

ROOM WITH A VIEW Clockwise from top left: *Simplicity* by Nancy Braithwaite; the designer in a room of her own invention; for this beach house bedroom, Braithwaite had the bed custom-made by Premier Woodworks, hung fabric by Rogers & Goffigon around it, and added texture with curtains by Glant and chairs by Kenneth Cobonpue.



BACK TO BASICS

In her new book *Simplicity*, beloved Atlanta interior designer extraordinaire Nancy Braithwaite shares all.

By Travis Neighbor Ward | Photography by Simon Upton

For Nancy Braithwaite—hailed by many as one of the top interior designers of our time—there are three things that great designs must have: integrity, creativity and simplicity. It's also why she chose the latter for the title of her first book, *Simplicity* (\$50, Rizzoli), publishing on Oct. 21.

Creating a minimalist design, she says, isn't as easy as it sounds, particularly if you're after a luxurious effect. "Simplicity

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...CONTINUED is one of the most difficult things to achieve. It involves being able to see what the space is, what belongs in it and what doesn't. It takes a very disciplined eye to do that."

Since she opened her eponymous firm 30 years ago in Atlanta, she has made it her mission to figure out how to pare down rooms to their essentials, yet still convey powerful visual statements. In her early years, she looked to designers Billy Baldwin and Albert Hadley for lessons; from Hadley she learned that "a designer has to have a concept and stick to it." Sometimes keeping things simple is a rigorous undertaking, whether the style is classic, country or contemporary. When she first went to look at a townhouse project in New York, the living room had over the top moldings and columns. "It was so overdone, [that] the architecture was lost," she says. But, rather than work around them, "we spent the first six weeks just scraping off the excess."

In Braithwaite's designs, a few elements take top priority: overscale, very comfortable furniture; colors that are "warm and exciting," she says; and lots of texture, to add softness. One of her greatest passions is for textiles ("the coarser and heavier the linen, the better!"), which she discovered during a sewing class in college. When she designed a blouse out of lined burlap,

SPACE CASE

From above left: In this New York apartment, Braithwaite chose ethereal shades to create a serene yet exciting design—showcased in everything from the inside of the bed hangings lined with velvet to the velvet-cut wool carpet to the chartreuse satin pillows. The bed was custom-designed by DeAngelis and the white midcentury chairs were originally from the Paris salon of couturier Marcel Rochas; in this Chicago penthouse, the bed and side table by Lord Linley of London are a stand out.

the professor gave her a C. "She told me, 'You can't do that.' Now people in showrooms tell me I'm easy to work with because I know how fabrics work together."

She's also quick to point out that keeping things simple doesn't mean sacrificing punch or, to use a word she likes, wonderment. "I love design that stops you in your tracks. I love the oohs and aahs people make when they walk into a room." That's definitely the reaction that readers will have about the photos in her book, which include her homes in Atlanta and on Kiawah Island, S.C., among others she's designed for clients. She and her husband, Jim, are avid collectors, and she has furnished the former primarily with American antiques from the 17th through 19th centuries. (She credits Deanne Levison American Antiques in Buckhead as their "guiding light" for the past 35 years.) When Braithwaite isn't working, she spends time with her family (she opened the high-end baby store Baby Braithwaite with daughter Chaffee in 2005).

Ultimately, her thoughts about simplicity apply to everything—including life. "We all lead busy lives, but we long for peace and quiet, and look forward to coming home," she says. "We need a place where we can sit down and relax. Make it simple. Make it your haven." *Available at A Capella Books and B.D. Jeffries* ■