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*inside the charleston home
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In the dining room, Lorraine created a chic, transitional style by offsetting the traditional architectural elements with Brunschwig & Fils Asian motif silk-screened grasscloth wallcovering and a mandarin lacquered buffet.

MAKING HERSELF AT HOME

by JULIE SPRANKLES
photography by MICHAEL COSTA

With a fresh new outlook and a lot of paint, local interior designer Lorraine Vale of House Interiors learns to love the Daniel Island townhouse she never thought she'd call home.

Lorraine Vale was happy in her home by the lake. After moving to Charleston, South Carolina from Rhode Island ten years ago, the interior designer, owner of House Interiors on Daniel Island, and her husband built a custom residence in the I'On subdivision of Mt.Pleasant—a house Lorraine felt at home in. But with her husband's career with Daniel Island Real Estate burgeoning, the couple felt pulled in different directions. When her husband suggested they needed to move to live in the community he worked in, Lorraine was less than thrilled to leave behind her beloved lakefront home. Never one to dwell on the negative, the upbeat designer decided a change of attitude was key to finding contentment in their new neighborhood. So when her husband suggested they look at a townhouse on the Island, Lorraine agreed. Although she shared his sentiments that the lighting was great and the backyard had potential to be great, it

still wasn't enough to sway Lorraine...she 'needed' a house. Her husband, anxious to convince her, promised it would only be for a few years. Yet she remained resolute in her refusal knowing the move was imminent. Finally, he said the six words that designers dream about: "you can do whatever you want".

"At first, I didn't want to leave the lake, in a community that was home," explains Lorraine. "But when he uttered—famous last words!—that I could do whatever I thought needed to be done, I changed my attitude, *Hmm...for two years? I can do this. Where do I sign!*" The first order of business for the designer was transforming the interior style to reflect the traditional feel of the townhouse. "The interior style was contemporary, but with traditional bones. This home needed to be one or the other," says Lorraine, "so we enhanced the existing crown moulding, added a wall of built-ins surrounding the fireplace in the living room,



and added to the built-ins that were already in place." Lorraine chose traditional wainscoting in the dining room to enhance the architecture of the space. She then had the floors refinished a rich sable brown. (Lorraine often uses a dark stained floor in her clients homes to anchor and enhance the furnishings.) To develop a paint palette, the designer started with her givens—elements in the home she knew they weren't going to change, such as the granite and tile found throughout. "I always start with the 3-inch by 3-inch color squares and lay them out next to my givens to see what works together-



Custom built-ins in the living area offer the perfect repository to show off the designer's art and accessories. Adding to the room's style and comfort are a custom ottoman covered in dash and Albert needlepoint rug.

er," she says. "Almost immediately you see what definitely won't work, so you can pull those out and tweak your selections." Picking paint colors, Lorraine asserts, is not a 1, 2, 3 process; clients often come to her for paint color consultations. "Choosing color," she says, "is not as simple as saying *I love green so I'll pick up some green paint*. It's a matter of putting colors next to your givens and seeing how they react. For me, a color isn't what it seems until you put it next to another color." Since the original permanent selections of tile and granite were not changing, Lorraine chose to embrace them by incorporating them in the overall design, rather than ignoring them.

Since the original plan was to stay in the townhouse for two years, Lorraine decided early on that she would use the space as a living experiment. "In selecting the colors, I really wanted to go bold in places and experience a real departure; I didn't want to go

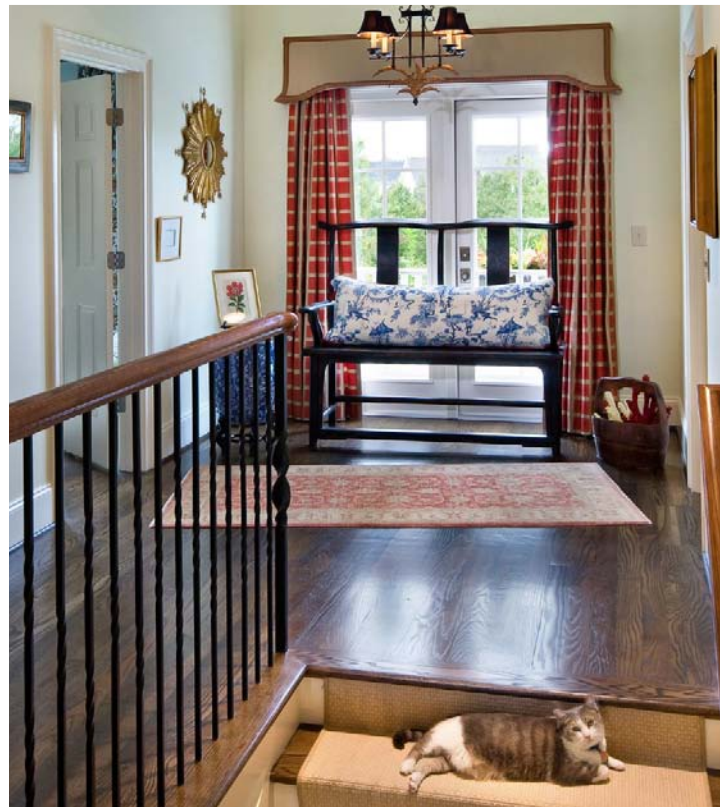
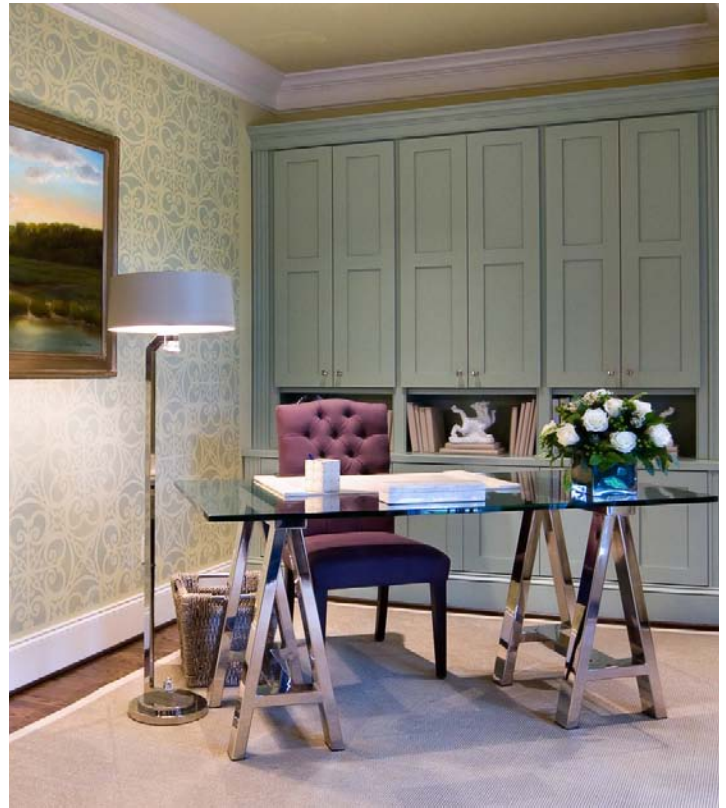
down the tried and true path with expected colors," she smiles. "I wanted to set up an unexpected palette. It's great to walk clients through so they can experience exactly how each selection plays off the other adding up to a cohesive interior." Lorraine used her color selections to give punctuation to certain areas of the home. In the foyer, chocolate brown walls serve as a backdrop for a dramatic oversized 30-inch antiqued brass light fixture situated over a 30-inch center table, another bold move in a small space that works. In the dining room, grasscloth walls are silkscreened metallic gold with an Asian print and are accented by a pop of mandarin orange on the lacquered side board. In the kitchen, where there was minimal wall space, Lorraine opted for a coral color called Autumn Cover by Benjamin Moore. "There's not a lot of wall showing space, but people always comment, *Wow! What a great color*," states Lorraine. To keep the color downstairs from becoming

overwhelming, she painted all the space in between the coral and chocolate areas—the living room, stairwell, and upper hallway—a mild Ivory. Upstairs, she relied on a mix of blues, greens, and taupes for walls.

After establishing her paint palette, Lorraine set to work on the decorative elements of the home, using the existing granite and tile as a springboard for her other selections. "I needed it to look like I did the original selections, like it was in the plan," she says, "I kept reminding myself not to ignore, but embrace!" To help amp up the home's decorative dimension, Lorraine called on local decorative and faux-finish expert Suzanne Allen of Wall Candy ("One of my favorite people!" exclaims Lorraine). In the kitchen, she painted the cherry cabinetry in a French Vanilla and had Suzanne apply a Linen texture with a Carmel glaze. After finding a fabric she loved, Lorraine had Suzanne create a reverse stencil based



Using coral as her unifying thread throughout the interior, the walls in the kitchen and breakfast nook garner constant complements from guests, as do the English antique barley twist breakfast table, chairs slip covered in Kravet Fabric, and the wool rug from Godfrey Hirst at Carolina Carpets.



(top left) Lorraine found returning to the master bedroom almost difficult after a night spent in this enveloping chocolate and spring green hued guest bedroom with linen bedding from Aubergine Home. (top right) To create a custom wall treatment to serve as a backdrop in the office, Lorraine enlisted the help of local decorative finish expert Suzanne Allen. She picked up her desk from Williams Sonoma Home. (bottom left) Beach bleached furniture, pale blue fabrics, and an oversized wooden fish on the wall inject this guest room with coastal flair. (bottom right) Nearly every room features a unique window treatment- like the custom draperies framing this window bench—since Lorraine uses her home as a living portfolio clients can walk through and view. All window treatments in Lorraine's home are by Catherine Atkinson's designer workroom.



Simple and chic, the master bedroom serves as the designer's sanctuary. Her bedroom furniture is from Postobello Home, Drexel Heritage.

on the fabric's overscaled damask pattern for the office walls. They then duplicated the two colors of the fabric with the paint, so that the walls matched the fabric. "We were able to match the colors perfectly—without a custom mix," muses Lorraine. "It's amazing how well it all worked out. We had a great time doing it, too. Suzanne is so enthusiastic and just loves what she does." Capitalizing on her infectious enthusiasm and talent, Lorraine enlists Suzanne's help whenever she can to enhance the interiors of client's homes.

When it came time to select furnishings for the home, Lorraine took full advantage of her husband's original decree to the designer. "When my husband said I could do anything I wanted, I don't think he realized that the furniture from our previous home wouldn't work in this one," she says, smiling coyly, "so I had to shop for a townhouse full of new furniture!" Where ever she could, it was important for Lorraine to incorporate

some of her existing antiques in with the new furnishings. "I love creating a mix with the addition of antiques," she says. "It just establishes a sense of history and it doesn't look as if you just went out and bought a living room or dining room 'suite.'" In the living room, Lorraine found inspiration in two large candle sconces—which now flank the large mirror in the room—that had a 'French' appeal in a modern scale. Lorraine didn't follow a theme for the bedrooms in the home, but rather chose to give each a distinctive feel. "It was important for me to consider our guests, mostly visiting from the northeast," explains Lorraine. "One guest room—and I always like to do this in clients' homes—evokes the feeling of our coastal destination, because when I go somewhere to visit, I love a departure from where I live to truly feel like I'm away from it all. I wanted the room to have a coastal retreat feel." To get a better sense of each guest room, Lorraine slept in each one to test it for comfort and convenience,

which she believes everyone should do in their own homes.

Three plus years later, with the interior design work done and a backyard that has realized its great potential, Lorraine has settled into her new surroundings and loves it. A shift, she says, that had much less to do with wall paint and new furniture than with her new outlook. "I've learned that if you change your attitude, you'll be amazed at what that does for you," she smiles. "If you don't like something, pretend you love it! Whether it's a piece of furniture, a room, or even a whole house—pretend you love it and see what happens. I did not want to move into this townhouse, but I changed my attitude, worked with what I was given, and you know what? Now I think townhouse living is sophisticated and urban. More importantly, *I feel our townhouse on Daniel Island is home now.*" ❖