



Sense of Self

In Barbara Franceski's Alexandria home, the designer's vision and personality take center stage

BY JULIE SANDERS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGIE SECKINGER

In the living room (both pages), walls painted in light cream and beige showcase vibrant artwork such as the abstract oil painting by Brazilian artist Sayonara Oliveira above the mantel and a colorful oil-on-canvas portrait Franceski picked up in Italy (opposite), which hangs above a decorative vintage dress form. An eclectic mix of furnishings completes the picture.





AS FAR AS BARBARA FRANCESKI IS CONCERNED, GOOD DESIGN IS IN THE DETAILS. So when the designer was house hunting and came across a 15-year-old townhouse boasting such architectural elements as picture moldings, a coffered kitchen ceiling and doorframes sporting Victorian rosettes, she naturally jumped. "They were a big part of what drew me to the space," she recalls.

Three years later, Franceski has added to those innate good lines to create a home that thoroughly reflects her design sensibility. She's accomplished her goals using classically styled furniture and accessories enhanced by a sense of whimsy, an element of surprise or a contemporary flair—all punctuated by eye-catching artwork. "Spaces shouldn't be too stuffy or take themselves too seriously," says the designer.

But before the transformative décor took shape, Franceski's first, dramatic step was to bleach the floors. "They were dark-stained, builder-grade oak," she explains, "and made the house feel enclosed. White floors made it light." They also complemented the neutral palette of creams and beiges that Franceski chose as a backdrop for what she calls "pops of color from the artwork."

Located within a community of townhouses near Old Town Alexandria, Franceski's home has a traditional exterior that fits its surroundings. The interior is designed like a center hall Colonial, with the living room to the right as you enter and the dining room

Barbara Franceski poses before the marble-fronted fireplace in her living room (above left), where the bleached-oak floor (above right) provides a backdrop to the Aubusson-style carpet with its unusual sunburst motif; an antiqued mirrored screen reflects light while making the room feel larger. In the elegant dining room (opposite), the designer placed a cabinet in front of a set of windows to conserve space, then framed it in draperies.

to the left. Franceski points out the unusual rug that covers the living room floor; with its sunburst pattern, it radiates movement—which is what the designer liked about it—with punctuations of red that pick up the vintage red Marimekko textile piece on the wall. The room's eclectic embellishments also include a framed, antique Mexican family tree, a large-scale abstract oil painting over the mantel and a vintage dress form.

The living room deftly blends traditional architectural elements and transitional furnishings with modern lighting, artwork and accessories; Franceski carries the same look into the dining room. William Morris wall coverings emphasize the rectilinear shapes of the picture moldings. To counteract their straight lines, Franceski chose a dish cupboard with circular motifs on the doors. She adorned the neutrally hued walls with rectangles of wallpaper punctuated by round French upholstery tacks. A fanciful round mirror occupies one wall. An oversized, wood-bead chandelier with a copper frame hangs above a table for six.

The dining room provides access to the galley kitchen via an adjoining room that Franceski uses as a butler's pantry. The direct entrance to the sleek, gray-and-white granite kitchen—which Franceski has not altered—is back beyond the stairwell, straight ahead as you enter the house.

INTERIOR DESIGN: BARBARA FRANCESKI, Barbara Franceski LLC, Alexandria, Virginia.





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Decorated in pale corals, pinks and blues, Franceski's master bedroom cleverly juxtaposes elegant furnishings with a piece of folk art and a whimsical light fixture by Niermann Weeks. The designer floated the bed in the room to create wall space for artwork.





A guest room in blue with green accents offers a restful retreat, with a luxurious canopied daybed (this page). The third-floor office (opposite) is a comfortably neutral space where the designer's creativity can flow.



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Upstairs, the master suite illustrates the designer's willingness to play with size, scale and form. She placed her elegant, Niermann Weeks four-poster bed in the center of the room (with three and a half feet between its head and the wall because, as she explains, "I wanted to be able to walk around the bed"), and juxtaposed a piece of folk art beside it for contrast. A pale pink ceiling, coral-hued satin draperies and soft bedding in blue and pink convey a sense of delicate femininity.

On the other end of the second floor, a guest room includes a canopied day bed and a palette of blues and greens. The third floor is home to the designer's office, a sunlit space that she has chosen to paint white, feeling that "it's best to make choices involving color for clients against a neutral background." A zebra skin on the

floor draws the eye, and added crown moldings create visual interest in the space.

Throughout the house, Franceski has repeated specific furnishings, colors and textiles in order to subtly tie rooms together—so the color on the entry hall wall (Farrow & Ball's String No. 8) crops up again on the dining room ceiling, and a chair from the living room has a double in the master bedroom. "My rooms reveal themselves over time," Franceski says. "It's about finding your sense of self. You don't want your house to look like your neighbors'. I like to help clients find their sense of self." ♦

Photographer Angie Seckinger splits her time between Potomac, Maryland, and Spain.

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