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ARRAY

**BRIAN
MCCARTHY**

Reflections on a
Mentor

DANIELLE COLDING
The Artful Life

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Soulful Minimalism

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By Cathy Whitlock



REFLECTIONS ON A MENTOR

BRIAN MCCARTHY REMEMBERS ALBERT HADLEY

A prominent splash of color makes a statement in almost every McCarthy interior.



For New York interior designer Brian McCarthy, learning at the feet of one of the most influential designers of the 20th century was the chance of a lifetime.

“Lucky me that my first job out of college was at Parish Hadley. I never imagined how that would unfold,” says the Pratt graduate. “Going to the firm was an eye-opening opportunity, and more importantly, Albert was one of the most generous and caring gentlemen. He wanted you to be involved every step of the way and had a whole confidence in teaching the younger generation. What he had was such a natural gift and he was a unique visionary.”

Competition for a coveted job opening was fierce, and after a four-month interview process that dwindled to McCarthy and one other designer, the stars and the planets aligned. “I got a call from his secretary Eileen who asked me for my

A Hervé Van der Straeten chandelier provides a modern focal point in the living room of a residence in Manhattan's historic Apthorp.





An attractive custom glass and patinated bronze base table by Patrice Dancel is accented by furnishings that reflect the client's 1920s Manhattan apartment.

birthdate and time of birth. Apparently, Albert was into numerology at that time in his life, and I guess my number was better.”

It was a heady time in the mid-eighties for a firm whose client roster was a “who’s who” of Kennedys, Astors, Roosevelts, and Gettys. McCarthy’s first big job was the Degas- and Renoir-filled duplex of publisher and philanthropist Enid Haupt. Exposed to Hadley’s process, he details, “He was the most incredible editor of ideas and thinking things through. What he really taught me was you have to look at the past to the future, be curious, and always keep your eyes open.” He also learned from Mrs. Parish (who went by the name of Sister Parish) the mechanics of layering a room and how to “undecorate” with fabric.





McCarthy eventually made partner, eventually starting his own firm, Brian J. McCarthy Inc., in 1991. His projects ranged from homes of ambassadors and Manhattan penthouses to a ski chalet in Switzerland and a residence in Monaco. One of his favorites is a recent boat project in Holland. "It was amazing and something I have never done before," he muses. "The idea is the same, but the boat is moving!" Living by the credo that no two projects are alike, his style avoids the trappings of branded looks as he notes in his book *Luminous Interiors* (Rizzoli), "While there's a thread that runs through everything, no two projects are ever alike: It's all about the homeowner."

The AD 100 designer passes his knowledge down to the next up-and-coming generation of designers, relaying that design is not only about creativity; it's a problem-solving business. "Design is a lot of architectural organization, spatial organization, and how we approach a job by looking for references and finding ideas that we can discuss collectively." His process involves "putting together rooms of furniture and having everything

A 19th-century Chinese bamboo jacket and embellished wall panels preside over a Jonas bed and Borge Mogenson bench.

Inspired by Matisse's cutouts, Venetian hand-plastered walls make an intriguing backdrop in a Manhattan pied-a-terre sitting room.





Bold cerise red silk taffeta curtains give an eye-catching pop of color in the adjoining living room.

assembled by room on a bulletin board so my staff and I can stand and look at it all and really understand the dialogue the furniture is having independent of fabric. I then lay in the carpets and don't lose sight of all the pieces—these were lessons I learned from Albert and the many years of trying not to make mistakes. It's a practical way to check yourself."

In a fitting tribute to McCarthy's career and Hadley's tutelage, the multi-talented designer received the Albert Hadley Lifetime Achievement Award at the New York School of Interior Design's annual 2020 gala this past spring. "A day doesn't go by that I don't think about Albert. It's always something in the day that makes me reference him. He was exceptional in every way and the last of the great gentlemen."