

Carleton Varney Shares 'Rooms to Remember' In Newest Grand Hotel Book

By Stephanie Fortino

With the turn of each colorful page of "Rooms to Remember," interior designer Carleton Varney seeks to transport readers into the whimsical and iconic guest suites of Grand Hotel. The book is Mr. Varney's 36th publication, celebrating the 43 named rooms and suites there, each of which has a unique design.

Mr. Varney recently visited Mackinac Island to host the fifth Dorothy Draper School of Design Weekend Saturday, June 22. During his talks, Mr. Varney shared the design aesthetics of Mrs. Draper, who founded New York interior design firm Dorothy Draper Company in 1925. Mr. Varney began working for Mrs. Draper in his 20s in the 1960s; he is now the owner and president of the company.

Vibrant colors, large floral and botanical prints, and stark black-and-white features are all signature elements of Dorothy Draper Company designs at Grand Hotel. Mr. Varney believes hotel guests should have memorable experiences, so the designs he develops with the Musser family are intended to help create a unique sense of place.

Mr. Varney approaches each blank room "with a sense of fantasy," he told the *Town Crier*. "What can we do to bring people into another realm when the check-in?"

Dorothy Draper Vice President Brinsley Matthews explained during his talk that the design team tries to ensure hotel guests wake up knowing exactly where they are.

"If you like where you are, you should celebrate that," Mr. Matthews said.

Mr. Varney lamented the loss of interesting, colorful designs in public spaces. Too often, he said, hotels are painted with drab colors, neutral artwork, and predictable layouts. He wants things to be interesting, inviting, and vibrant. But many people shy away from color, he said, lead-

ing to dull, uninspired spaces. When speaking with the design school attendees, he recalled one trip to a hotel decorated in beige and gray.

Upon stepping out of the shower, he thought to himself, "I'm naked in a bowl of oatmeal!" he said. "People are afraid. People are afraid of these beautiful colors."

During his talk, Mr. Varney rattled off a series of things he "believes in," favorite design elements such as stripes, pineapple yellow, vivid green, and daffodils, his favorite flowers. These design motifs can be seen throughout Grand Hotel and its properties on Mackinac Island, including the Gate House Restaurant and Jockey Club. Vertical stripes on walls can make the ceilings seem taller or highlight architectural features like barreled ceilings.

Mrs. Draper published two books that outline her design aesthetics: "Decorating for Fun," published in 1939, and "Entertaining for Fun," published in 1941. Dorothy Draper interior designer Rudy Saunders encouraged the audience to not be "dreary," as Mrs. Draper urged her readers to fight against what she called "the will to be dreary." Rather than saying something is too much trouble or will take too much time to do, Mr. Saunders said, Mrs. Draper implored her readers to be imaginative, creative, and colorful.

"Why would you want your memories in black-and-white when they can be in color?" Mr. Saunders asked.

When decorating their homes, the students were encouraged to experiment with new ideas, to use colors they adore, and not to be confined by so-called "rules" of interior design.

"I don't believe there is a any rule in the game that can't be broken," Mrs. Draper wrote.

During the afternoon session of the design school, interior design professor Joellen Kerr outlined several tips for the attendees to use in their own homes. She encouraged students to use their imagination and creativity. Bright colors, large scale, printed textiles, and imaginative lighting are some of the Dorothy Draper Company trends she explored.

To help the students hone their ideas, Ms. Kerr suggested they



A sitting room in a Song of the Islands suite was added to Grand Hotel in 2017, featuring a nearly monochromatic color scheme. (Grand Hotel photograph by Sara Wright)

sketch out plans and brainstorm while being physically active, which boosts creativity.

"Take your leash, get your thoughts, and go for a walk," she said.

Color is the easiest and cheapest way to transform a space, Ms. Kerr said, and Mrs. Draper advocated for using multiple and vivid colors in designs. Mr. Varney said he likes to use as many as eight colors in the rooms he decorates. Designs can incorporate many hues of one color for a monochromatic scheme; colors located near each other on a color wheel for an analogous scheme; or colors on the opposite side of the color wheel for a complimentary scheme.

Dorothy Draper Company is known for using many complimentary colors to add contrast, such as the many instances of red and green used throughout Grand Hotel. Most Dorothy Draper Company clients like neutral walls, Ms. Kerr said, so the decorators use brightly colored furnishing, textiles, and wall art to add interest.

Lighting is another key element to use when designing, Ms. Kerr said,



Grand Hotel decorator Carleton Varney of Dorothy Draper Company with his newest book, "Rooms to Remember."

to illuminate spaces and objects. Ambient lighting is used to light walls and ceilings, task lighting is used to highlight work or reading areas, and focus lighting, such as chandeliers, adds "sparkle" to rooms, she said.

Drawing inspiration from the outdoors, Grand Hotel and other

Dorothy Draper Company spaces are decorated using natural themes or elements found outside. Green is a particular favorite color of Mr. Varney, who uses the color often in designs, mimicking how much green there is in nature. All the colors of

Turn to page 19: Carleton Varney

Dorothy Draper Company Shares Design Theory of Grand Hotel Rooms



The parlor of the Bali Ha'i Suite of Rooms 454 and 456 that debuted this year features many characteristic Carleton Varney design elements: bright, alternate colors, striped and botanical fabric upholstery, and unique lighting fixtures, here in the shape of a palm tree and turtle shell. (Grand Hotel photograph by Sara Wright)



Carleton Varney designed the Musser Suite in honor of the late hotel owner, R. Daniel Musser, Jr. The sitting room features large silk screens, brightly upholstered sofa, and unique plaid carpet. (Grand Hotel photograph by Sara Wright)



The desk in the Prentiss M. Brown Suite is lit by two lamps. Wallpaper designed to look like three-dimensional bookcases line the wall, on which hangs a portrait of Senator Brown. The suite is featured in the new book, "Rooms to Remember." (Grand Hotel photograph by Sara Wright)



The Jacqueline Kennedy Suite at Grand Hotel was designed with the former First Lady in mind, and it is featured in Carleton Varney's new book, "Rooms to Remember." (Grand Hotel photograph by Sara Wright)

Carleton Varney: from page 5 flowers grow happily together in a garden, Mr. Matthews said, adding that green can be used with every color inside, too.

A self-described maximalist, Mr. Varney uses pieces with a large scale, whether giant vases or large botanical prints on carpets. Mr. Var-

ney urged his students to be brave with their interior decorating choices, putting whimsy, imagination, and color before practicality.

"Nothing is ever achieved without taking risks," he said.

Mr. Varney believes that people's homes should be covered in memories and their favorite things. As a collector, he suggests people group and display collectables together, such as silver boxes or crystal figurines.

"I use what I love to see," Mr. Varney said.

When developing the décor themes for rooms and suites at Grand Hotel, Mr. Varney works closely with members of the Musser family. He and Amelia Musser, mother of current hotel President R. Daniel Musser, III, have worked together since Mr. Varney was brought in to redesign the hotel in 1976.

"Amelia wanted the hotel to be American," Mr. Varney said, which inspired the series of suites that honor First Ladies and Presidents.

The Dorothy Draper team visits Grand Hotel at the beginning and end of each season, as well as throughout the summer. Designing the rooms is never finished, Mr. Varney said, as they are constantly freshened up and updated to reflect new trends.

"We want to keep the hotel relevant and stylistic..." he told the *Turn to page 27: Carleton Varney*

Memorable Decorations Are Key To Unique Guest Experiences, Says Varney

Carleton Varney: from page 19 *Town Crier*. "We go through and update the styles all the time; it's constant. It isn't that we get it finished as it is today. Things require attention. That's why we do it. The Mussers love this Island; this is run by passion."

During his talks with the design school, Mr. Varney showed images of his home in Ireland, which he never before had shared publicly. The home was built in 1680 and fea-



This guest room features bright yellow and blue, complementary colors, a large fish print fabric for bedding, a gilded lion head bust on the wall, and a colorful hibiscus pillow. (Grand Hotel photograph by Sara Wright)

tures 15 bedrooms. The home features many of his favorite things, such as Staffordshire dog figurines, photographs and portraits of close

friends, and murals of the property. He fills his home with things he loves, creating happy spaces to enjoy.



The Carleton Varney Suite at Grand Hotel is decorated with the interior designer's favorite things, including green bedding, canopy, and wallpaper and a lithograph series grouped on the wall. (Grand Hotel photograph by Sara Wright)

While Dorothy Draper Company has many commercial clients, the team also works closely on private projects.

"We sell memories," Mr. Varney said. "It is in these places, the environment in which you live, that are the most important."

NEWS ABOUT PEOPLE ON MACKINAC ISLAND

BY MARGARET DOUD



Carleton Varney and his assistant, Brinsley Matthews, and other team members were at Grand Hotel for the Dorothy Draper School of Decorating weekend. People came from all over the United States and Canada to attend the weekend and hear Mr. Varney speak. He also has a new book out called "Rooms at Mackinac." It's a beautiful book about all the different rooms he has designed at Grand Hotel.