

A Life in Color and Pattern



Sophia Bennett, Editor in Chief of Window Fashion VISION 54 mins ago 2 views 3 min read

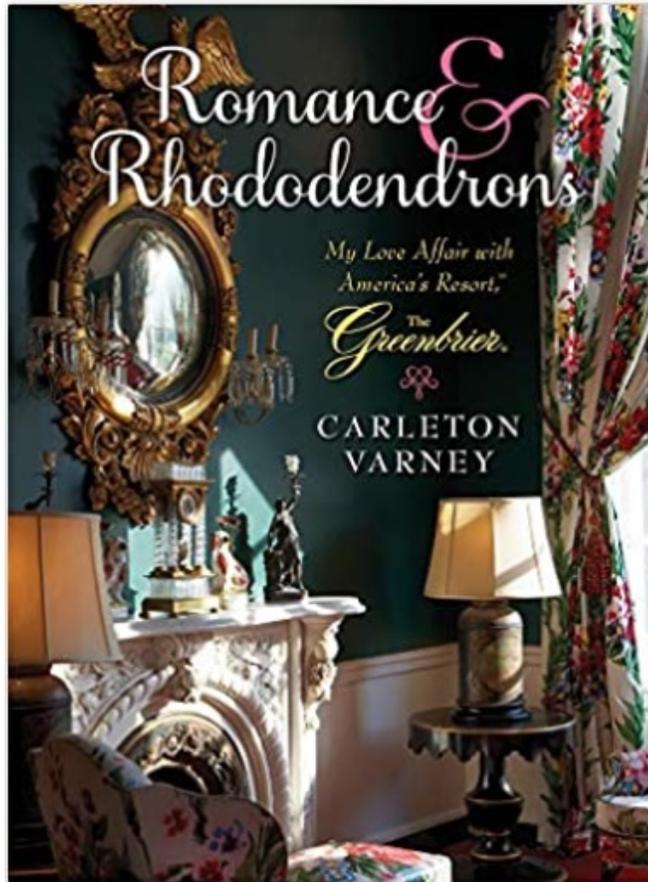
By Sophia Bennett

All photos courtesy of [Dorothy Draper & Company, Inc.](#)



When Carleton Varney started at Dorothy Draper & Company, he would walk around the office with the storied designer as she checked in on junior staff members and their projects. “She would say, ‘Show me nothing that looks like gravy,’” he recalls. “There was nothing she liked that had anything to do with mousy colors or grays or gravy-looking sauces. We were trained to think color and happy colors.”

So it’s not surprising that 54 years later, Varney still describes himself as “a color person. Totally a color person.” His vibrant, richly patterned interiors have given him a loyal following among U.S. presidents and celebrities. It’s also attracted dedicated readers who eagerly await his weekly blog posts (adapted from his column in the “Palm Beach Daily News”) and his books on various topics. His newest one, “Romance and Rhododendrons: My Love Affair with America’s Resort, The Greenbrier,” will be published later this month.



Varney shared a few tips for bringing color and good design into homes. “The first thing we have to do is believe that color is magic,” he says. From there, creating enchanted interiors becomes much easier.

Go Back to the Beginning

“When I had my school for design at the University of Charleston, the first assignment I gave the students was to write an essay about the very first room they remember. What was in the room? Who was in the room? What was the color? What did it smell like? After they wrote the essay, they had to draw me a picture of it. I believe that in the very first room you remember is the foundation of your taste. That carries with you all of your life.”

Think Like Mother Nature

“At Dorothy Draper & Company, we were always trained to think in terms of the country garden. I can take a room and use 16 different printed fabrics and make it work because it’s like the country garden. All the colors work together in some way if you have a unifying factor, like the sky blue or the green grass.”



Start in One Area and Build Out

“A house should feel right without any furniture in it. One way to do that is to pick a pretty wallpaper for the entryway, and then you lead off of that color for the rest of the house. Take a color from the wallpaper and paint that in the living room, then in the dining room, do a stripe, again in those same colors.”

Small Rooms, Dark Shades

“If a room is very small, many people think that you can just put a mirror on the wall and paint the room white or beige. I always paint small rooms dark colors: garnet red, navy blue, sable brown. I think if you have a small room and you have colors, you can put a nice small table in a corner and a sofa and it becomes cozy. No matter how many mirrors you put up, you can only put so much in a small room without creating bulk.”

