

POP & FRESH

INTERIOR DESIGNER TODD ROMANO CREATES A DECOR THAT IS AT ONCE FAMILIAR AND SURPRISING





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In the living room, walls painted a meaty olive brown help ground the vibrant upholstery and rug. FURNITURE The Bridgewater-style sofa was custom-made. The fauteuils are in the Louis XVI style. A custom Christopher Spitzmiller lamp sits atop a late Georgian mahogany Pembroke table, from Christie's, NYC. FABRICS Riviere's Enchantée cotton covers the sofa; pillows in Ninon taffetas, all from Brunschwig & Fils. PAINT Benjamin Moore's Brown Tar. RUG A Parish-Hadley design from the estate of Betsey Cushing Whitney, bought at Sotheby's, NYC.



TODD ROMANO USED INTENSE COLORS—LUSH MOROCCAN RED, ELEGANT OLIVE BROWN, CREAMY YELLOW—TO GIVE A SENSE OF DEPTH TO THE LOW-CEILINGED ROOMS OF THE OLD HOUSE. WHITE TRIM STRENGTHENS THE VERTICALS AND GIVES THE DECOR A MODERN PUNCH

As beautiful as an interior may be, it can't ring true as a home if the occupant's personality is nowhere to be found. In the little cottage that interior designer Todd Romano bought in upstate New York and revived after decades of spotty maintenance, his personality is writ large. Born and bred in San Antonio, Romano, who runs Todd Alexander Romano Antiques and Decoration in New York City, has the big enthusiasm and down-to-earth ease of a Texan fused with the educated, well-honed taste of an urbanite. (He apprenticed with legendary designer Mario Buatta.) That ease, and a refined eye for the play of surface, scale, and color, turned the house into a retreat at once cozy and elegant—and peppered with the wit and whimsy of

Romano's many collections.

The interior is almost biographical. "The story of my life," he calls the reading room. The snug chamber is lined with books and crammed with family photos, pictures (especially of dogs, and best if they're dachshunds, like his pet, Missy), and offbeat mementos such as an eighteenth-century French gilt bronze dog and a plastic Buzz Lightyear doll.

Elsewhere in the house, interspersed with the fine eighteenth-century Continental furniture and paintings, there are coral and seashells that he has collected since boyhood, eccentric Staffordshire china animals and figurines (a passion also kindled in childhood), and art by Andy Warhol, Josef Albers,

and Alex Lieberman. That art entranced Romano as a kid in the 1960s, when his mother allowed his first foray into decoration, letting him do his bedroom in a black-and-white motif, complete with a clear blow-up chair and a black lacquer captain's desk. ("I'm sure she regretted it later," he says.)

Two years ago, seeking a change of pace from the Hamptons ("I'm a beach boy," he says, "but there comes a point when you're over it"), Romano sought refuge in the postcard pretty hills of the Hudson Valley, where he'd often





TRADE SECRETS

The striking cinnabar glaze on the library walls is offset by the subdued carpet and upholstery. **FABRICS** A custom sofa is covered in a discontinued Travers velvet; 18th-century Louis XV fauteuils are covered in Brunschwig & Filz's Le-Lee glazed tints. The slipper chair, opposite page, is upholstered in Schumacher's Pavilion Rosette in a discontinued color. **ACCENTS** Mirrored '40s French coffee table; wall lamp by Christopher Norman. **CARPET** Stark's Antelope wool rug.



antiqued and visited friends. Near Millbrook he found a small house built in stages (half is eighteenth century, the addition early nineteenth) and surrounded by overgrown fairy-tale gardens. Fifty peony bushes, old specimen trees, and a long, rangy grape arbor had been planted decades earlier and left mainly to their own devices. Inside, the house was equally well conceived, but unkempt. "It needed a good paint job," says Romano. "A really good paint job."

Laying down a good foundation of color and light is Romano's credo as a decorator. "With clients," he says, "I spend most of my time working on the background: walls,

windows, floors, and basic seating. People get wrapped up in objects, but then there's not a comfortable chair in the house." That wasn't going to happen here. Romano brought in painters for five weeks of base laying before decorative painters arrived to glaze the walls in deep Moroccan red, an elegant olive brown, and creamy yellow. White trim gave the old house a crisp, modern punch. Because the place has such low ceilings, Romano used intense color for depth, and tonal stripes to create a sense of height. "Strengthening the verticals with paint is easy and effective," he says.

Upstairs, he gave color a different spin. In the master bedroom, soft creams and pale browns downplay the smallness of the room; in a guest room, he covered nearly every square inch in blue-and-white fabric. (He discovered the Porthault paisley in the Paris shop's archives and had it resurrected.) The riot

COLOR

UNCONVENTIONAL COMBINATIONS SET THE TONE IN A HOUSE FILLED WITH WHIMSY AND SURPRISE

This house demonstrates a highly personal use of color, combining the startlingly bold with the conventionally muted. The result is an uncontrived home where comfort and collections are paramount. A series of different but complementary atmospheres enlarges the space.

- The living room's olive brown wall is a stark but effective contrast to Warhol's *Marilyn*. The resulting tension heightens the art's impact, yet it still feels at one with the decor because the colors in the blue lamp base, blue and ochre cushions, black lacquer table, and red accents are all derived from the Warhol.

- Teddy bear brown and Moroccan red might not be natural bedfellows, but the contrast of textures between the brown velvet sofa and the lacquer wall finish makes the combination work.

—MARTIN EPHSON AND TOM HELME, FARROW & BALL



TRADE SECRETS

Todd Romano gives visual interest to the small reading room by repeating Clarence House's Draperie print in Brun on the bed, walls, and pillows. FURNITURE The Louis XVI daybed is from a Paris flea market, as is the provincial Louis XV prayer chair, now covered in custom-dyed Hermes leather. ACCENTS Lamp by Cedric Hartman. A 19th-century Japanese lacquered tray rests on the bed. A dachshund lover, Romano poses with his own pet, Missy, above.





NOTE THE TACTICAL USE OF COLOR: MUTED HUES IN THE SUN ROOM, A SPACE FILLED WITH LIGHT AND GREENERY, A RIOT OF BLUE AND WHITE MASKING THE ODD CONTOURS OF THE GUEST ROOM

Like most decorators, Romano savors a good pedigree. He bought at auction a sculptural side table depicting a moor, and later learned it had belonged to the stylish ambassador's wife Evangeline Bruce and had done duty in her Colefax and Fowler Georgetown home. ("Oh, goody!" he concluded.) A wool zebra-striped rug in the living room is one that the famed decorating firm Parish-Hadley made for clients—in this case, the philanthropist Betsey Cushing Whitney.

For Romano, the most important aspect of his interior is that things be unusual and, ideally, a little quirky. That's where, he admits, having a home decor shop can be an occupational hazard. Rare objects—such as a detailed, pre-Civil War painting of a black woman—destined for the shop become hard to part with. He hung it with a Goya-esque painting of a Caribbean group, his "fake Rothko," and eighteenth-century French pieces in the foyer. Fortunately for Romano and his friends, his occupational hazard makes for a house that is a home—one truly full of character. □

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of pattern detracts from the low garret ceilings and "covers a multitude of sins," Romano says jokingly.

As for the comfy part of the equation, each fireplace is flanked by cushy, low-slung chairs—for log poking—such as the slipper chair he found at a Paris flea market and upholstered in a vintage "dirty chintz." He was tipped to the antelope-spotted Stark carpet in the library by his friend the late C.Z. Guest. "It won't show paw prints," she said, and adds a warm palette underfoot. "There's a nice dichotomy," says Romano, "between the old beamed room and the funky and fun carpet."

Romano is all about that dichotomy. "I'm a big believer in mixing things up—eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and mid-twentieth-century furniture and art," he says. "I did it in spades in my house. I'm young and want the place to look young, not like my grandparents' house." A prime example of the dichotomy is the living room, where Warhol's eye-popping *Marilyn* resides near a 1700s Italian allegorical painting and a charcoal by Van Day Truex, the genius design director behind Tiffany & Co.'s postwar success.

TRADE SECRETS

Pattern is a panic in a guest room, above. **FABRICS** Walls and bed skirt are done in Brunschwig & Filz's Therese cotton. **LINENS** Paisley sheets, custom-made by Porthault. Coverlet by Schwitzer, NYC. **FURNITURE** The patio is furnished with vintage rattan and bamboo pieces. **TABLEWARE** The table is set with a cloth by Porthault, vintage Dodie Thayer plates, and sterling by Tiffany. The glasses and julep cups are from Hudson, NY, antiques shops. Sources, see back of book.



