



Carleton Varney

WITH OVER 50 YEARS in the decorating field, the design legend continues to bring color and style to homes and resorts the world over and always finds happiness in the garden

Flower: Who has inspired you the most? **Carleton Varney:** Dorothy Draper was my mentor when I started and continues to inspire my work today. Joan Crawford once said, “I invented me, and you can invent you,” and I took that advice and it helped to create who I am as a designer.

As that designer, how has your business changed over the last 10 years? I have been in the business over 50 years and have seen a lot of changes. However, at the core, classic looks will never go out of style. Fresh flowers and bright gardens will always bring joy to your home. Today, design is so much more accessible because of the internet. You can find all kinds of tips to refresh



your home. For example, you can go on countless websites and get new throw pillows, which, like the seasons outside, can change easily to suit your mood.

What have been some of your favorite projects? The big resort hotels—Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Michigan, and The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. These are ongoing projects I have been with for decades, and I have grown close to the properties and their owners. Both are magical getaways where memories have been created by generations of families. It has been a pleasure to bring color to those memories.

After working on a big project, where is your favorite place to visit to refresh your creative mind?



My Irish getaway in County Limerick. Every spring I try to head over to see the daffodils and then look forward to my cosmos. I have a greenhouse in the back where I can relax and work with all the colors nature has to offer. I always have to have a garden near me. There is a sign in my office that reads, “He who plants a garden plants happiness,” and that is something I truly believe.

Other than Ireland, where might we find you? For a special treat, I enjoy seeing my friends and soaking up the sun in St. Croix. I have been going there for some time. Over the years I have worked on many projects, private homes, and resorts, but to see my dear friends, catch up, and enjoy a little time away from the rushing around of modern life is so welcome.

Name three things that are essential to your well-being. Bright colors, bold patterns, and fresh flowers. These three things bring warmth and happiness to my home and will do the same for yours.

Speaking of flowers, which one best represents your personality, and why? I would say the daffodil because it’s bright and happy.

Do you have any go-to sartorial preferences? I always wear red socks in memory of my dear friend and client Van Johnson. I also have a lady who will cut my Hermès scarves in half and make them into neckties. Dorothy Draper would cut anything in half—paintings, antique furniture—it didn’t matter, so I guess I am doing the same.

When and where are you happiest? Either gardening or spending time with my new grandson. His blue eyes and infectious smile will brighten the cloudiest of days. Grandchildren are a gift, and I am so blessed to have him. ✨ —ALICE DOYLE

