

The Aesthetics of Happiness: Ghislaine Viñas Explains

text by Michele Keith

Given a bowl of oranges, lemons and limes as inspiration by the client, Viñas wallpapered the kids' room in a customized Flavor Paper to match the trim on the bunk beds she designed. Aronson's Bolon carpeting finishes the look. Photo by Garrett Rowland

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profile

“Going over the top with color and using it in unusual, bold ways is simply who I am,” says Ghislaine Viñas, the New York-based designer.

“I believe in the idea of the ‘aesthetics of happiness,’ or creating interiors that feel good. Not for any complicated reasons, but purely because they have an easy and playful vibe or exude a positive energy. Color helps me do this.”

Born in the Netherlands, raised in South Africa, and schooled in the U.S. at Philadelphia University where she earned her interior design degree, Viñas says, “I realized my love for color at an early age. I would get butterflies in my stomach while deliberating about which crayons to use in my coloring books. In college, I adored my color theory classes, assembling collages, anything relating to color. I didn’t realize this was at all out of the ordinary, something that would make me stand out among other designers. I was just being me.”

When she established her firm in 1999,

Opposite: Cloaking the walls of a steep residential stairway is “Wild Thing,” a wallpaper Viñas and her husband created together for Flavor Paper. Customizable to any size or color. *Photo by Garrett Rowland*

“We were deep in the beige era,” she says. “I’d only been in the States for about four years and thought it was merely because Americans liked beige. This idea allowed me to consider myself in a different light. Plus, never having worked for anyone except myself, I was able to make my own rules and figure out my own style, like using color blocking or warm tones for private areas and cool ones for public spaces.”

By continuing to develop new strategies today for residential, commercial and hospitality projects throughout the country and around the world, she’s won a devoted following and prestigious honors such as Interior Design magazine’s Best of Year (BOY) Award multiple times in diverse categories.

An enthusiastic collaborator, she often works with her husband, graphic designer Jaime Viñas, on furnishings. Recently, the couple developed a wallpaper pattern which is based on foliage they admired on a trip to Durban, South Africa. Jaime photographed dozens of the tropical leaves and together they translated them into a wall covering for Flavor Paper.

Viñas is busier than ever today, working on a textile line for HBF Textiles as well as rugs for Aronson’s Floor Coverings, interiors for a Chicago furniture showroom and residences on the East and West Coasts.

Viñas works her colorful magic throughout the home in small ways (think chair cushions) and big ways like kitchen islands. At first glance, one might think these interiors are too colorful. However, spend a little time in any space Viñas has created in her inimitable fashion—clean lines, location-appropriate furnishings, customized details—spiced with colors like citrus orange and fire-engine red, and one quickly becomes comfortable, and most definitely, happy.

Of course, she acknowledges that some people are less bold about using color in their homes, “Clients know what they are getting into when they hire me, but if they’re skittish, we ease them into it or avoid lots of color and dream up other solutions for the interiors, such as an all-cream room.”

She also has a broad view of what is considered neutral. “Who said beige is the



A mural wallpaper depicting an enormous splash of milk was designed by Viñas to set the mood for this cream-colored room in TriBeCa. Adding to the cocoon-like feel are Nova68 Next Liquid Raindrop pendants and Aronson’s cushy Tretford floor covering. *Photo by Eric Laignel*



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only one? What about subtle blues and barely-there greens? Play with colors you love," she suggests, "and with softer versions of them. Then, for some fun, throw in an unexpected accent like a dash of neon or a bit of black as an exclamation point."

Central to making Viñas' interiors work is her selection of furnishings. Modern but not minimal, they always have a welcoming and homey look and feel. "I build my rooms very carefully, in an architectural manner," she explains.

Sofas, whether neutral or a dominant color, often ground the room. From there, rug and wall colors are selected. And then, she starts accenting. This may mean adding monochromatic hues or she might use a pattern as a connector to introduce other colors.

"You have to balance the different levels of energy of the various pieces. A very straight, low sofa for example, will work well with curvier, higher lounge chairs. Mixing eras can be interesting, too," she adds. "Then



Inspired by a breakfast of eggs sunny-side up, the kitchen/dining area gets its glow from Hivemindesign powder-coated steel pendant lights detailed with silk thread. Custom table is by UM Project. Maun Windsor chairs are by Patty Johnson/Mabeo Furniture. Photo by Eric Laignel



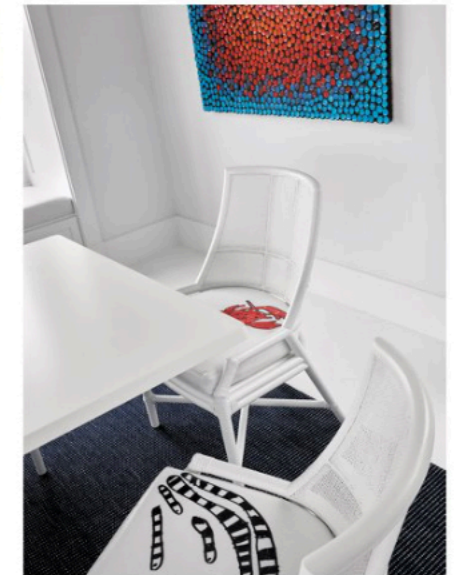
Made famous by its use in the early days of the Beverly Hills Hotel, the banana leaf-patterned wallpaper focuses attention on James Duncan's four-poster in the guest room. Vik Muniz's c-print of Marilyn Monroe balances the blues and greens, as does the Viñas-designed rug by Tsar Carpets. Photo by Garrett Rowland



Illuminated by Zero Lighting's blue-corded, glass "fisherman" pendants, the games table in the living room is by Alain Gilles, the chairs by McGuire. On the wall is Robert Melee's mixed-media artwork, "Semi-Articulated Chic Substitution." Photos this page by Garrett Rowland



Slightly raised letters created with trapunto spell out "SUMMER IS HERE" on a window-seat cushion in a Montauk, LI beach house.



A close-up of chair cushions printed by Design-2Print with sea-inspired drawings done by the homeowners' children, Matte vinylized, they're easy to wipe clean.

there is always the art that adds a whole other layer and provides a personal touch."

This last concept, personalization, is critical in Viñas' view. "I love customizing things for our clients, making them almost like modern-day heirlooms." For a family in New Zealand, for example, she tufted an ottoman. The buttons look randomly placed,

but they actually replicate the constellation of stars known as the Southern Cross. For the powder room on a yacht, she designed an imaginative wallpaper using the owners' fishing lures and images of the fish they catch in the Bahamas, adding, "It's little things like this that tell a story and give meaning to a space." ■