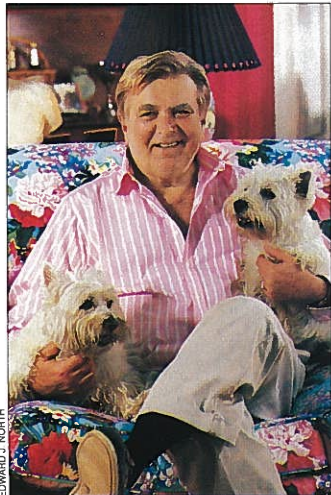


Carleton Varney on The Westbury's Hartnell Suite



EDWARD J. NORTH

Like one of the queen's hats, pastel and timeless, the Hartnell Suite crowned The Westbury on New Bond Street in London for a brief, enchanting moment beginning in 1957. In those years the hotel was the domain of the decorating firm of Dorothy Draper and under the eye of her protégé Carleton Varney.

"When I was young," Varney says, "I used to spend six weeks every summer living in the Hartnell Suite overseeing the annual 'freshening' of the hotel." A penthouse with two bedrooms and a wrap-around terrace, it was an extraordinary perch from which to view the chimney pots of Mayfair as well as the last days of a certain manner of English life.

Norman Hartnell was the dress designer to Her Majesty, and his was a name everybody knew. Today the marriage of fashion and decorating seems perfectly obvious. But the idea of commissioning a couturier to decorate The Westbury's most prestigious rooms was a novel one



COURTESY DOROTHY DRAPER & COMPANY INC.

then. The English firm Mann & Fleming was called upon to execute his designs.

"It had a dress designer's magic," says Varney, noting that this was a time when dress designers lavished attention on details. "Trim-mings, linings, buttons... *buttonholes*." The fringe on the draperies, the bows on the lampshades, the way the fabric is pinched and draped, the underscale and understated quality of it all—this is a luxurious room, but also a room with nothing to prove. "It could be one of the queen's dresses," says Varney. "It's just a little frumpy."

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Even an old black-and-white photograph cannot diminish the room. Its pretty, feminine palette of blue, gold and apple-blossom pink—how royal—somehow shines through. "It captures the moment," Varney says. "And I was so fortunate to come to interior design at the end

of this era. What it taught me was a certain level of refinement.

"This was the era of down cushions that people used to shake," he elaborates. "There was a lot of puff in a room like this. Today we want the puff—but nobody wants to shake."