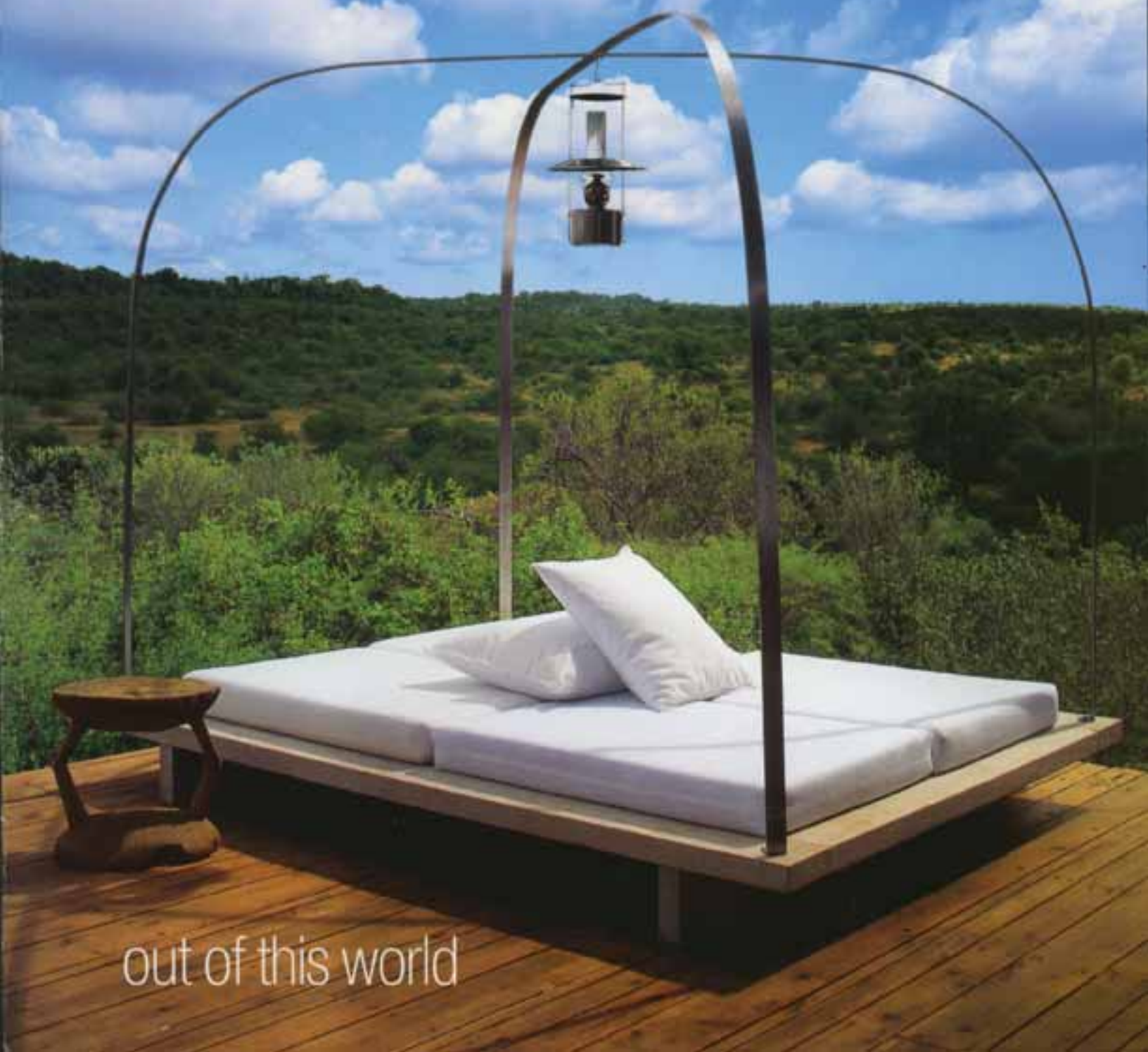


INTERIOR DESIGN

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out of this world

Aero Hampton

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Who knew that a Norman Jaffe house in Bridgehampton, New York, had a hidden French '40s side? Thomas O'Brien of Aero Studios





Thomas O'Brien is the kind of interior designer who makes some others in the same line of work turn, if not bright green with envy, then at least a soft shade of celadon. He's young by most standards (42). He was trained at the prestigious Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, worked as a creative director at Polo Ralph Lauren, and cofounded Aero Studios in 1992. Almost immediately thereafter, the New York interior design practice and furniture gallery reached the top of many aficionados' list of what to do and buy in SoHo,

and O'Brien has placed his name and imprimatur on chairs, sofas, bath fittings, lighting, glassware, and fabric in the easy-to-live-with style that you and everyone else call Warm Modernism. Oh, and we forgot to mention how relaxed O'Brien seems to be about all of it.

So O'Brien was sailing in friendly waters when a young couple asked for his help defining and furnishing a modernist house in Bridgehampton, New York. The clients already owned an impressive selection of 20th-century furnishings, bought from

Paris flea markets and eBay. "It's wonderful when people come to you with an appreciation for design," O'Brien says. "In this case, not only did they have a great collection but they were also intrigued by historic design, new design, and taking a real lifestyle approach." The house—situated in a prime location, south of the Montauk Highway—came with its own 20th-century provenance. The geometric shingled structure was one of the more modest efforts of local architect Norman Jaffe.

Jaffe drowned mysteriously 10 summers →



Previous spread, left: Thomas O'Brien introduced pieces from his clients' collection of early 20th-century French design—including the dining area's Serge Mouille lamp and Jean Prouvé chairs and table—to a Norman Jaffe house in Bridgehampton, New York. The wooden vessel and Pyrex vase are contemporary.

Previous spread, right: An Isamu Noguchi lamp softens and brightens the kitchen's original wall of ceramic tile. Charlotte Permand's table displays a small smoked-glass bowl by O'Brien and a large glazed Italian bowl, circa 1949.

Left: In the double-height living room, O'Brien placed a sofa of his own design, a George Nelson daybed, a Noguchi cocktail table, and a Donald Deskey side table. *Above:* A walkway of fieldstone pavers leads to the front door. *Top right:* An oak-veneer storage unit and bookcase by Prouvé stands in a corridor. *Bottom right:* In the living room, Alvar Aalto chairs in maple and cord flank a standing lamp by Mouille and a painted table by Harvey Propper.



ago, while taking one of his usual morning swims. By that time, though, dozens of his residences dotted the fields and dunes from Southampton to Montauk. He also designed the Gates of the Grove synagogue for the Jewish Center of the Hamptons. Completed in 1987, the building remains one of his most enduring, notable for its sensitive use of materials and manipulation of light and space.

The ways that a structure absorbs and reflects light and relates to the landscape were prime considerations in every Jaffe

project. Materials were practical as well as gutsy, colorful when they needed to be, and very much of the late '70s as a moment in interiors. "The stone and wood are the big statements here," O'Brien explains of the Bridgehampton house, noting the deep-orange ceramic tile that lines one wall of the open kitchen and the cypress wall cladding that unifies the interior overall. The double-height living room—the focal point of the house—celebrates Jaffe's use of rough-hewn fieldstone, which forms both the floor and the fireplace surround

scoring from hearth to ceiling.

O'Brien calls his gentle intervention an "enhancement" rather than a redesign. To a certain extent, he simply acted as a catalyst for his clients' compatible yet slightly divergent tastes. "She had lived in Paris, liked European modern, and collected Jean Prouvé. He was more drawn to American things," O'Brien says. "I chose individualistic pieces and blended them." In concrete terms, that meant seamlessly interlacing classics by Prouvé, Charlotte Perriand, and Serge Mouille with others by Isamu →



Noguchi, Harry Bertoia, and George Nelson, then adding comfort in the guise of a sofa, side tables, and accessories by O'Brien and Aero Studios.

With anonymous objects, he could make some of the surface changes at which he's so adept—refinishing furniture and bringing out the texture of a particular piece are important, idiosyncratic parts of the O'Brien process. "I like dark. I like blond. It's not about change purely for the sake of change, but something that evolves," he says. "I believe in new interpretations." Rather than paint a side table white, for example, he might give it a matte waxed-gesso finish, transforming a poor relation into a dazzling Cinderella. Let's just hope that midnight doesn't strike too soon. Or at least that George Nelson designed the clock responsible. —

PROJECT TEAM MICHAEL AIDUSS, EUGENE CORLESS.

WOODEN VESSEL, GLASS VASE (DINING AREA), SMALL BOWL (KITCHEN), SERVING TRAY (LIVING ROOM), AERO, LARGE BOWL (KITCHEN), SIDE TABLES, STOOL, COORD CHAIRS (LIVING ROOM), DRUM TABLES (GUEST ROOM), THROUGH AERO, SOFA (LIVING ROOM), HICKORY CHAIR (THROUGH AERO), LOUNGE CHAIRS (POOL AREA), GLOSTER, UMBRELLA, TABLE, KINGSLEY-BATE.



Opposite: The master bedroom features a vintage bench by Nelson and a wire chair by Harry Bertoia.

Above: A Prouvé chair complements the cypress of a guest room's wall. The hand-lacquered drum tables are vintage. **Below:** Like the front walkway, the pool surround is fieldstone pavers. Carefully placed cherry trees complement the geometric volumes of the house.

