

# Even the rich and famous have vintage style

At first glance, it might appear that many of us have a lot in common with Henry Francis du Pont. He loved his home and old things, and he enjoyed collecting and living with antiques. We love our homes and old things, and we, too, enjoy collecting and living with antiques. Du Pont’s magnificent home, Winterthur, was ultimately transformed into a museum with 175 period rooms, housing approximately 90,000 treasures and our homes. . . well, come to think of it, maybe we aren’t on the same page after all.

Except for this: Harry (as his friends called him) decorated his home-turned-museum using some of the rules that we who love vintage style have adopted in our own domiciles. Interestingly, a recently published book, *The Well-Dressed Window: Curtains at Winterthur*, provides an up-close-and-personal look into rooms of Winterthur that most of us will never glimpse. To be sure, the book focuses on textiles, especially those used as window dressings. And it provides an enlightening discussion of the history of curtains: fabric being expensive, it was not until the 17th century that it was used to adorn a window, and then only

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in the homes of the wealthy. These early curtains were single panels the size of the window, which could be pulled back to one side. Pairs of curtains were not introduced until a century later.

But there’s more: In the beautifully illustrated book, we learn that Harry was extremely detail-driven, focused on selecting exactly the right fringe, tassel and braid. It would seem that he agonized over the perfect tieback. Even though Winterthur window treatments are the primary theme of the book, it also provides an intriguing look into what made this arbiter of good taste tick.

For example, long before the color experts at Pantone Inc. began selecting the “color of the year,” Harry had already settled on his favorite: green. While he would no doubt have approved



**Above:** Whereas it is highly unlikely that most of us would take inspiration from the elaborate window treatments at Winterthur, the book is a great source of eye candy.

of the 2017 selection (“Greenery”), he certainly would not have limited himself to just one hue. In fact, there are some 48 shades of green on the paneling and walls of his resplendent mansion, because, in his mind, it was “the prettiest color there is.”

Like my Grandmother, Harry dutifully changed the look of his rooms with the seasons. In fact, he divided the year into quarters and marked curtains (and other pieces) “1,” “2,” “3” and “4” when they were stored. Today, we probably don’t switch out winter’s heavy drapes for sheers in the summer, nor do we take up axminster rugs and replace them with their sisal equivalents, but decorating the house seasonally is certainly in vogue. One visit to home décor stores (or a glance at their websites or catalogs) certainly gets me in the mood to tweak my living space, but instead of purchasing objects with no story behind them, I take the inspiration and translate it, using vintage treasures. Harry would probably approve.

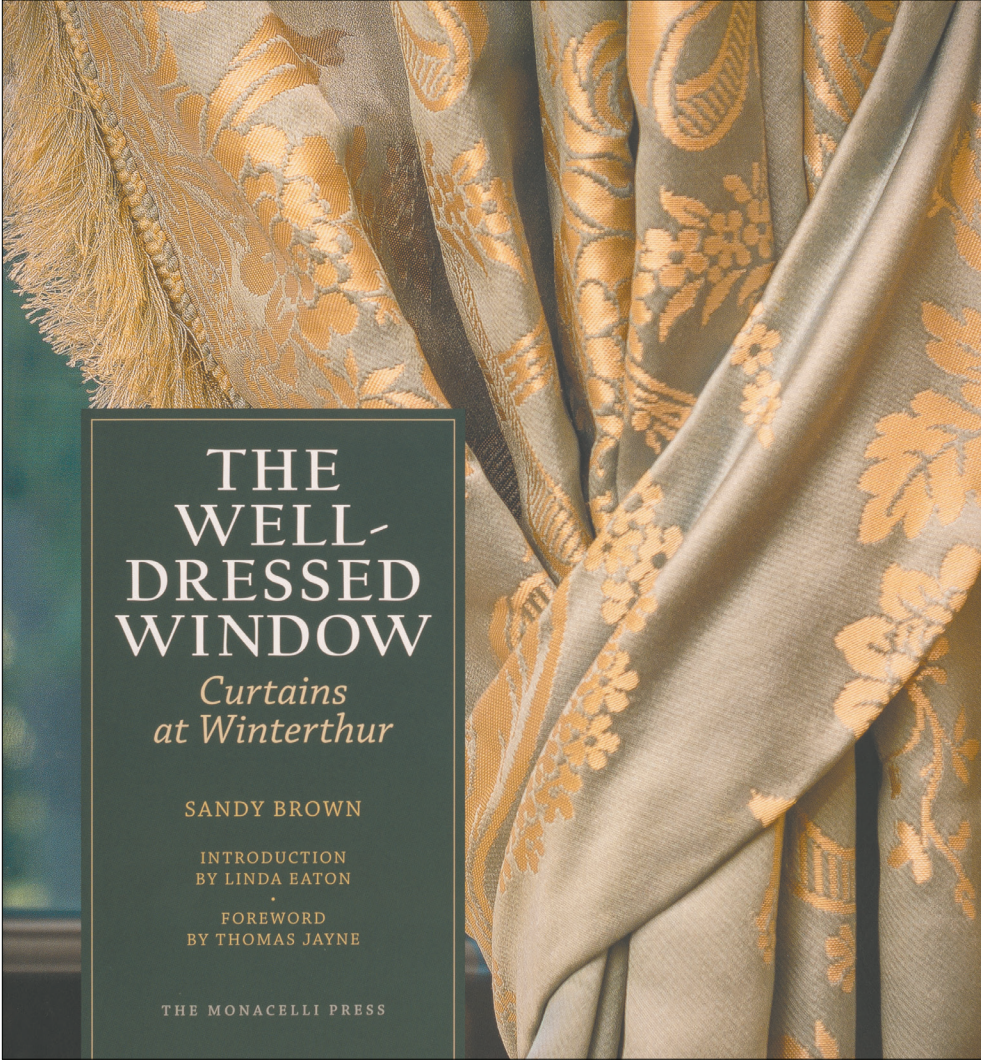
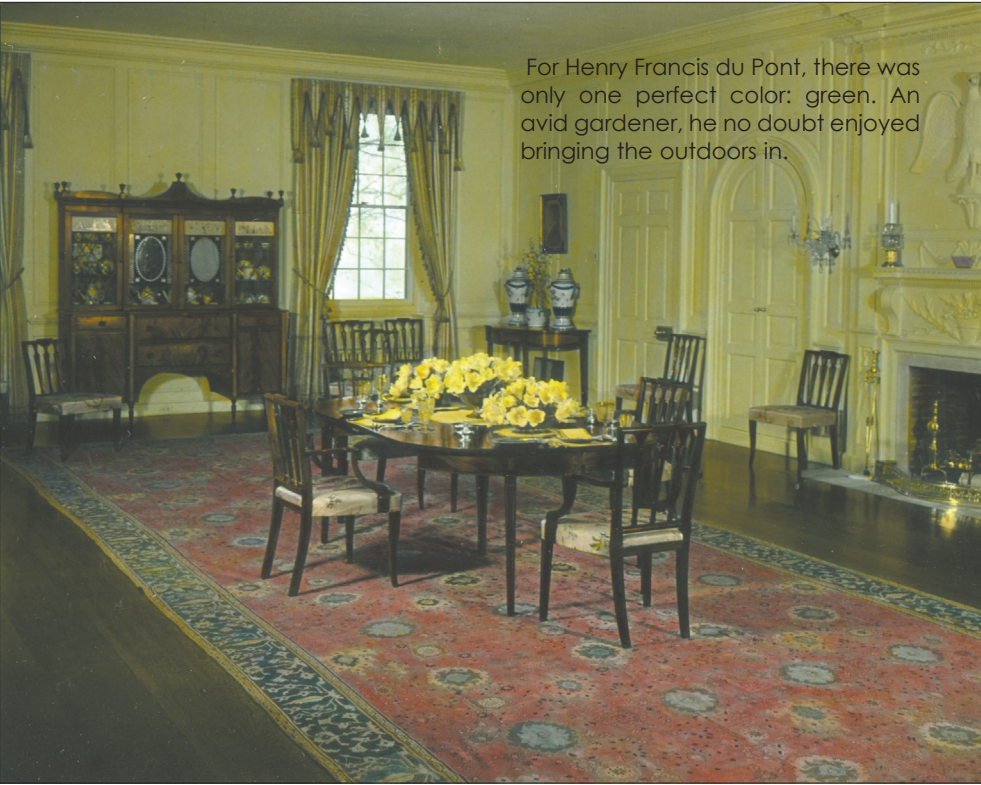
Harry was not a slave to historical authenticity. Many of Winterthur’s rooms are decorated with architectural features removed from other houses in order to preserve them. But he wasn’t afraid of mixing it up a bit. If the dates didn’t quite fit, no matter, just as long as it looked “right.” I don’t think any of

us would want to live in a museum room (in the strict sense), but mixing in old things with new things certainly works for me.

Finally, it’s helpful to be born with (or to cultivate) a good eye, and among Harry’s talents was the ability to layer decorative pieces. I’m thinking most of us would never be called “minimalists,” but that doesn’t mean we want to make our rooms glorified storage spaces. Harry knew how to do it, and a few thoughtful evenings spent with *The Well-Dressed Window* might provide true inspiration.

Was Henry Francis du Pont ahead of his time? To be sure, and I’m thinking that the “Yuletide Tour” at the grand museum in Wilmington, Del., could be even more meaningful for those who have read this new book. Might I suggest that there might be someone on your Christmas list who would appreciate this lovely volume as a gift? Maybe you?

**Below:** Many of the fabrics used by du Pont would never work in an average home, but these curtains in the Blackwell Parlor certainly would fit in with most any décor. Note the elaborate tieback. In fall and winter, these curtains were taken down and replaced with salmon-colored silk window dressings, thereby completely changing the look of the room.



**Above:** A new book, *The Well-Dressed Window: Curtains at Winterthur*, offers a peek into otherwise unseen parts of the du Pont mansion in Wilmington, Delaware. It also offers some insight into the mind of Henry Francis du Pont, renowned for his decorative talents.

