

# PETITE-MINDED

For Muriel Brandolini, size mattered when it came to designing a client friend's Long Island guest house. Its dimensions called for modestly proportioned furniture, so compact mid-century pieces and earlier objects were in. But she offset their pared-down charms with a sprinkling of more effusive touches, including foliate bronze mirrors, an exotic hand-beaded landscape wall and glittery Damien Hirst silk screens. Text: Christopher Mason. Photography: Simon Upton

'It's a jewel box,' says Muriel Brandolini of the deluxe three-bedroom guest house she designed for an American client in Southampton, Long Island. The half-French, half-Vietnamese designer, known for her haute-bohemian panache and perfectionist demands, was amply acquainted with her client's sensibilities, having already decorated the main house and Manhattan duplex. 'She's a dear friend and an amazing individual with refined taste who loves beautiful objects,' Brandolini says. 'I'm lucky to work with her because I'm able to propose dream pieces.'

The goal was to design a more functional refuge for the expanding family, with a new playroom wing for grandchildren. 'With this client, the biggest challenge is the very strict deadlines,' she says. 'We needed to deliver *exactly* on time.' Otherwise, she adds, 'there were no restrictions. We had the same objectives – simple harmony, beauty, comfort and practicality.' Hesitancy, the bane of exasperated des-

igners, was never an issue. 'She's quick to decide', Brandolini says. 'I can get a yes or a no in 30 seconds.'

An ardent admirer of Scandinavian design, especially the Swedish Grace period of the 1920s, Brandolini discovered most of the house's contents in Paris, where she and her aristocratic Venetian husband, Nuno, have an apartment in the chic seventh arrondissement. Most of the vintage components are mid-century or earlier. 'The scale of the furniture was more petite back then,' she says, 'which was perfect for this jewel. Contemporary works can be quite massive, and the proportions wouldn't work for this space.'

In the salon, mullioned windows offer expansive views of lush gardens designed by Miranda Brooks. A 1950s Jean Royère daybed occupies the centre of the room, flanked with brass table lamps by Paavo Tynell, the industrial designer known as 'the man who illuminated Finland'. A sumptuous custom-made curved sofa occupies

a broad bay window, upholstered with grey tussah silk harvested from the cocoons of wild silkworms, embroidered with nifty shades of grey and cognac to evoke wind-tossed Japanese grasses. Elegant silver-grey silk throw pillows with embroidered pink-and-olive-green flowers showcase vintage textiles from Renate Halpern Galleries.

The crescent-shaped sofa forms a conversational ensemble with a 1950s 'Boomerang' armchair designed by Sven Johansson, the Swedish cabinetmaker, and a pair of voluptuous wicker chairs by the Australian-born industrial designer Marc Newson. Across the room, a 'Plume' vase by Gio Ponti sits on a 1930s walnut table by Renou & Genisset, attended by a pair of 1940s curule stools by Charles Dudouyt, the founder of the Gentilhommeière workshop in Paris. Behind them, a cased opening to the den is flanked by a spectacular pair of asymmetrical mirrors commissioned from David Wiseman (*Wol* May









Previous pages: in the salon, a Gio Ponti 'Plume' vase sits on a c1935 walnut table by Renou & Genisset, flanked by a pair of c1945 curule stools by Charles Dudouyt. The mirrors were commissioned from David Wiseman. The ceiling lights are by Paavo Tynell and the c1955 floor lamp is by George Jouve. An Elizabeth Dow seagrass paper from Holland & Sherry covers the walls, while the rug is by Sabine de Gunzburg. This page, top: the salon's bespoke Jonas sofa is covered with silk 'Spencer Embroidery' fabric by Hodsoll McKenzie from Zimmer & Rohde. A lamp by Eugène Printz and Jean Dunand rests on a Jules Leleu walnut table – both date from the 1930s. Right: a c1955 Jean Royère daybed stands in the same room. Brandolini designed the cherry-blossom sconce to the left and the wicker chairs at the rear are the work of Marc Newson















*Left: the playroom boasts a hand-beaded landscape wall and a corduroy 'Dromadaire' sofa by Jonas on a Fedora Design rug produced by Studio Four. The ceiling lamps are by Pierre Cardin. Top: the den features a Brandolini slipper chair and a Jonas daybed in 'Tjanting Stripe' fabric from Pollack. A 1950s tiled coffee table by Roger Capron and early 19th-century Biedermeier pedestal table stand nearby*



2022), the Los Angeles-based designer known for his explorations of the natural world in bronze, with entwined branches, leaves and a pair of winsome monkeys, one aslumber, one crouching.

In the den, one of Brandolini's signature slipper chairs combines effusively floral antique and vintage fabrics accented with bursts of purple, yellow, orange and blue. It keeps company with a Biedermeier pedestal table, a 1950s tiled coffee table by Roger Capron, and a bespoke daybed upholstered with yellow-and-white 'Tjanting Stripe' fabric. The base is trimmed with an opulent white raffia border created by Nicolas Chambeyron, the French craftsman who was wooed away from Christian Dior in Paris, where he worked with John Galliano, to deploy his vaunted embroidery skills in New York for Holland & Sherry, the venerable 19th-century fabric company headquartered on London's Savile Row. 'Everything I do with Nicolas is custom,' Brandolini says.

A bespoke midnight-blue glass oval 'Mojito' table by India Mahdavi, the Iranian/French designer and architect, serves as a supremely stylish breakfast table in the kitchen, with cornflower-blue cast-glass 'Fog' stools by Henry Dean. The vibrant blues stand out amid walls upholstered with biscuit-beige woven leather from Nacarat, Belgium.

For the playroom, Brandolini devised a captivating Caribbean-inspired landscape wall depicting coconut trees, succulents, a swirling river, and electric orange and yellow chickens, all hand-beaded in Vietnam. 'I designed it for the grandchildren to come and dream and imagine,' she says.

Brandolini, née Phan van Thiet, was a child when her family fled war-torn Vietnam in 1971. On an emotional first return visit in 1995, she saw a beaded handbag in the Cholon market in Ho Chi Minh City. 'I thought, why not apply this on walls?' She ran into a school friend and his wife,

*The salon's woven-leather blinds are from Nacarat in Belgium. To the fore, the den walls are covered with 'Cavaillon' fabric from Pierre Frey, based on an 18th-century striped brocade*





*A 1950s Gilbert Poillerat bed was copied to make a pair for the children's room. Damien Hirst's limited-edition silk-screen prints 'Mickey' and 'Minnie' (2016) adorn walls lined with 'Manisa' fabric from Studio Four*

Trinh, and convinced her – she can be exceedingly persuasive – to launch a new side business. 'I was so determined to work with Vietnamese artisans I guess my drive was infectious,' Brandolini says. 'She searched for ladies who did hand-embroidery and beading. I was thrilled that it opened the doors to collaborate with my country. Their handwork is incredible.'

Installing the beaded landscape in the Southampton playroom was challenging, for it had to fit exactly around the built-in shelving and desk. 'We had to be very precise with the dimensions and beading design,' says Brandolini. 'I was so worried about the chickens being beheaded by the shelving. It became a running joke with my genius contractor, CNR, whom I've worked with for 28 years. Thankfully, everything came together perfectly.'

In the grandchildren's bedroom, playful silk-screened portraits of Mickey and Minnie Mouse by Damien Hirst, encrusted

with glitter, adorn walls that are upholstered with 'Manisa' fabric, inspired by stylised 19th-century Ottoman flowers and trees. In Paris, Brandolini found a single 1950s wrought-iron bed by Gilbert Poillerat and had it replicated to make a pair for this room. Hand-embroidered custom bed linens came from Vis-à-Vis in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the source of all of the house's bedding, and cashmere Holland & Sherry throws were embroidered with parrots by Nicolas Chambeyron, a theme echoed in the carpet. Venini red-green-blue-and-yellow pendant lamps, another fanciful touch, hang over bedside tables created by the young Icelandic designer Brynjar Sigurðarson for Galerie Kreo in London.

The guest-house project was completed two years ago, before Covid. 'Even now, I wouldn't change a thing,' Brandolini says @ *Muriel Brandolini*. Ring 001 212 645 5940, or visit [murielbrandolini.com](http://murielbrandolini.com)



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