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DECORATING

From Town House to Our House

Trendsetting interiors couple Douglas and Miranda Abrams transformed a frumpy old town house into a fresh and fabulous expression of eclecticism. Their secrets start here. **By Jodi Bryson. Produced by Sara Ruffin**

■ Designing duo Douglas Abrams and Miranda Robertson Abrams spend their days creating dream homes for other people. He's CEO of the Portico empire of ultrahip home-design stores; she—a former model who's part Sri Lankan—heads up Portico Interiors, its in-store interior-design service. When it was their turn to wave the decorator's wand over a home of their own, they chose an abandoned 1856 town house in New York City's Gramercy Park area with beautiful bones that could stand up to their modern, mix-it-up take on design.

"We wanted the structure and finishes to have an old-world feel, but the décor had to reflect our ages," says 29-year-old Miranda. "We're a young couple, but we recognize that we're living in an old house that a family would live in. So we threw the best of the old in with the best of what's going on right now."

Right now, the best of what's going on is going *in*, room by room, to their rambling brownstone. It's all about clean lines with eclectic pieces, brilliant mohair fabrics and amazing woods, antique furniture with modern lighting, but everything is filtered through a quirky, pared-down perspective. Says Miranda, "I hate the overdone-by-a-decorator, don't-touch-anything theme box approach to rooms; I love what's unpredictable."

Pottery and barns (opposite): Frosty pastel vases and white upholstered chairs are juxtaposed against a magnificent rustic barn-wood table. Chandelier by Portico. (left) Miranda wears a cashmere Portico nightgown; behind her, Portico's Madonna mirror. (above) Pups Memphis and Ruby romp past a window.
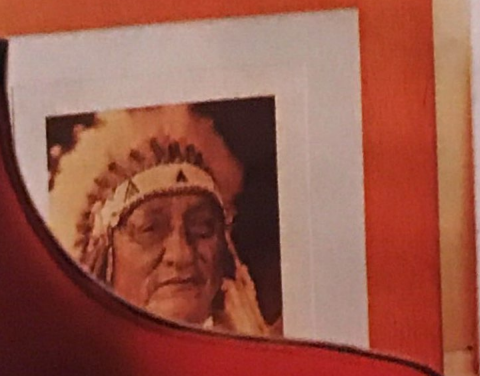
"Someone could walk into the house in 50 years and say the joint was very *now*."

The specifics on how she put this design philosophy into practice? In the living room, she started with her signature pale, creamy walls, put an edgy black-and-white '70s photograph of the Rolling Stones over an Italianate marble mantel, while covering a traditional English chair in a shock of burnt orange fabric. "It's the last thing you'd expect on that chair, but it's also a blast of color to a soft, muted room," she explains. Near the chair, Miranda wields her doing-the-unexpected expertise by leaning a portrait of a Native American by turn-of-the-century photographer, Edward S. Curtis, low to the ground. In the dining room, with its stripped-to-the-bare-wood showstopper of a doorway and intricate Italianate molding, Miranda chose not a grand table and chandelier but a rustic table fashioned from old barn wood and a simple, stark wrought-iron light.

The other secret to her success: remarkable restraint in not gunking up the look with loads of bric-a-brac. "Don't overdo it. Clutter kills the effect," insists Miranda. Instead of displaying knick-knacks to invest her rooms with texture, Miranda depends on a mix of wood tones. For instance, in the bedroom, she's assembled an array of shades but explains, "The woods don't have to match. They just have to work together."

Her last bit of advice is to toss together striking items that strike your fancy, regardless of their era. The master bedroom provides some intriguing evidence—a mod lamp shares space with a spate of English botanical prints...and it *works*. By not being rooted in replicating an established style, Miranda hopes her home will withstand her personal time test. "I'd hope someone could walk in to the home in 50 years and say the joint was classically beautiful but still very *now*." We'd say the odds are in her favor. ∎

Rock over rock (opposite page): An original black-and-white print of the Rolling Stones' *Black and Blue* album-cover photo above an Italianate marble mantel. The pale wood lamp by Portico provides a sleek counterpoint to a curvy antique chair. (above) Douglas and Miranda in the foyer. (right) Miranda keeps the bedroom ambiance airy with sheer curtains in baby blue silk with a pale green strip at bottom. Portico sleigh bed.