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Designer Jack Fhillips punches up his traditional home with contemporary art.

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Photography by Kim Sargent

When it comes to blending art with interiors, let alone choosing colors and fabrics, interior designers are more decisive than the rest of us. Decorating decisions are made quickly and surely. For example, Jack Fhillips doesn't bat an eyelash over flanking Keith Haring's "Untitled," 1982, a bold geometric work on paper, with a pair of serious 19th-century English portraits.

His handsome two-story house, with its diamond-paned windows and sprawling 7,000-square-foot interior, was a "contemporary mess" when Fhillips purchased it. Now it looks like a country estate, his clients tell him, a "pleasantly Anglo-American house" situated on approximately two acres near Palm Beach, Florida, and surrounded by more than 100 Australian pines. So it's a perfect setting for the designer's favored Georgian English/Regency and American Federal furniture. "I like simple and elegant lines," he explains. "I especially like the early American Federal period, before the style became too fussy.

"My taste hasn't really changed," he continues, referring to his first purchase, a small Picasso etching bought when he was in college and paid for in installments. "Today, what I love about my contemporary art is that it makes me smile. It's upbeat art, and often the minimalism is refreshing against the old tea-stained fabrics and 19th-century English portraits that I gravitate toward. I believe people should live with things they love."

The graphic-looking work by Haring, an artist connected with the New York Graffiti movement, attracted Fhillips immediately. "I like the simplicity of Haring's designs, similar to Andy Warhol's Pop Art, some of which I display in my entry foyer. The two artists share an energy, though Haring was younger. The Haring piece