



Picture perfect

Spaces can be customized with artwork and interior design to tell the story of an owner's life

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

In the world of visual storytelling, interior designer Rebecca Last is a master.

In her distinctive approach, every item in a room is considered a work of art, each object telling its own story. In Last's philosophy, art functions the way it did in the Renaissance, when pieces reflected the owner, often stimulating conversation about politics, religion and history.

Last creates entire interior spaces and customizes them to reflect her clients' interests and personalities. She doesn't pay attention to the rules of displaying art, using colour freely and combining shades that aren't often perceived as complementary.

In a dining room Last recently designed, she hung a brilliant red painting of a woman on a deep red wall. The combination works perfectly and exemplifies her approach to decorating with art, which is to incorporate it seamlessly into the interiors so that it feels natural within the room without compromising its own personality and presence.

Last was recently hired by a couple who wanted their home to reflect their travelling experiences and interest in history and fine art.

"Integrating art into an interior offers a multi-dimensional experience," she says, "and each work of art opens up alternative worlds of thought and experience within the world of the interior."

In the living room, the focal point is a majestic fireplace with a mirror and mantle Last designed.

To either side of the fireplace are two richly textured, bright red paintings from Last's "Pompeii" series. She speaks about Pompeii and its ghost-town qualities. As she describes the different items in the room, it is easy to become absorbed in their stories.

Every addition to the room acts as a portal to another place and each element is an integral part of the experience of the interior as a whole.

For Last, the most important step in creating a space is getting to know her clients and finding out how they intend to use the rooms.



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The living and dining rooms, designed around collections of works of art, were created to reflect the owners' interests and travels and to stimulate conversation, Renaissance-style.

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Her objective is to tell the story of their lives through their interiors.

In this home, a model sailboat made of wood is displayed in the dining room, reflecting the owner's love of sailing and also serving to inspire dinnertime tales of his nautical adventures. Oversized seashells, preserving memories from various trips, grace the mantelpiece below the boat.

Two 19th century Italian prints, which the couple inherited, hang in the living room. Nearby is a water-based painting on papyrus — a memento they purchased on a trip to Egypt.

Last included each element in the room because of the importance they hold in conveying the life of the owners throughout the space.

Some of the artwork in the living room is placed within trompe l'oeil frames that Last painted directly onto the walls in two shades of blue — custom colours that she made specifically for the space.

Frames accentuate the ceiling's height and are neo-classical in style, again reflecting the owner's interest in history.

They add a richness to the room and it's hard to imagine what it would be like if they weren't there.

'Each work opens up alternative worlds of thought and experience'

Rebecca Last, interior designer

Last often hears comments like "it feels as though the room has always been here."

Her talent and intuition for making sure each item is perfectly placed gives her rooms this sense of belonging.

The home displays a combination of antique furniture and items that were custom-made by local artisans.

An exquisite early 19th-century settee with oil-painted detail and original rattan sits in the living room, with three contemporary tables framing it.

The settee sits at the foot of a customized floral Aubusson and on the other side of the carpet is a stunning vintage inlaid cabinet with painted oval vignettes depicting landscapes and oil-painted frames.

Last found the cabinet at an antique shop and painted it herself to fit her vision of the space. A 19th-century terra cotta bust sits on top and stylistically matches the two Italian prints hanging on the walls behind it. The room reflects a myriad of historical art periods and custom designs and is also a reflection of the owners' diverse interests.

Last's philosophy stems from a long tradition of visual artists who design entire spaces, which was a popular practice in the Renaissance through to the end of the 19th century, when painter James McNeil Whistler created the Peacock Room for Frederick R. Leyland's London home.

However, this tradition dwindled after William Morris introduced mass production to interiors.

Last's approach rebels against generic design elements and instead reawakens the tradition of all things customized.

Her work harkens back to days when interiors revealed the interests and beliefs of the patron.

An essence of magic emanates in her interiors that combine various stories, dreams and worlds.

Through Last's unique approach she also becomes part of the story in each room she designs.

- Rebecca Last's paintings can be found at the Edward Day Gallery (<http://www.edwarddaygallery.com>).

Her love of Italy and interest in the Renaissance is a significant part of her life and every year she gives cultural tours to small groups in Florence.

This year Last is teaching painting to a group of interior design students.

Go to <http://www.rebeccalast.com> or call 416 465-0550 for more information.

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