



This page: Adam Lippes (left), his partner Alexander Farnsworth and their dogs outside the pool house.  
Opposite page: The hall is home to a Perret et Vibert bamboo desk and chair from the Aestheticism movement



# IN ECLECTIC DREAMS

GRACE CAIN peels back the layers of designer Adam Lippes' bucolic home in the Berkshires

"PEOPLE SAY I'M A FRUSTRATED interior designer," says Adam Lippes, speaking from his home in the Berkshires, western Massachusetts. He is sitting in his light-drenched pool house, the design of which he "basically copied" from the orangery at Givenchy's Château du Jonchet. "Amy Astley, the editor-in-chief of *Architectural Digest*, who loves our clothes, always says: 'Are you sure you're in the right business?'"

In fairness, Lippes seems like one of those people who would excel in whatever field they cared to pursue. His own fashion brand (which will be available at Harrods this season) has been worn by First Ladies past and present. And even before he established his own line back in 2004, he was working as the global creative director for Oscar de la Renta – in fact, Lippes was one of the youngest people to hold such a title in the fashion world at the time.

It was just after he resigned that he started looking for a property outside New York City. "My mother died and left me some money when I was quite young," reveals the designer. "They tell you not to do anything in a rash moment, but I immediately began looking for a house that she would have loved." Having confined his initial search to within a 60-mile radius of the city, Lippes came very close to putting in an offer on a 200-year-old family farm. Serendipitously, during a final viewing, a friend convinced him to travel a little further north to visit an acquaintance in the Berkshires. "At dinner, there was this real-estate agent," Lippes says. "When he heard I was about to buy a house, he got all crazy – and the next morning he showed me this. I bought it that same day."

Distance from the city was not the only deviation from the designer's original plans. "I did *not* want a Tudor house," he says, emphatically. "It's just not my style. I prefer Edwardian." However, he was immediately enamoured by the beauty of the surrounding landscape. "The property is set on top of a hill in a very private 100 acres," he says. "It's an idyllic spot with a little stream. It really spoke to me."

That's not to say Lippes doesn't like the house (named Casa Sandra, in honour of his mother) – quite the contrary. "I love, *love* it," he says. "I think it's the most English country house you can get in America. It's very grand without being very big, so there are lots of cosy places to hide. It's a bit run-down and that's OK – I have three dogs, and people come in and out all the time. The house is all useable and it's all used – it's not like you have these big, cold rooms that nobody ever sets foot in. Although I do want a place like that one day..." Wait – he wants a *cold* house? "A big, endless house," Lippes says with a grin. In that case, how about a *real* English country property? "Well, I love the Irish and Scottish countryside – they have the best gardens, I think. The problem is the weather. I think my next house might have to be somewhere warm – maybe Sicily."

In the meantime, this place in the Berkshires is Lippes' primary residence. He shares it with his partner, Alexander Farnsworth, commuting into New York City for two or three nights a week. And over the years, it has become an escape from the frenzy of work and life. "Here, I host as little as possible," he says. "We travel a lot and entertain often in the city, so this is sort of a refuge." Walks with the dogs take up much of his time, as does gardening – unsurprising, given the size of the land. "One of the few regrets I have is designing the garden myself," Lippes admits. "I should have worked with an expert. For me, designing a garden is much more complicated than working on a room, because you have your sight lines, the different elevations, the reflections from the water. But I enjoy it, and – you know what? – you can always change it. I've learned by trial and error, which has been super expensive."

Many people find renovations (of the interior and exterior varieties) to be a source of stress; not so Lippes. "There's always something about to happen here, so I spend a lot of time thinking about projects," he says. "That is my way of relaxing." And you've probably gathered >



Timeless treasures



Ginori 1735 Oriente Italiano  
Aurum large potiche vase £1,200



Gingerilly x Memo Press  
Forget Me Not silk duvet cover,  
superking £855



Poodle & Blonde Fringed Money  
Tree circular cushion £205



Ralph Lauren Home Cannes  
Guéridon accent table £4,960



Comitti The Regency Balloon  
– Quartz clock £1,100

Furniture and Home, Third  
Floor; and harrods.com



(the images are a bit of a giveaway) that Lippes has another major hobby: antiques. His interests stretch across continents and time periods, spanning furniture and objets d’art. “I love things that are incredibly well made but also have a little bit of weirdness to them,” he says. “Like old tobacco and snuff boxes; anything bejewelled or carved in stone. I find it very interesting when there is a tabletop filled with objets and each one has a story – you only find that in a very personal house.”

Furniture, however, is where his collection began. “I started with Swedish Gustavian pieces, and I’ve always loved Biedermeier,” he says. “I like English design because of the way they mix things together – you know, like a grandparent’s old worn-out sofa next to a perfect 18th-century Kentian cabinet.” Lippes describes his own style of decorating as “very layered, very English”, incorporating influences from his parents. “My mother was an interior designer; she had incredible taste and loved antiques.” And his father, a lawyer and entrepreneur, is an art collector. “Mixing and matching was instilled in me from a young age,” Lippes says.

The designer also finds inspiration on his travels; at the time of writing, he has just returned from Japan, where the Adam Lippes brand has opened a new office. “It was extraordinary. I dove into the ceramics, the lacquerware, the baskets... well, I didn’t actually dive into the baskets, because the one I fell in love with was \$200,000,” he says with a chuckle.

Lippes’ fashion career manifests itself throughout the house in myriad ways. “With a lot of the fabrics we use in our collections, I’ll order an extra 20 or 30 yards and use it for a sofa or drapes,” he explains. And the creative influence flows the other way, too. “A lot of our fashion collections are inspired by great interior designers, such as Madeleine Castaing,” he says. “I’ll pull a lot from their colour palettes or prints.”



Isabel Parra/OTTO

From far left: In the winter living room, a French Japonisme mantel sits underneath a 1940s painting by Angèle Watson and an 18th-century Swedish chandelier; a charming mix of art and antiques is the key to Lippes’ interiors style; in the summer living room, Lippes has paired an 18th-century Venetian bed with a custom-made ottoman and chairs that he designed

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The period that Lippes spent with Oscar de la Renta has also had a lasting impact. “When I worked for Oscar, I was exposed to some of the greatest houses in the world,” reflects the American. “I was very close to his daughter, Eliza, and we would go everywhere with him; I’d think nothing of it. I was so spoiled – I mean, I once spent a week at Chatsworth! I wish I could go back now and dig through every single thing I like to say that my parents gave me an incredible foundation, and then working for Oscar was like grad school in design – not only in clothing, but in homes.”

Today, Lippes says he buys at auction “compulsively”, but also insists that he’s trying to break the habit. He’s evidently not a hoarder, though, and is very happy to move items into storage or even sell them on. “When we moved out of our home in Brooklyn Heights, I sold about 150 pieces. People were shocked, but it’s good to have that freedom to start again, because every time I do, I think with a greater level of learnedness and refinement,” he says. “Everything that’s currently in the house has been placed with a lot of thought. I really believe that a room, like a garden, is never done – it’s just a moment in time.” □