

10 Minutes With Eric Cohler

Eric Cohler knows a good thing when he sees it. The New York-based designer has earned ink in leading interiors magazines from *Traditional Home* to *House Beautiful*, *Elle Décor* to *House & Garden*, not to mention his name can be found on nearly every list of hot designers in the country. Industry insiders even crowned him the “mixmaster” for his knack for the unexpected, creating clever pairings of style and color.

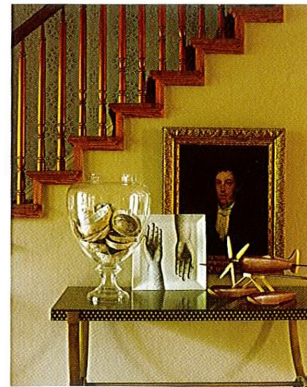
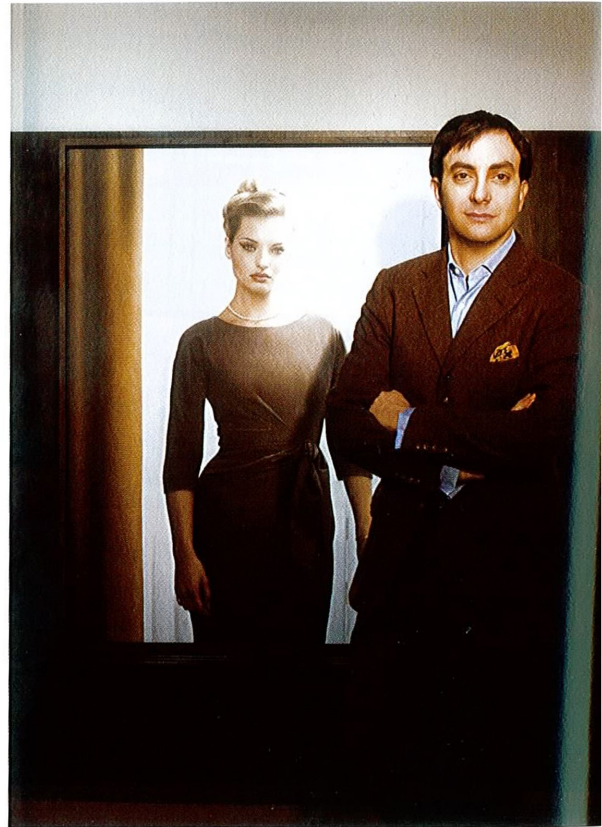
So when he first arrived in Charleston three years ago on a weekend visit with friends, it didn’t take long for him to take a shine to the city. “From day one, I loved everything about it,” says the Chicago-born Cohler, who holds a master’s degree in historic preservation from Columbia University’s School of Architecture. “The architectural details, how quintessentially Southern the houses are—the city just spoke to me, and I began laying plans to make it my part-time home.”

That he did and since took up residence first on Wentworth then on George Street while restoring a South-of-Broad single. With that project behind him, Cohler is in the market for new digs here, as his “Southern sensibilities” draw him back once a month or so. “My love affair with the city hasn’t lessened since I first visited,” he says. “Perhaps I’m a Southerner at heart?”



Expert Advice

Cohler recommends creating an idea cache for every room in the house. Living room, bathroom, playroom—they each get a file for ripped-out magazine pages, notes, and photos. If you don’t incorporate the ideas this year, he says, you will next year.



Order in the House

(Left to right) Cohler played up bold graphics and bright punches of color in this Manhattan living room he designed for a Susan G. Komen Foundation showhouse. The Church Street single Cohler restored last year boasts a handsome ground floor entrance. The foyer of his residence at 4 George Street was a mix of varied artwork and interesting objects.

Words to Live By

Let Function Lead Form

I start by asking clients, "How will this space be used?" It's simple, but it's the most necessary element. I have to know them and what they like, who they are—it's all about learning how they live.

Stay in the Present

When it comes to working with historic structures, think of it as liberating. The envelope that you can't disrupt actually frees you to explore the possibilities in the structure. What can I do within these constraints? This is how you make it yours. Think about how you can best preserve the past, while ensuring it meets today's needs, your needs.

Be Your Stylish Self

I interact with a lot of women every day who are so well put together. And then we talk about designing a room and they don't feel like they can make the right choices. I look at them and say, "Wait, you look amazing. The black skirt, the blouse, the pearls." What they're lacking is the courage to let that style cross over into their own living room.



Love Your World

Don't be afraid to live with the things you love. If you love purple, design a purple room. There are so many rules out there saying you

have to have this, or a room has to look like that. Have the confidence to live with what you like. And remember that life isn't perfect. Kids spill, dogs jump on the furniture. Your life and how you live it has to be part of the room.

Train your eye

Look at plenty of art. Studying a Reiman or a Marc Rothko painting stirs emotions and offers lessons in color and composition.

—Mary Matthews

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