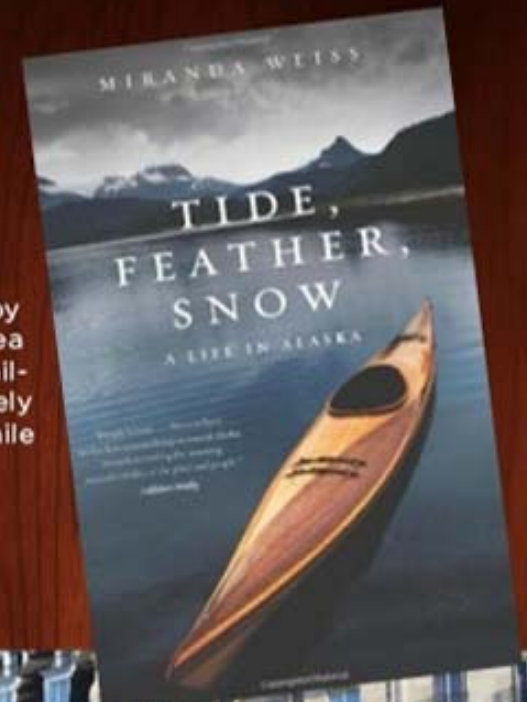
Danny says I have no taste in music, so he's in control of what I listen to. I've been told we have a subscription to the Metropolitan Opera this coming fall. I hope I'm in town enough to attend...

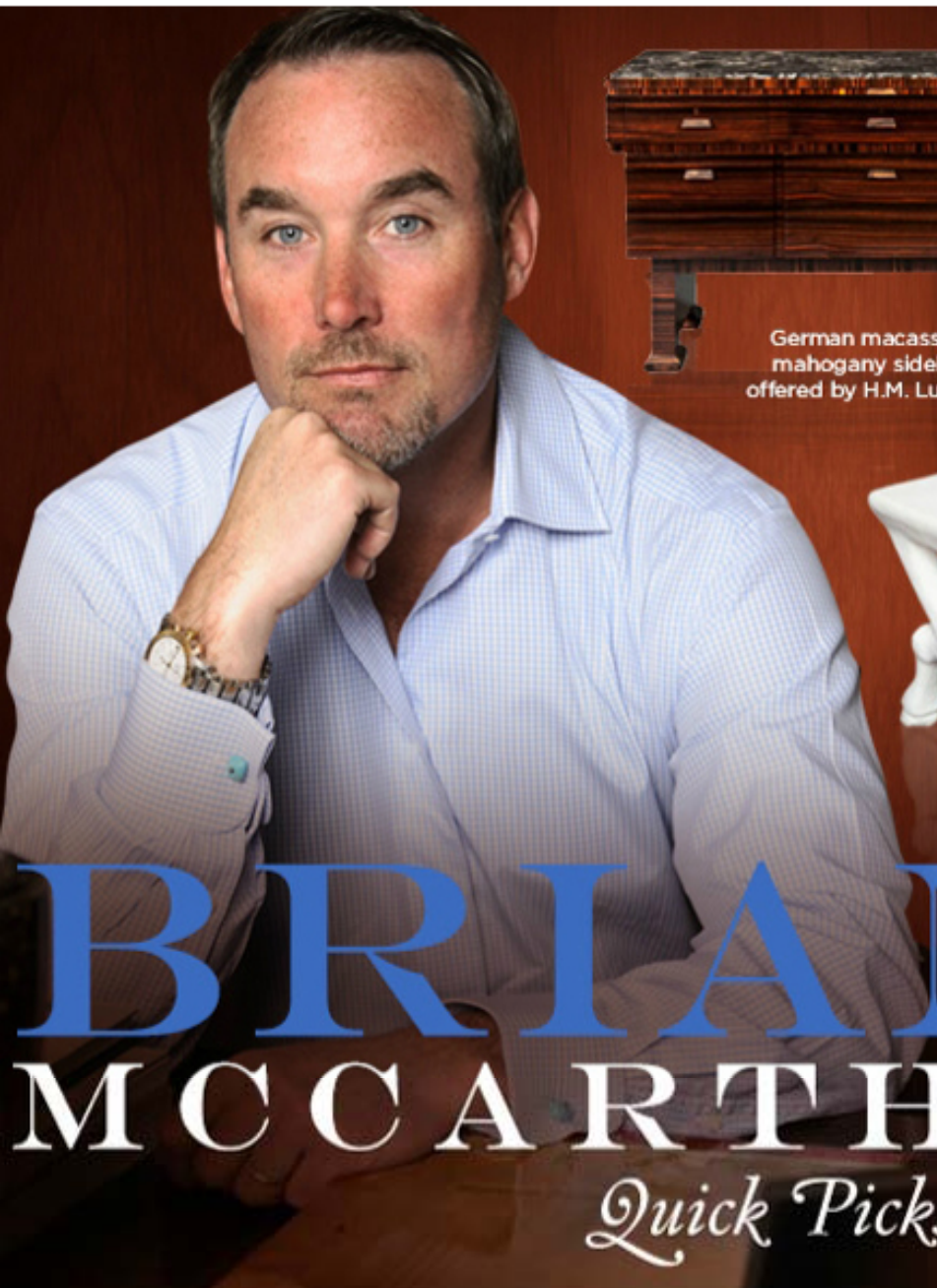
BOOK:

Tide, Feather, Snow: A Life in Alaska, by Miranda Weiss. I just love the whole idea of removing oneself from what is familiar and learning to exist in a completely foreign place. Being that isolated, while frightening, intrigues me.

HOTEL:

The Pont Royal in Paris, specifically room 604. Besides a great location in the 7th arrondissement, incredibly close to many of the antique dealers I shop and buy from, they treat me like family. That's probably because they see more of me than they do their own families! For a quick winter blues getaway, it's Parrot Cay in Turks and Caicos. The spa there is paradise.





German macassar and mahogany sideboard, offered by H.M. Luther, Inc.

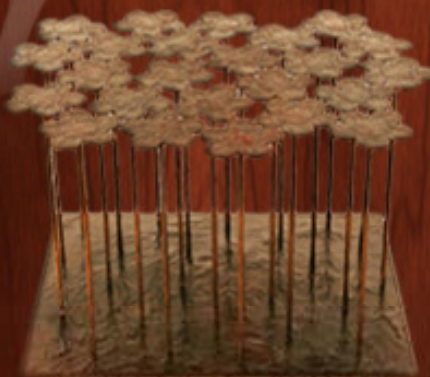
Breguet Perpetual Calendar Equation of Time Watch, offered by Betteridge



Up by Anthony Caro, offered by Mitchell-Innes & Nash



John Dickinson plaster table, offered by Liz O'Brien



Bronze coffee table by Hubert Legall, offered by Themes and Variations



Armchair by Leon Bouchet, offered by Malson Gerard

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Quick Picks FROM *Istdibs*