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# CHARTING A PATH FROM NEW YORK CITY TO THE HAMPTONS

## Designer Gideon Mendelson Combines City Style with the Relaxed Colors of the Beach

An eye for the unexpected has become Gideon Mendelson's signature style. At his home in Sagaponack, New York, his interesting juxtapositions of traditional and modern styles never cease to delight. In the spacious living room, [a wild sculptural mirror by Hervé Van der Straeten](#) hangs over the dignified and demure fireplace. In arresting contrast to the dark oak floors, the walls are painted a pale, almost pastel, blue. In the dining room, Mendelson [paired a funky chandelier from the David Weeks Studio](#) with classic [caned armchairs from Lorin Marsh](#).



*Mendelson takes great care in choosing the right design details for a space, including his own home.*

His eagerness to take risks also explains why he had the audacity to buy the former spec home in Sagaponack, a mellow village nestled between the party scenes in Southampton and East Hampton. While most designers would have recoiled at such a generic space, Mendelson saw a problem just waiting to be solved. Risk taking and problem solving—these are two central themes in the story of how Mendelson went from a would-be tennis agent to one of [Traditional Home's 10 New Trad designers](#).



# A Hidden Talent

Gideon Mendelson grew up around design: His mother, Mimi, ran her own design firm in Scarsdale, New York. And while he admired his mother's creative work, his passions revolved around sports, particularly tennis. Neither of Mendelson's parents had any background in the world of competitive tennis, so he was forced to follow his own path.

"Being a tennis player as a young kid, I was fending for myself in a very competitive world," Mendelson said. "I was the one navigating my path."



*Expertly styled with pops of lavender and wooden accents, the exterior of Mendelson's Hamptons home offers an oasis of respite from Manhattan's concrete jungle.*

In addition to teaching self-reliance, tennis also presented lessons in problem solving, a skill that would prove useful later in his life. "Tennis involved a lot of trial and error," he said. "It's the same with design—you have to understand what you do well and then learn to be successful with those elements."

Mendelson flourished in this competitive world, eventually earning a national ranking among junior tennis players. At Columbia University, he starred on the tennis team while also working toward a degree in architecture. After graduation, he went to work at the talent agency William Morris Endeavor, with the ambition of eventually working as a professional tennis agent. But after a couple of years in the William Morris training program, Mendelson started to rethink his goals.

"We try as young people to navigate a career path that is always on the up," he said. "Sometimes there's a sideways move that can actually move you forward."

For Mendelson, this sideways move was actually an about-face. He had left college feeling that architecture and design weren't all that "sexy," as he put it, but when he asked himself what he really wanted to do with his life, he always came back to design. Even though Mendelson hadn't held a pencil in almost a decade, he enrolled at the New York School of Interior Design, in 1999. He later interned for a year with designer [Steven Gambrel](#).

When Mendelson asked himself what he really wanted to do with his life, the answer always came back to design.

Then, in 2003, his mother called in a panic. She was retired by this point, but an old client had contacted her about a huge interior design project in Westchester. Mendelson hung up and then immediately phoned her back.

"We're going to start a company together," he told his mother.

The company they established was named the Mendelson Group. Though his mother was incredible helpful as the company got off the ground, she quickly stepped back and allowed her son to take the reins. Now Mendelson is in a position he is well acquainted with—charting his own course, running his business how he sees fit.

## Beach Style

The Hamptons have always been a special place for Mendelson. When he was growing up, his parents rented summer homes in a string of towns along the far-eastern shores of Long Island. For Mendelson and his family, the attraction of the Hamptons was never the glitz and glamour but rather the natural beauty of the place. "It's a place where people go to escape, to relax, to get away from the hustle and bustle of Manhattan," he said. "A place where they go to connect with nature."

Recently, after his father passed away, Mendelson decided to buy a house in the Hamptons, a place where he and his family could stay connected. By this time, Mendelson and his husband had three kids of their own, so they needed a house that could give their family ample space and still have some left over for entertaining.

"I really wanted something with history and character," he said.





*Mendelson had the settee pictured on the right custom-made to complement his design. We love the yellow against the blue and white of the rest of the room. It creates a sunny, welcoming environment.*

However, what Mendelson finally ended up buying was a five-bedroom traditional shingle-style spec house in Sagaponack. The issue with spec houses is that they are constructed without a client in mind. To figure out how to make this house work, Mendelson called on his problem-solving skills, the same skills he had honed as a young tennis player. For example, in order to create a more cohesive yet personal environment, he designed custom furniture, from the bookcases in the library to the settee in the living room. "Sure, it was a lot of work," he said, "but well worth it. We love being out there."

## Colors of the Sun

Most of Mendelson's projects are based in Manhattan and the Hamptons, and in both settings his designs are always client-driven. However, with each project he tries to challenge his clients to think beyond the confines of their style.

"My goal is to learn how much I can push," Mendelson said. "I do want to push them a little out of their comfort zone, to make them feel something. Some people might not be comfortable with bright red walls, but they might be comfortable with red on draperies or on the back of a chair."

Finding these boundaries is especially important when designing a client's beach getaway. While the Hamptons are only a two-hour drive from New York City, those two hours separate two completely different worlds. According to Mendelson, it's essential to match the color palette of a client's second home to the feelings that differentiate it from that client's permanent residence.

"The city is a man-made environment," Mendelson said. "The beach is real and natural. In the city, I have a tendency to go outside the box in terms of using colors that are a little glossier, a little silkier, with a little more sheen. In the Hamptons, the palettes tend to be a little more natural, a little more organically driven. Out there, you'll see more neutrals and blues and greens."



*Mendelson crafted a style that leans more toward cheery classic than beach chic. He looked to the colors of nature for the inspiration behind this color palette.*

For his house in Sagaponack, Mendelson favored those blues and neutrals that are so central to color palettes in the Hamptons. His decision to use blue in a living room without any other blue accents was rooted—as all Hamptons designs should be—in the natural surroundings.

"I wanted the living room to connect to the outside," he said. "The set of French doors [in the living room] leads to the back porch."



*The dining room and kitchen glow with warmth, welcoming friends and family to gather, enjoy meals together, and make memories.*



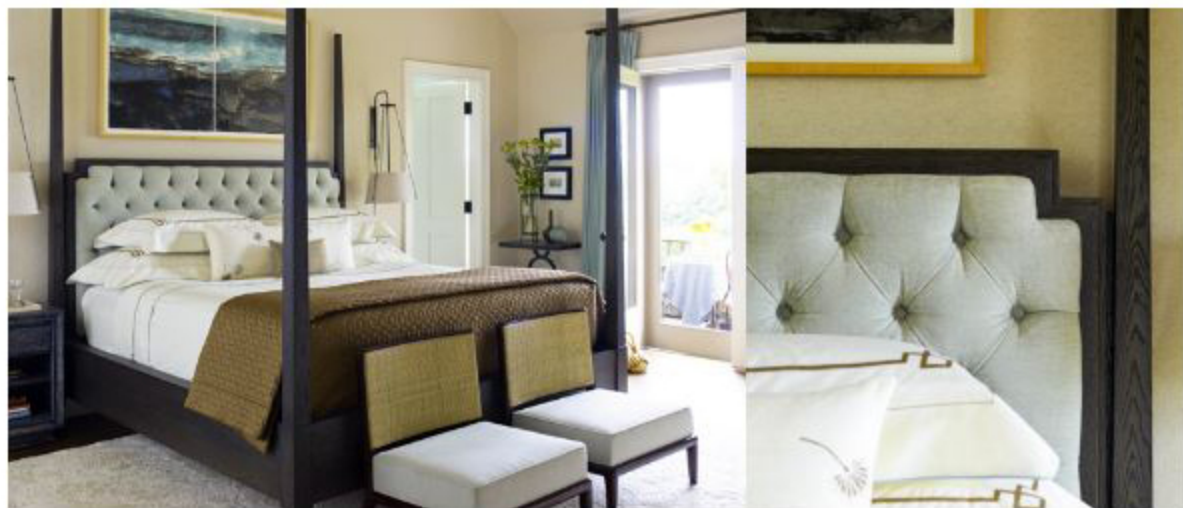
In the dining room, Mendelson went with grayish neutrals like Pratt & Lambert's Mirage Gray 28-31 and Full Moon 29-31. Neutral tones in any dining room or kitchen allow food, the real star of these spaces, to pop.



MIRAGE GRAY 28-31



FULL MOON 29-31



*The bedroom in Mendelson's home practically begs you to curl up for a deep sleep, surrounded by calming natural hues.*

For the neutrals in the master bedroom, Mendelson leaned more toward rich creams like Pratt & Lambert's Navajo 33-32 and Vanilla 9-30. For him, the use of neutrals is all about creating a relaxing environment away from his family's everyday home in Park Slope, Brooklyn.



VANILLA 9-30



NAVAJO 33-32

"The neutral tone in the bedroom with blue and green accents is soothing," he said. "With three young kids, I need all the relaxing I can get!"

According to Mendelson, good design is all about choosing the right colors. And color, he said, "is a simple way for people to improve their lives."