

# Southern Accents

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## GRACIOUS LIVING

decorating  
at its best



weekend getaways  
Charlottesville, Palm Beach, Dallas



A chat with...



# Mona Hajj

The Baltimore designer talks about melding color and exotic textiles into rooms that feel classic and instantly appealing

**Molly Pastor: What does a signature Mona Hajj room look like?**

**Mona Hajj:** Elegant and timeless with a simple, relaxed feel.

**MP: Your work has a well-traveled look. How have your travels inspired your design?**

**MH:** I love the harmony of how different cultures live together, and I am fortunate to have clients who share that sentiment.

**MP: You use a lot of Oriental rugs. What are your favorite types of rugs?**

**MH:** I feel that a rug is the heart and soul of a room; it is where my design starts. My favorites are antique Persian, English, and Turkish rugs. I love Dabir Kashan Persians. I look for rugs that have unusual and unique designs with muted colors.

**MP: You work on historic homes in the D.C. and Baltimore area. What is the trick to making them feel comfortable**

TOP: A collection of black-and-white drawings anchors a neutral room where subtle pattern and antiques give the room a sense of history.

BY MOLLY POWER PASTOR

RIGHT: Allover color and pattern make this room seem larger. BELOW: Hajj suggests soft colors for a master bedroom.

**and relevant for today's lifestyle?**

**MH:** When renovating a historic house, I am careful not to change but only to update and enhance the interior architecture. To obtain the comfort level of today, I integrate today's technology and design materials.

**MP: How do you integrate today's technology?**

**MH:** When designing a family or living room, I don't mind if the television is exposed. In bedrooms and baths, I will try to conceal it. I might do this by placing a flat-screen television behind an antique textile.

**MP: What are some of your favorite paint colors?**

**MH:** Benjamin Moore Davenport Tan. I also like using Pratt and Lambert's Off-White on trim and Pratt and Lambert's Nickel on the walls. I often use Benjamin Moore's Niveous in a broad sweep throughout a house.

**MP: I have seen some beautiful rooms where you used strong, saturated colors, such as red or midnight blue. Do you have any suggestions on when to use strong**



**colors and when to avoid them?**

**MH:** Natural light affects my choice of color. I use strong colors when there is little natural light, and I use table, floor, and ceiling fixtures to create mood and highlight the room. Strong colors make a small space look bigger yet quite intimate. The critical element is to understand the scale of furniture. I use lighter colors where there is a lot of natural light.

**MP: Do you have a favorite design period right now?**

**MH:** I like to pull from good design in all periods. I love the simplicity and quality of English cabinetry from the era of George II and William and Mary. I am also drawn to the Venetian mirrors of 18th-century baroque design. They are ornate with classic styling. The furniture from the 18th-century Anglo-Indian era mixes various types of wood to create unique cabinet design. I believe these pieces are having their renaissance. They have always been appreciated in Europe but are now being used in American design.

**MP: Do you have any secret design sources that you would like to share with us?**

**MH:** I love going to Antik Décors at the flea market in Paris. The owner has a great eye, and I never fail to walk out with a few pieces. In the United States, I buy a lot of antiques at auctions. I frequent the New York



PHOTOGRAPHED BY SCOTT FRANCIS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SCOTT FRANCIS; ILLUSTRATED BY RICK VITULLO

auctions but also look for any auctions with unique, quality pieces. I love looking for antiques in salvage yards. There is a wonderful company called Olde Good Things in New York that specializes in antique architectural salvage. They also have a warehouse in Scranton, Pennsylvania. I have always found pieces at Henrik Aarestrup's Scandinavian Antiques in Sharon, Connecticut.

**MP: When it comes to decorating master bedrooms, do you have a favorite palette?**

**MH:** I like soft, blush colors that are soothing and inviting and always look good with skin tones. A woman can feel at home, and a man, comfortable.

**MP: Do you like to mix blush colors with stronger colors or keep it monochromatic?**

**MH:** I use a monochromatic palette in the master bedroom. I will use neutrals on the walls, such as Benjamin Moore's Marble White, as well as neutral-colored linens. I like the furniture to be dark-stained wood, and I bring in color through the accents, such as the pillows and the art.

**MP: Do you have a philosophy on where to splurge and where**



ABOVE: Hajj incorporates pattern into all her work. The design on the ceiling is repeated in the rug for this library. BELOW: By incorporating several seating options and great lighting, Hajj made this library a comfortable place to read.

**to be more economical?**

**MH:** You should splurge on what you love. In general, antique rugs are worth the money. The care, workmanship, and uniqueness don't compare to today. The most economical element and perhaps the most profound is paint.

**MP: Since you are a world traveler, what are you on the lookout for when antiquing abroad?**

**MH:** I collect antique textiles. I have a large variety of antique, one-of-a-kind *sofras* from the Middle East. *Sofras* are a folk art textile made of wool and sometimes mixed with cotton and silk. They were family heirlooms, and they became so valuable to families that they were sometimes used as a dowry. I especially like the quality of ones from Uzbekistan.

**MP: Where do you go for antique textiles?**

**MH:** I buy most of my antique textiles

at the bazaar in Istanbul. I find them domestically at textile shows in New York and San Francisco.

**MP: When installing art in your projects, do you like to use modern art or traditional? Or both?**

**MH:** Both. I like to mix modern with traditional in the same room to create the sense of a collection. If the art is appropriate for the space, the mixed pieces will feel right residing in the same area. I particularly like oil paintings and landscape pieces. They create a romantic feel, and when mixed with modern art, it is an overall collected look that is comfortable.

**MP: What design element do you feel will be dated within the next five years?**

**MH:** I think that any design that exudes "designer" is already dated. Interior spaces should always look and feel like the client's home. ♦

*For details, see Sourcebook, page 226.*

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SCOTT FRANCIS (TOP) AND GORDON BEALL (BOTTOM)