

By Catherine McHugh

Portrait by Andrew French

# SHE COMES IN COLORS

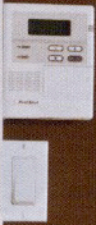
GHISLAINE VIÑAS ESPOUSES A LIGHTHEARTED RAINBOW AESTHETIC

At Ghislaine Viñas Interior Design, nothing is ever merely black and white. Instead, the company's principal chooses the hottest reds, the coolest blues, and every color in between (along with stripes, polka dots, and the like) to formulate her signature design style.

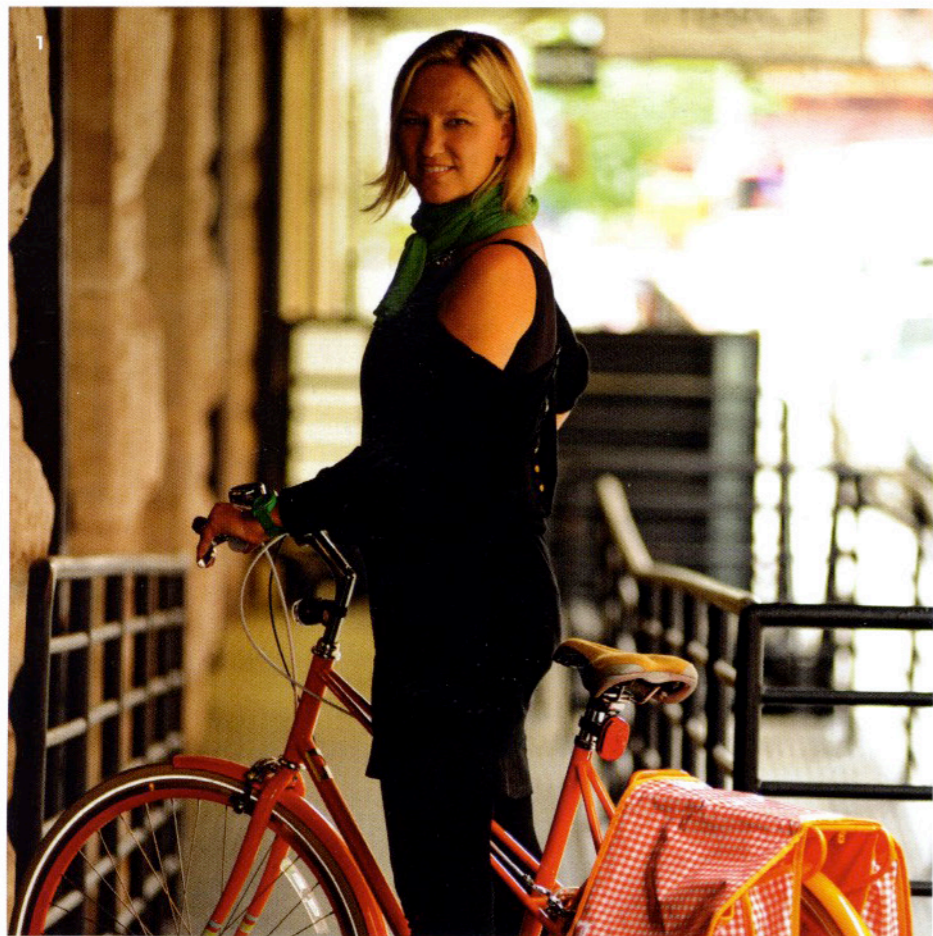
Facing page, (Montauk House-Master Bedroom)

The client loved mermaids, so this statue/lamp now presides. Kitsch? For sure, but it adds so much fun. On the back wall, photos of mermaids, of course! This page, (Bachelor Loft in Tribeca) A sulphur yellow wall creates a dramatic entry. Orange upholstery and an orange rug continue the warm tones. White furniture and walls keep the palate crisp, clean, and modern.









Born in the Netherlands, the winner of the 2007 Pantone "Color Outside the Lines" competition and the Benjamin Moore 2010 Hue Award (both in the Residential Interiors category) ascribes to a Dutch sensibility when it comes to design—even though she grew up in South Africa. "I've always felt that it's in my blood. I think my sense of color just naturally comes from that because I really don't shy away from it—I LOVE color. AS A CHILD, I WOULD FEEL A RUSH OF EXCITEMENT WHEN OPENING A BOX OF CRAYONS AND BY THE THOUGHT OF PUTTING DIFFERENT COLORS TOGETHER."

This passion, along with her childhood pursuits of attending open houses with her mother nearly every Sunday and creating Barbie-doll houses at the bottom of her closet eventually pointed her toward a career in interior design.

While pursuing her degree in interior architecture from Philadelphia University, Viñas fell in love with New York City during her first visit and resolved to make it her home upon her graduation in 1990. "I even live in the same loft in Tribeca that I moved into with a bunch of roommates," she says. "Everybody eventually left except me and then I met my husband and he moved in—and now we share it with our two little girls."

Indeed, her geographic happenstance has served as fertile ground for clients. Although she has completed both commercial and residential projects in Los Angeles, Holland, and all around the Tri-State area, Viñas has done much of her work in her Tribeca neighborhood. "I've been really lucky," she says. "It's a great feeling because there are so many interesting projects happening here."

In fact, Viñas recently completed work on a large townhouse on Warren Street that she had been working on for the past three years. She has designed four residences and two offices for this client, Paige West, including the 10,000 square-foot office in the Starrett-Lehigh building in Chelsea, which put Viñas on the map about ten years after she arrived in the Big Apple.

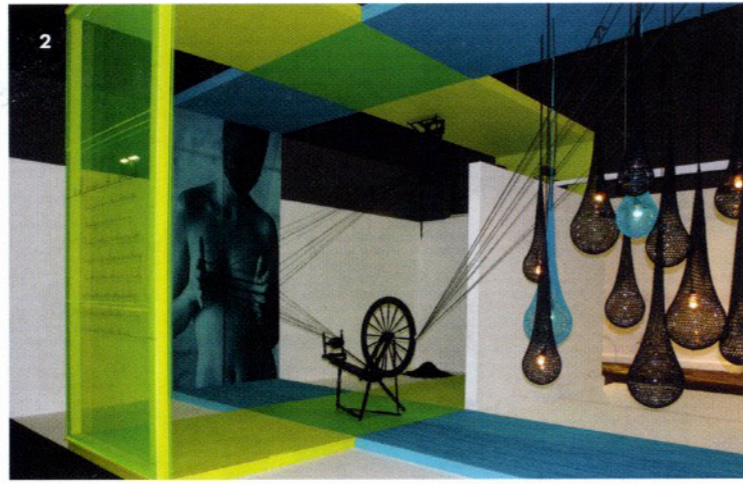
At that time, Viñas was working for a modular furniture company as a designer/sales person. "I WAS KIND OF LEARNING THE BUSINESS END IN A STRANGE WAY—HOW TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE AND HOW TO GET WHAT I WANTED WITHOUT BEING PUSHY," she explains. "I did a bit of freelance design work as well, but I felt that I was kind of losing track of my design aesthetic."

A friend introduced her to West in 1999, when the dot-com boom was in full swing and new offices were being set up all over the city. "I hadn't really been that active in interior design up to that point, so I figured it was a long shot, but she and I hit it off and she loved my ideas."

Viñas then threw herself into creating a sophisticated office/art gallery out of what was a completely raw space with no electricity, no plumbing—not even an architect. "I was very green, but I told people that up front," she says. "Certainly I had a background in this work, and my degree, but I hadn't

1. Ghislaine Viñas captured near her Tribeca studio. 2. (Bachelor Loft in Tribeca-Living Room) The colors in this room were based on men's suiting—grays, charcoals, felts, and wools were used. The pops of color reference accent colors in neckties. 3. (Bachelor Loft in Tribeca-Dining Area and Kitchen Seating) Oranges, natural wood, and white are the colors. A repetition of rounded forms soften the feel of the space. 4. (Pied-à-terre in Manhattan) A strong orange back wall is echoed in the orange of the living room chairs. The only other colors in the space are white and cream.





really gotten my feet wet in this situation before. So I pulled together a crew of people who I thought would do a good job. **I THINK THE SMARTEST THING TO DO IS TO ACCEPT THAT YOU CAN'T DO EVERYTHING AND TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT.** It was hard work, but I loved the whole process."

That success prompted the designer to quit her full-time job and establish her eponymous design firm. "I figured it was now or never, but it was very tough at the beginning," she admits. "I was just doing a lot of little jobs here and there." Then West hired her again—this time to do a townhouse. "That was my first residential project and it got published in a design magazine, so that's how I got rolling."

Now, ten years down the road, Viñas is quite choosy about the people she works with. The designer currently works closely with one full-time employee

1. (Montauk House-Master Bedroom) The headboard, an eBay find, was re-upholstered in blue corduroy and the frame painted white for a modern vintage vibe and a casual romantic look. 2. An installation for Interface combined sulphur yellow and turquoise, using the same raw materials used to make the carpet tiles. 3. (Montauk House-Guest Room) A study in grays, silvers, and whites. The only color is found in the custom headboard. 4. (Tribeca Leonard Street Loft) "People are sometimes surprised to learn that white is my very favorite color. I don't design without it, and I love designing all white rooms." 5. (Tribeca Family Loft-Open Kitchen/Living Room) The space is all white with bamboo floors and a concrete floor and counter in the kitchen. The defining color was picked to match hot pink streaks in the client's hair. 6. (Montauk House-Entry) A custom linoleum rug is an introduction to the many colors to be found throughout the house. 7. (Montauk House-Guest Room) The design of the purple and orange guest room was inspired by the curtain fabric. Keeping much of the furniture white balances out the color.







and calls in freelancers when necessary. "My business has grown bigger at times, but I haven't always liked the tradeoff," she says. "I am at every client meeting—it's a very personal service."

This type of personal attention has allowed Viñas to build her business almost exclusively through word-of-mouth referrals. "I KNOW THAT I'M MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION BECAUSE MY LAST PROJECT IS ALWAYS MY FAVORITE," she says. "I think I'm growing as a designer and I love the path that I'm taking. I would love to get into hotel design because I think my style really lends itself to a quirky, modern kind of place."

"I always have a lot of fun doing the guest rooms in the houses I do because the design is not for a specific person, so it gives me more freedom," she continues. "I just finished a guest house in upstate New York where everything is based on a picnic. The curtains have giant red-and-white plaid patterns and there are garden gnomes and light fixtures that are filled with plastic ants. It's funny and it looks great and modern but it's bordering on kitsch, which I enjoy."

"THE THINGS THAT MAKE ME HAPPIEST IN LIFE ARE LAUGHING AND ENJOYING LIFE AND I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO PUT THEM INTO INTERIORS," she continues. "Of course, it's important to get a strong architectural basis down, but I throw a lot of fun into my designs. Ultimately, especially regarding the residential side of my work, I JUST WANT TO CREATE HOMES FOR PEOPLE THAT MAKE THEM SMILE AND FEEL REALLY HAPPY AND COMFORTABLE. THAT'S THE MOST GRATIFYING THING ABOUT MY WORK."

Viñas does have some advice for prospective clients before they hire her to color their worlds: Be bold. "YOU HAVE TO BE SOMEWHAT COURAGEOUS TO WORK WITH ME BECAUSE A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE THINKING IN TERMS OF BEIGES AND BROWNS, AND I JUST DON'T DO MY BEST WORK IN THOSE PARAMETERS," she concludes. "I want to work with people who will use my talents to their full capacity. That's really important to me."

1. (Montauk House-Basement Rec Room) Vintage Hawaiian surf photos, blown up and wallpapered onto two perpendicular walls. Long banquette seats double as extra beds. 2. (Tribeca Family loft-Kids Bathroom) All white except for the green grass tile (an actual photograph of grass) and a green sink. 3. (Montauk House-Guest Room) Each of the five guest rooms has a very different feel, color, and decor. This room has apple green walls, a silver and green wallpapered ceiling and black accents. 4. (Tribeca Penthouse) The client loved plates and had a collection. Viñas added to it by scouring thrift stores, garage sales, and antiques shops to find a fun, eclectic mix. 5. (Mixed Greens Gallery-Office) A collaboration with Leven Betts Architects. The entire space is white except for the interior rooms. Like when biting into a bonbon—there's a surprise inside. 6. (Pied-à-terre in Manhattan) A simple palate of green, black, and white is made interesting by varying the greens—combining chartreuse and apple keeps things interesting. 7. (Montauk House-Kitchen) Powder blue walls and a bright blue table give color to this white kitchen. 8. (Bachelor Loft in Tribeca-Office and Pink Guest Room) Warm tones were used in all the public spaces and cool tones in the bachelor's private spaces. The office is fresh green. The guest room was designed with the client's sister in mind.