

fashioning **a home**



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHELLE GABEL



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USING PASSIONS FOR INSPIRATION ENSURES A GOOD FIT

| BY AMY BLEIER LONG

Decorating your home is like getting dressed: There are foundation pieces, layers of accessories, elements of color, texture and pattern, and both are forms of personal expression. But sometimes people are more reserved when it comes to their home.

Interior decorator Lisa Pirro is not one of those people.

Pirro's bold personality is reflected in her dress and décor, both of which are grounded by classic shapes and materials and accentuated with accessories that command attention.

Sartorial details define Pirro's style, ►



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TOP, the living room in Lisa Pirro's home in Syracuse. Pirro believes in classic pieces and adding interest and versatility with accessories.

ABOVE, a downstairs guest bedroom mixes Eastern and equestrian accent pieces.

FACING PAGE, Lisa Pirro is celebrating her 15th year as a decorator. In the early 1990s, she owned her own clothing store, Lisa Boutique, and later was a buyer for Jet Black. Fashion influences all of her work.



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The dining area features two large butterfly prints hung over ikat wallpaper by China Seas. Butterflies remind Pirro of her mother.



Inspired by Adirondack lodges, the downstairs level is darker and more masculine than the rest of the house.

which she originally honed as a fashion retailer.

At 26, she opened her own high-end boutique. Seven years later, the store was struggling, her personal life was in upheaval, and then her mother passed away after a short illness. "It was one of those moments when your whole life implodes," she says.

She decided to close shop and start fresh. She explored several career paths, including selling industrial laundering supplies, dealing antiques and working at Tucci's Furniture, but missed having a creative outlet. Pirro realized that all along she had been decorating by helping friends with their homes. Bolstered by her degree in art history, a passion for textiles and beautiful objects, and her understanding of proportion and scale, she decided to pursue decorating as a career.



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The mahogany front door was custom made by woodworker Matteo Bartolotta of Auburn.

Pirro opened a freelance office, working out of Creative Design Interiors, then located in Syracuse. There she had access to the samples and a fabric library while she spent four years learning the interior décor industry and studying how to run a business — something she hadn't really done before she jumped into fashion retail. During her stint at Tucci's, she had familiarized herself with the furniture industry. "I was constantly saying to myself, who is the Nine West of furniture, who's the Gucci of furniture, because I understood it in fashion but I didn't know what it was in furniture," she says.

As Pirro furthered her education in décor, she worked in fashion on the side; friend Joel Shapiro hired her as a buyer at his boutique Jet Black.

In 1999, Lisa was ready and founded Lisa Limited, her interior decoration firm. She worked out of her apartment initially, and then rented space from Shapiro next to Jet Black as she built her client base. Lisa ►



Pirro recently painted her kitchen cabinets purple for a quick and easy makeover.



Matching etageres flank the living room fireplace. Pirro often uses symmetry in her decorating to provide balance in a room.

LISA PIRRO'S TIPS OF THE TRADE

- 1. To keep your décor fresh without being beholden to trends, try a summer-winter swap with throw pillows.** "Because I like to mix it up, I want to do it with pillows, window treatments, and two different rugs," Pirro says. Try lighter fabrics and bright colors in the summer and bring out the richer colors and heavier textures in winter.
- 2. Accessorize.** "I'm always shocked when I go to someone's house and they have no accessories." Rooms don't look finished without accessories. If you use things you collect and things you love, it will all go together even if it doesn't match perfectly.
- 3. Once you've accessorized, don't let things stagnate.** Take a lamp from one room and try it in another. Swap pillows, or move art and objects around. Mix it up in your own house: "It's a good exercise to keep things interesting."
- 4. Symmetry is generally a foolproof rule of thumb.** "I do like pairs, it always looks right to me." It doesn't have to match all the time, however; just because you have a side table and a lamp on either side of a sofa doesn't mean they have to be the exact same tables and lamps, but stay with a similar scale and style.
- 5. "I start with the wow and work my way backwards."** Begin with a large scale pattern that's fun, as Pirro did in her family room with the rug, and work your way backwards, filling in with solid furniture pieces, other patterns, and accessories.



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PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHELLE GABEL

Pirro's favorite room in her house is a first-floor powder room that was inspired by an Hermès package. Skaneateles painter Chuck Gridley stenciled the iconic ribbon on the walls and ceiling.

started by working for friends, fabricating window treatments and developing inventive color schemes. Her big break came when, after decorating a good friend's new home, a housewarming party gave her the exposure she needed. From that group of guests and subsequent word of mouth came more projects, and Pirro's business grew. When Shapiro sold his boutique in 2012, Lisa moved her company to its current location on North Clinton Street.

Her office, arranged as a showroom, is brimming with beautiful furnishings and accessories. Now she has her own extensive library of fabrics and because you can't fully take the girl out of retail, she has an assortment of accessories for sale not found anywhere else in Syracuse. Some of the furnishings displayed are leftovers from past projects; often these pieces find their way to her house.

In her Syracuse home, Pirro's decorating style is infused with fashion references and detailing at every level. Tabletop collections from Versace, Christian LaCroix and Ralph Lauren fill a glass-fronted kitchen island cupboard. A downstairs closet — housing Lisa's shoe collection — is lined in a Louis Vuitton trunk-patterned wallpaper. More subtle details range from toggle buttons on pillow shams to tweedy upholstered dining chairs with tassel decoration.

The most overt example is her favorite room in the house: an Hermès package-inspired powder room painstakingly painted and stenciled by decorative painter Chuck Gridley. The idea for the design came from a book devoted to the Hermès scarf given to Pirro by a friend.

Each room has a different color scheme, though orange appears often. Repeated elements like Lisa's collection of fashion and design books, antique pieces, Asian motifs, animal prints and ikat patterns give the house a layered and cohesive look without seeming chaotic. It's not all calculated curation, however. She couldn't resist a striking black, gray, and orange ikat rug she found by chance while sourcing rugs for a



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client and changed everything in her family room to accommodate it.

"I'm an emotional buyer," she says. "I find something I love and I work it in."

Butterfly designs are another motif that recurs as art and on lamps: After Pirro's mother died, she kept spotting butterflies, "That was her saying hello." Their presence in the house is a way of keeping her mother close.

Working with interiors means always experimenting and evolving. Pirro's preferences have become more contemporary; kitchen cabinets painted purple are her latest attempt to update a look she's tired of without resorting to a full renovation. In the master bedroom, chocolate walls and a floral headboard are being replaced by black-and-taupe wallpaper reminiscent of tie-dye and black velvet upholstery, respectively.

Even the house's exterior has been upgraded: the front and side doors were custom fabricated out of mahogany by woodworker Matteo Bartolotta, whom Pirro works with often. The glass surrounding the front door is original to the house. "You don't just throw out the old, you try your best to make it work," she says.

The downstairs level of the 4,200-square-foot ranch is very different from the main floor. Whereas upstairs is bright and colorful, downstairs is darker and more masculine, with an Adirondack lodge vibe — a nod to the taste of her husband, Brian Hughes, an avid hunter. Their 8-year-old son, Trent, also enjoys the finished basement and has plenty of room to spread out in the less formal space. An office and a guestroom are also on the lower level. In the 12 years they've lived in the house, built in the 1950s, only a downstairs bathroom hints at its age; everything else has been redone. ►

Pirro has been decorating homes for more than a decade. These are some of her favorite rooms from her decorating portfolio. To see more, go to lisalimited.com.



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HOME DESIGN



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Making sure everyone's personality is represented in the décor is Pirro's objective with her clients, too. That's why she works exclusively on residential projects. She finds that many people don't know what they like, so helping them identify their personal aesthetic is a challenging but necessary part of what she does. One client was having difficulty pinpointing what she liked, but when she was able to describe what she wanted in terms of an outfit, Pirro knew exactly in which direction to go. "I like for their house to be them," she says. "Décor has to reflect your personality." ❖

This client's kitchen is a favorite past project from Lisa Pirro's portfolio.



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