

# Who could pick the greatest interiors of the century? Meet Billy Norwich

When I heard that a book was coming out this month billing itself as the definitive collection of the world's most fabulous home interiors of the past century, thoughts smashed up in my head like a three-car pileup: How could one ever pick? Who could pick? And how soon could I get a copy?

An advanced copy of "Interiors: The Greatest Rooms of the Century," (Phaidon, May 22), recently landed on my doorstep. It is the fanciest book I have ever put my hands on. And, at \$79.95, perhaps the most expensive. (Amazon has it for \$49.95.)

Between its padded velvet, embossed covers — which come in Midnight Blue, Merlot Red, Saffron Yellow or Platinum Gray — lies a who's who of the decorating world.

The compendium features over 400 rooms, including those of fashion designers Bill Blass, Pierre Cardin, Gianni Versace and Coco Chanel; artists Pablo Picasso, Georgia O'Keefe and Frida Kahlo; and the work of legendary interior designers Elsie de Wolfe, Billy Baldwin and Nancy Lancaster. Homes range from lavish chateaux to pieds-à-terre, dating from 1901 to now.

Following the likes of "The Art Book" and "The Fashion Book," legacy landmark books from Phaidon that have sold 2.5 million copies worldwide, the new compendium is to interior design what these books are to art and fashion, so says the publicity sheet.

In other words, this is house candy at its most delicious, tailor made for voyeurs like me. The book is sitting on my coffee



AT HOME WITH Marni Jameson

table like a box of fancy truffles.

But who could pick? William Norwich is who. A fixture in the New York world of design and fashion, Norwich, known as Billy, has been on the international style scene since the 1970s. After writing a regular style column for the New York Post, Norwich has worked as an interior design and fashion editor for Vogue alongside Anna Wintour, and as style editor for the New York Times before becoming a book editor at Phaidon a few years ago. He's as connected as a satellite.

I got him on the phone. I pictured him talking to me from a leopard-print chair, yet, despite his hoity-toity circles, Norwich oozed self-effacing charm and was nervous as a new father about his book's debut. I peppered him with questions:

• *Whose idea was this?*

No one (at Phaidon) had shown an interest in interior decorating. When I came along,



Oh, so Chanel — The Paris salon of French fashion designer Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel, completed in 1920, is among the more than 400 greatest rooms of the century, featured in Phaidon's new legacy book "Interiors." Photo courtesy of Phaidon.

I thought wouldn't it be amazing if we did a hall of fame that pulled together what people talk about when they talk about interior design?

• *Just the thought of identifying the greatest interiors of the century sounds impossibly daunting. How did you do it?*

When we decided we wanted to do this, I free associated for a weekend and came away with 900 interiors. That was too many for a book where everyone gets a page. So we started whittling. I reached out to a couple dozen arbiters and asked whom they would include. Then I sat with two knowledgeable friends whom I trust and we got the list to 600.

Then it became a question of getting photos and permissions. We needed high-resolution photos, which weren't always available, especially of the older homes. Some permissions we couldn't get. Some photographers wanted too much money for their images. The process took 39 months. The final book has 415 rooms, and I still think we left a few out.

• *Who didn't want to be in?*

Marie Kondo declined to be in book; maybe she thought the idea too cluttered. Amy Sedaris also declined. I wanted to include American designer Michael Taylor, but we couldn't



A Who's Who of Interior Design — "Interiors: The Greatest Rooms of the Century," out from Phaidon May 22, is available in four different cover colors: Merlot Red, Saffron Yellow, Platinum Gray and Midnight Blue. Photo courtesy of Phaidon.

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