

CONDÉ NAST

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it's all  
about  
**LUXURY**

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Lavishly painted and textured walls evoke Italy. In the hallway, the ocher background and geometric trim are offset by Barbara Paca's arrangement of flowering cherries and jasmine. The carpet is an antique kilim. The Louis XVI chair is a family piece; behind it is an 18th-century gouache of Venice.



THE LUXURY OF  
*color*

# Jewel Tones



Combining the lush palettes of  
Italy and India, interior  
designer Lucretia Moroni  
makes magic in the New York  
apartment of jewelry  
designer Annalu Ponti

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**T**HERE MAY BE as many definitions of luxury as there are of pleasure, but one must surely have to do with the satisfaction of the senses through which we experience the world and through which we are assured of being fully alive, sentient beings. Annalu Ponti's apartment is clear evidence that the places we live in can grant us such satisfactions, spelling out how the comforts of home can also offer a constant visual and textural feast. A tonic of color in the asphalt avenues of midtown Manhattan, it is truly a place where we can come to our senses.

Ponti is a jewelry designer, and her apartment also serves as design studio. Her pieces often encompass different styles: a necklace composed of multiple ropes of small rubies has been designed to be worn alone or with chunky rosewood earrings that complement the color of the gemstones. Simple strands of aquamarine might be paired with a more elaborate choker made from larger stones. A black sapphire bracelet is clasped by a diamond snake. Juxtapositions—of scale, of material, of translucence and opacity, of simplicity and complexity—figure consistently in Ponti's pieces.

Her work is classical, ornate, and interior designer Lucretia Moroni set out to complement that sensibility. She did so by evoking for Ponti, a native of Turin, "a memory of Italy," where lavishly painted and textured walls are celebrated decorative traditions. "Walking into such rooms is like walking inside a painting," Moroni recalls, and it is indeed the impression that these surfaces give—painted, brushed, sponged, and marbled in hues and patterns that dazzle the eye. The extravagance of color is accented with painted and stained patterns; applied to walls and floors, the square, diamond, and rhomboid designs have been braided, woven, and otherwise intertwined in a series of equations that add up to a resplendent interior landscape.

But if the painted walls are a memory of Italy, the apartment makes loose references to other moments in the history



Green stripes and sandstone statuary give the living room the feel of a garden. The carpet, bought in Italy, used to belong to the Iranian royal family. The fabrics on the chairs and window shades were custom-made by Lucretia Moroni Studio, NYC. The sepia prints propped up on the mantel reinforce the notion that this is a casual, outdoor space.







A still life photograph showcasing a collection of jewelry and flowers. In the background, a silver vase holds several large, vibrant pink and red flowers with green foliage. In the foreground, a wooden surface is adorned with various items: a gold-toned bracelet with green stones, a blue beaded necklace coiled on the left, and a red beaded necklace with a central gold-toned medallion resting on a dark wooden stand on the right. A blue beaded necklace is also visible, coiled on the left side of the stand. The lighting is warm, highlighting the textures of the jewelry and the petals of the flowers.

*The flowers in the apartment are  
nature's counterpoints to Ponti's  
elaborate gemstone constructions*





The focal point of the dining room, seen from the living room, this page, is a large table designed by Moroni. Painted to look like maple (as are the chairs), it doubles as a display space for Ponti's work. Tulips and anemones, opposite page, rival the pieces. Clockwise from far right: ruby beads paired with an Indian necklace from Ponti's collection of antique jewelry, her sapphire bead necklace, and gold, emerald, and diamond bracelet.





The lilac-colored bedroom is tinged with memories. Ponti found the painting of an apostle ("my angel," she says) in her family's basement in Turin when she was thirteen. The bed linens were her grandmother's. The blanket and mirror are from Italy. The bedside lamp is from Victor Antiques, NYC.



of decorative arts. Ponti is drawn to that coincidence of elegance and comfort known as the Biedermeier style, and the proportions and detail of the furniture throughout the apartment convey the stolid grace of that period. Yet the Germanic undertones have been softened with sensuality and lavish color ordinarily associated with the decorative traditions of India. In the bedroom, especially, a Biedermeier table that serves as Ponti's drawing table seems at home with the lilac walls that have the luster and surface texture of silk. Along with faux-bois ocher borders, stenciled accent patterning, and sisal floor covering, the walls evoke the ornate and sensuous

arts of India. Just as the color and vibrant patterning applied in the bedroom feed the senses, so does the unlikely fusion of sensibilities fuel the imagination.

With its garden statuary and green stripes, the living room reads more as an English garden. The stripes vary in width—the thinner, dark green vertical ones have been sponged, while the wider, lighter stripes have a softer strié effect. A hand-painted border at the crown molding, a series of precisely interwoven diamonds, gives further definition to the more lyrical quality of the painted stripes, while unframed prints propped up on the mantel reinforce the notion that this is an improvisational, outdoor space.

The library functions as dining room and display case for Ponti's work. A table designed by Moroni is both the central piece of furniture and the spatial focus of



**Ponti's everyday jewelry—including a pearl cuff and mabe-pearl-and-diamond bracelet—are a study in white and gold. Ponti and her teenaged-daughter, Consuelo, right, share the apartment.**

the room. She installed two large mirrors opposite the wide doorways from the living room. They make the room feel somewhat more expansive than its actual dimensions might allow, and the massive table, positioned squarely in the middle of the room, anchors the space.

Moroni has ornamented the table's faux-maple surface with stylized floral faux inlays, creating a delicate decorative landscape that is also a backdrop for Ponti's jewelry. "This is a fantasy maple surface," Moroni stresses, pointing out that, unlike its traditional French counterpart, Italian trompe l'oeil makes gracious accommodations for the fantastic.

That the apartment is an oasis for the senses is underlined by Barbara Paca's floral arrangements. A landscape archi-



tect, floral designer, and historian of gardens, Paca studies the meaning attached to plants and garden planning. Here, however, her approach is more sensual than scholarly. In the library, a Pompeian plant stand offers a riot of parrot tulips, deep red amaryllis, purple sweet peas, and white jasmine. On the dining table nearby, silver tumblers embrace the same blooms in smaller, more demure bouquets. And in other rooms, there are fantasy tulips that might have been transplanted from a Dutch painting; a gathering of white anemones; a spray of flowering cherry—all of them nature's counterpoints to Ponti's elaborate gemstone constructions.

Paca's constantly changing arrangements are an essential ingredient in this interior landscape. With their implicit message about the evanescence of natural beauty, these temporary blooms are necessary and poignant punctuation to this celebration of sensual indulgence.

*Akiko Busch is a contributing editor to this magazine.*

## the luxury of **COLOR**

*"COLOR IS THE ONLY TRULY SUBJECTIVE SENSE. If you say something is hard, you can bump your head against it, but color has no other reference. You can't check it out with another sense, and that makes it really alive. There's an old quote from Hans Hofmann, the painter: 'In nature, light creates color. In painting, color creates the light.' Color in a room is very tricky, though: too much of a bright color can quickly become torture. Richly saturated color is joyful, but you have to measure it out very carefully. When it's right, a total ambient light comes off it. It's warm and livable."*

PETER PLAGENS, artist and art critic for Newsweek