

Baltimore

HOME

WINTER 2013

THE SURPRISING Patrick Sutton

A WORLDLY BUT TURBULENT PAST
INFORMS THE DESIGNER'S HOME

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SUTTON PLACE

A globe-trotting childhood, an odd career turn, and a search for peace all play a part in designer Patrick Sutton's home.



Opposite: Up on the roof: Patrick Sutton and wife, Tracy Kwiatkowski, with Stella. *This page:* The dramatic living room.

While en route from his Canton condo to a Ravens game via water taxi back in 2008, Patrick Sutton noticed a cluster of townhouses perched on the Patapsco.

“You get a different perspective when you see things from the water,” says Sutton, owner of Patrick Sutton Interior Design. “As we rounded the corner, I saw these big, beautiful, modern, glassy townhouses, and I said, ‘What’s that?’ They were so tucked away, you wouldn’t even know they existed.”

The following week, Sutton got his answer, after a chance meeting with a Realtor he knew. “I was serendipitously coming out of a movie theater, and she stopped me and said, ‘We have these new townhouses for sale, and they’ve dropped the prices 20 percent because of the recession. You should come look.’” Yes, the townhomes turned out to be the ones he’d seen the week before.

He wasn’t looking to move at the time, but when Sutton and his then-girlfriend Tracy Kwiatkowski went to see the waterfront Fells Point property with Natty Boh winking to the east and the Domino Sugars sign illuminated to the west, there was no turning back. “I loved it so much when we came to see it, I didn’t want to leave,” recalls Kwiatkowski, an insurance agent who married Sutton in September.

He signed on the dotted line, but admits purchasing the property was unnerving. “I was scared to death,” he recalls. “I got a great deal on it, but it was still expensive—there were a lot of sleepless nights.”

Still, they forged ahead and, after making minor tweaks, including transforming a study into a master-bedroom suite, they moved into their new five-floor, three-bedroom, three- and two-half-bath space.

The place was pretty quiet when they moved in: There weren’t too many other people purchasing property at the height of



the recession, so their neighbors were few and far between. In fact, Michael Phelps was one of his few fellow residents in the development. (Sutton played beer pong in the swimmer’s kitchen.)

While Sutton doesn’t like to design and tell, his clients include a litany of high-profile Charm City properties such as Foreman Wolf’s Cinghiale and Pazo restaurants, and his connections beyond Baltimore include a home in the Hamptons, a stylish New York condo, and a vacation home in Bermuda. Even so, designing his own home was daunting.

“One of the blessings and curses of being a designer of your own house is that you have time,” explains Sutton. “You’re not under the gun, but the curse is that when you’re working on someone else’s house, you have complete objectivity, so you’re able to make decisions with more confidence. When it’s your *own* home, however, you lose all objectivity, and every possibility comes to the fore.”

Ultimately, the Carnegie Mellon alum, who graduated in 1985 with a degree in architecture, decided to follow the credo of one of the modern masters. “To quote Mies van der Rohe,” he says, “Let the house tell

you what it wants to be.”

Five years later, the house has spoken, and Sutton’s place is a study in warm, contemporary calm—perfectly curated yet open to surprise; elegant without ever taking itself too seriously; uncluttered, but a feast for the eyes. “People come over and the first thing they say is, ‘You have a dog,’” says Sutton of his golden retriever/German shepherd/Labrador mix, Stella, who is sleeping at his feet. “There’s this perception that if you’re a designer, you don’t have a dog. People are like, ‘You let the dog on the furniture?’” he says. Almost on cue, Stella jumps up next to Kwiatkowski on the white linen sofa. “The reality is that we love to live a full life and that doesn’t mean it’s a precious life. It’s a life where you can have great dinner parties and let the dog run around like crazy and sit on your sofas. It doesn’t *have* to be perfect.”

Sutton’s belief in creating beauty without being beholden to it was shaped by a childhood spent in the well-heeled hamlet of Chappaqua, NY, as well as gallivanting around the globe with his late father, Horace, one of the most distinguished travel writers of his time. (His columns were syndicated to more than 250 newspapers



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Clockwise from left: The cozy sitting room; the kitchen with Calcutta Gold marble and fumed oak; lime-green seat-belt chairs and life preservers in the kitchen.

across the country, and he was the editorial director of the *Saturday Review*.) “He was known as the dean of travel writers,” recalls Sutton, whose late mother, Patricia modeled for *Harper’s Bazaar*.

“After World War II, trans-Atlantic travel had just become popularized, and he became one of the first people to do it.”

Travel became a family affair, and when he wasn’t in school, vacations were spent in far-flung places, collecting baggage stickers from Paris and Kenya to famed destinations like Italy’s Villa d’Este in Lake Como and the Cipriani Hotel in Venice.

“It was very common that we would go to these long lunches with the public relations director of whatever country we were visiting,” recalls Sutton. “And they would sit down to lunch and have these long conversations. And I was maybe seven, and bored, and I would always ask the same question, ‘Can I explore?’ And I would wander these hallways and all through these gardens and soak it all in—the architecture, and the proportions, and the frescoes, and the crumbling walls of the gardens—they all became my friends.”

But for all the privilege and outward appearance of the perfect life, there was also profound pain.

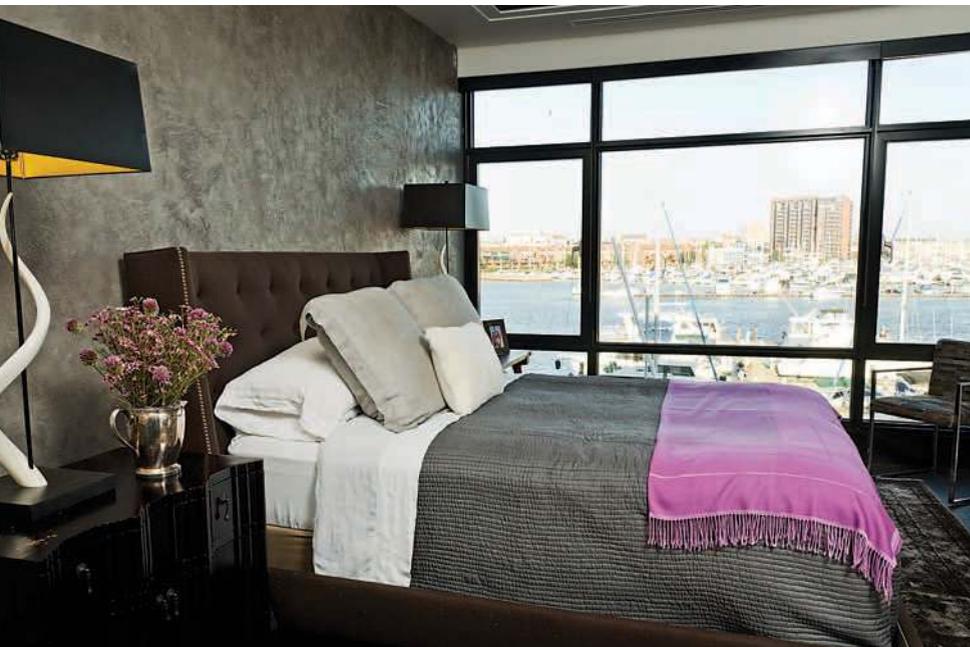
“It wasn’t the easiest childhood—my mother was afflicted with mental illness,” says Sutton, whose mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia. “On the one hand, we had this idyllic life jetting around the world, but with the onset of her illness, everything

came to a screeching halt.” As his mother’s illness progressed, Sutton says he became introspective and lost in his own world. Despite natural smarts, he was a mediocre student. A high-school drafting class, however, marked a turning point.

“When you look back on your life, you can always see the people who guided you,” says Sutton. “When I was 16, I took architectural drafting, which was super easy for me. My teacher told me I had a natural ability and that I should probably think about pursuing it.”

After college, Sutton landed a job with the internationally renowned architecture firm RTKL and went on to work at several other architectural outfits before opening his own practice. But he did not find the work fulfilling.

“When I started working, something was missing,” says Sutton. “To be an architect, you have to extract information. In order to create a structure, you have to be a little disconnected from people to a certain degree. I had all these ideas and was designing houses that were getting turned over to these interior designers, and I was horrified.” About a decade ago, Sutton had an epiphany. “I was walking through these properties where most architects would look at it and say, ‘Where’s the edifice going to sit?’ And I was thinking about the dinner parties and asking, ‘Where’s the dining room going to go?’ and ‘What are the guests going to be wearing?’ Looking back, I realize that I was raised by a storyteller to tell



stories and in order to tell stories as a designer, you have to control the whole environment—you're not going to do that as an architect."

In Sutton's own home, each room seems to tell its own story. The kitchen's fumed-oak cabinets and Calcutta Gold countertops are juxtaposed playfully with lime-green Phillips Collection woven "Seat Belt" chairs, and framed life preservers serve as a whimsical reference to the nearby body of water. The master bedroom, with its high-gloss gray ceiling, and purple, silver, and black accents, sunrise water views, and provocative photographs collected at Art Basel, invoke glamour and romance. In the living room, the simple linen Verellen sofas are the focal point, while the dining room's old winetasting table suggests friends, family, and casual entertaining are at the fore. Sutton also offers a bit of the unexpected with his spectacular rooftop garden. Conceived as an outdoor living room with rattan furniture, colorful pillows, a chiminea, and AstroTurf "lawn," it provides additional space for entertaining.

"The house is a collection of things that speak to me," explains Sutton. "It's like surrounding yourself with friends. I've never been the guy who had friends who were all the same age or went to the same school. The house is filled with a lot of different personalities."

And while world travel is still very much a part of Sutton's life (the couple recently returned from Amsterdam and honey-



Clockwise from top left: The master bedroom; the foyer; a hammered-silver sofa in the master suite.

mooned in Aspen), he and Kwiatkowski are equally smitten with staying at home. "The standard conversation between the two of us is, 'Where do you want to go for dinner?'" says Sutton, smiling. "And we go, 'Well, we cook better than a lot of restaurants, and the view is better, why don't we just eat here?'"

For her part, Kwiatkowski accepts the downside of being a designer's wife. "If Patrick sees something in our home that he wants to put in a client's space to finish a project," she says laughing, "then sometimes things have to go—you can't get too attached. Luckily, we have similar taste." Concur Sutton, "Tracy is very good about letting me express my vision here. I have ap-

proached this home as my laboratory and a place to explore."

Designing this home—as well as clients' homes—has also taken on a deeper significance for Sutton. "I will probably be trying to heal my mother and father for the rest of my life," says Sutton. "I will want to create a place for my father to feel whole and feel like his life is complete and a place for my mom to be well and a place where I can be well, too. If you look through my body of work, a lot of people will tell you that there is something very calming about my work, and I think that's where it comes from, a place of wanting to bring calmness and healing and to create a sanctuary for myself and for others." ❁