

SEPTEMBER 2016

House Beautiful

120 COLORFUL YEARS

LIFE-CHANGING
COLOR!

**BEST
PAINTS**
for
**Wellness,
Bliss &
Joy**

\$4.99



0 270551 6

AWORL

In the living room of a home near Washington, D.C., designer Mona Hajj took inspiration for the room's palette from the colors of a 19th-century Persian Tabriz rug. A skirted sofa by Gérard and a sofa with wooden legs from A. Rudin create one of two conversation areas. The armchair is by Dessin Fournir, and the antique Regency walnut table was found at a Paris flea market. Chinese jar lamps by Rose Tarlow Melrose House.

Filled with antiques and textiles from around the globe, a Maryland home designed by Mona Hajj is as cozy as it is multicultural, with come-together colors that are perfect for a young family.





ABOVE: The dining room's custom walnut table has rosewood banding and extends to seat 16. Wing and dining chairs by Dessin Fournir. Wall-paper, Osborne & Little. **BELOW:** A Verellen sectional in linen velour anchors the family room. The cocktail table is by Kerry Joyce. The cur-

tains are in a Ralph Lauren Home linen. The walls are faux-finished, with trim in Benjamin Moore's Soot. **OPPOSITE:** In the family room, an Arne Jacobsen Egg chair covered in a Moore & Giles leather is illuminated by a 1960s Italian floor lamp. Wakefield chest by Nancy Corzine.



S

KATHLEEN RENDA: Such an old-world elegance to these rooms!

MONA HAJJ: It's a European approach, mixing styles from different eras and countries. The house is a 1915 Colonial Craftsman Revival in the D.C. suburbs. I was aiming for a sophisticated and refined appearance. Walk into the dining room, and there's a 19th-century Italian crystal chandelier, an English oak chest from the 1600s, and 1940s French chairs in the style of Jean-Michel Frank. Layering these items creates a room that feels collected over time.

It does seem that way—how long did it take to pull together?

Just three months! The family was relocating from Manhattan for the husband's job, so the project was on an accelerated schedule. Because the home had been renovated a few years earlier, it needed only minor changes—this round, the bathrooms were updated and the floors redone.

With just 90 days, shopping for this project must have required a whirlwind trip!

My days of frantic chases are over, actually. Years ago, I would grab my passport and head off in search of a specific piece. Now, when I'm overseas, I buy

what I love and wait patiently until the right project and client comes around.

What inspired the home's lush colors?

For me, it begins with the carpet—always. In the living room, the 1880s wool-and-silk Persian rug was the jumping-off point. It's very large—18 by 22 feet—and it has faded blue-greens and yellows. Its hues inspired the pale green walls and orangey sofa.

Any worries that the scheme would look overly traditional?

Well, there is a difference between old-fashioned and classic. These are

everything in the room and vetoed some of my picks. I encouraged her—it's *her* bedroom. Sometimes as a designer, you need to go outside your comfort zone.

Did her parents push back, too?

The wife was initially skeptical of my plan for the family room. It's a large space, and I knew a dark color would make it feel intimate. We did a faux-plaster treatment and furnished the room with a big sectional sofa and an antique Persian rug with some beautiful blues. The family loves to hang out there and watch TV or play piano. It's now the wife's favorite room.

How did you become so knowledgeable about rugs?

It's in my DNA. My parents bought and sold textiles in Beirut, where I grew up. From the time I was two or three, I tagged along with them on visits to carpet factories to watch the hand-loomed. I'm also crazy about old, exquisite fabrics. That textile above the dining room mantel? It's from a pair of sultan's pants that I found in Istanbul. The silk is woven with 18-karat-gold thread. I framed an embroidered wedding skirt from India and hung it like artwork in the master bedroom.

Not every designer would think to hang clothing as artwork.

My work has always incorporated global design influences, but it



timeless colors that have energy and edge—which is important, because there are three children under six living here. Bright hues did not feel true to the home's character, and they are hard to sustain: You might get an immediate hit of happy, but people's emotions aren't like that all the time.

Mind you, the daughter's bedroom turns up the volume on the happy dial.

And in such a cute way! A purple bed canopy, apple-green curtains trimmed with fruit-punch pom-poms, and pink floral wallpaper are just right for a five-year-old. She actually weighed in on

wasn't easy when I started out. People were not used to seeing that. But I had to go with my inclinations. To me, older textiles—whether clothing or rugs—have soul. Now people understand what I'm doing and appreciate what is handmade.

Besides Turkey and India, where do you hunt for pieces?

All over: England, France, Morocco, Italy, and, hopefully soon, Tunisia. I go on scouting trips a few times a year, and I have contacts around the world who let me know if they have amazing finds. They usually do!



A regal canopy adds a fanciful touch to the daughter's bedroom. Glass nesting tables from Donghia offer a sleek contrast. Nevis curtains by Lady Ann Fabrics are trimmed in a Samuel & Sons pom-pom fringe. Tulia wall-paper by Harlequin. Lamps by Arteriors. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

WRITER: KATHLEEN RENDA; PHOTOGRAPHERS: PORTRAIT: KRISTI KLEMENS/COURTESY OF MONA HAJJ; MOSQUE: GUENTER STANDL/LAIF/REDUX; MAGNOLIA, MOVIE STILL: ALAMY; NAIL POLISH, PAINT: STUDIO D

MONA HAJJ

on color



The colors you gravitate toward are: Warm, inviting, romantic, and soft.

Strategy with color-phobic clients: Antique rugs are always a good place to start. Persian rugs especially, because they're muted but still colorful. They have depth.

Paint color you've used in your own home: The main living areas in my apartment are painted in Benjamin Moore's Niveous. I've tried a variety of neutrals over the years, and they can sometimes look cold, or go too pink or too yellow. Not this shade. It's a clean, creamy color that works in different lights.

Colors you'd bring home from a trip: I grew up in Beirut, which is right on the Mediterranean, and the water is a very, very clear blue. I'm also partial to the Caribbean blues in Saint Martin.

Color trick: When I use dark colors on walls, I always like the paint to have a little glossiness—it softens the intensity. With light colors, I go with a matte finish.

Inspiring movie: Everything about *The English Patient*! The breathtaking desert hues—it was shot on location in Tunisia—and the interiors that reflect the cultures of Britain and Egypt. They're opposites, but when they come together, they're fantastic.



Some of Hajj's colorful—and neutral—go-to's. **FROM TOP:** The blues of Beirut, like the Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque. Flowering magnolias. For a client's family room, Hajj used a custom paint with a hint of luster to tone down the blue color. Vintage Ottoman rug by Restoration Hardware, an elegant way to bring color to a space. Pale pink nail polish, like OPI's new Pale to the Chief. The film *The English Patient*. Benjamin Moore's Niveous.