

# LUXPOP!

FASHION / CULTURE / PEOPLE / TRAVEL / COLLECTING

## Who to Know

*Next Article* →



*Windsor Smith Homefront: Design for Modern Living* (Rizzoli) is the designer's first book.  
Photo Credit: Justin Coit



Gwyneth Paltrow's living room was a Room in the Box design from Windsor Smith. Photo Credit: Justin Coit



Every space including a home office subscribes to the same standard of beauty that defines the more public rooms.

by Candace  
Manroe

## Windsor and the Web

*California designer Windsor Smith is one of the international set's A-list designers. She's also one of the most unconventional and egalitarian. See how the internet became her partner in design.*

Without any danger of dabbling in superlatives, it's safe to define Los Angeles interior designer Windsor Smith as someone who never, ever thinks inside the box. So the name for her least conventional business





Windsor Smith. Photo Credit: Cindy Gold

model to date is equal parts irony and honesty: Room in a Box. It's hard to imagine a concept more outside the box, nor a prettily packaged end result that more perfectly fits its name. It's a conundrum, a bit like Smith's decorating style, which achieves the most moving harmonies by coupling the greatest incongruities.

Smith pioneered this new way of doing business using the internet as her accomplice not to replace her face-to-face client consultations, presentations, and installations, but as an alternative. The idea was to build in modern flexibility to fit modern lifestyles — a theme that addresses not just ways of doing business, but mines the very core of her creative process. "Pretty

rooms no longer are enough. We must change our thinking to adapt to how we actually use these rooms," she's fond of saying.

Like most new ideas, her internet-facilitated Room in a Box (known as RIABox in her staff's shorthand) was invented to meet a challenge about five years ago. "There was a new potential client coming onto the scene who was interested in accomplishing a top level of design, but wanted or needed to work in a less conventional way. Whether they were constrained by economics or had had a previously less than perfect experience with a decorator really was inconsequential. What mattered was that they wanted the end result of using a professional, but the control to purchase or value engineer on their own where needed," she explains.



Deep pewter silk velvet on the dramatically-shaped chair grounds the diaphanous space in masculine color. The piano is the living room's unusual focal point. Photo credit: Justin Coit

The fact that many of her RIABox clients are celebrities with unrestricted resources drives home the point. Gwyneth Paltrow famously began her relationship with Smith through

RIABox. A friendship was born. Paltrow describes Smith as a mentor and source of inspiration in the forward the actress wrote for her book, *Windsor Smith Homefront: Design For Modern Living*.

"Our RIABox client isn't someone looking for a fast and friendly three hundred solutions to a room's aesthetic direction, nor do they want to populate it with furnishings from a big box or online retailers. Not that there's anything wrong with that — that's a huge demographic and a very exciting one, but it's just not our customer. Our client is someone who has the resources and is seeking a top-level, bespoke experience as a means to create a beautiful room — or more often, the entire house — but they want more influence and control in the process than a conventional decorator/client relationship presents. Ultimately, they just want to feel a sense of ownership in the process and in the end result," explains Smith.



A thoughtful floor plan breaks the expanse of this San Francisco living room down into a series of interactive, yet independent niches for lounging in the Room in a Box project.

As in her private design consultations, those on the internet begin with questions. "It is rudimentary in my work to really drill down on purpose and aspiration before approaching the aesthetic of it, as I believe that all corners of our homes provide an opportunity to elevate or better organize the way we live. RIABox operates from the same ethos. I really think Gwyneth said it best in my book's forward: 'A room is only truly beautiful if it supports the lives of the people living in it.' Make no mistake, you will see beautiful fabrics and furnishings that are top notch, but there is so much more that goes into each room."

## HOW IT WORKS



Pricing for  
RIABox is

A Chicago homeowner had all custom bed coverings and pillows fabricated locally according to Room in a Box specifications.

determined by service and square footage, never by the level of furnishings the client can/will buy. Thus every box includes the option for three product re-selections,

allowing the client choices. One reason, of course, is a consideration for price point. Another is to provide a Plan B (and C) should a pattern or piece become discontinued. And finally, the three choices allow the client to find the product that's the closest fit for their personality and needs.

In addition to falling in love with Smith's vision, clients often discover that the unique presentation of that vision makes them feel empowered. For example, a repeat client in the Bay Area faithfully executed Smith's recommendations, but for one change. Instead of applying Smith's colors to the walls and furniture as suggested, she transposed the process. Her walls now herald the hues Smith had specified for the upholsteries, and her furniture and fabrics bear the colors originally picked for the walls. Her reversal represents a small, but hugely important change. "Let's face it," says Smith. "We all want more than ever for our homes to be an expression of who we are, and Room In a Box truly provides the blueprint for that to happen."



Hand-painted de Gournay wallpaper sets the elegant tone

of the living room, which is bisected by a double-back sofa that allows different activities to occur on either side.  
Photo credit: Justin Coit

[CONTACT THE EDITORS](#)