



INTERIORS

Alessandra Branca Dreams Up a Lyrical, Art-Filled Hideaway in Palm Beach

For a couple's South Florida "pied-à-mer," the designer conceived a jewel box retreat that pops with soigné style

BY JULIE BELCOVE PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON UPTON
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An Hervé Van der Straeten pendant, a Philip Taaffe canvas, and an Andy Warhol silkscreen add chromatic flair to the living room. Arrayed around a Van der Straeten cocktail table are a custom sofa, a floor lamp and lounge chairs by Mattia Bonetti, a leaf-form side table by Clotilde Ancarani, and 18th-century Venetian armchairs upholstered in a Dedar fabric. The abaca rug is by The Natural Carpet Company.

A [lessandra Branca](#) has a habit of naming her projects. The designer, who is based in Chicago and Palm Beach, Florida, says it serves as a reminder that each possesses its own unique identity, rather than merely reflecting her personal aesthetic.

When a couple enlisted her to design their new [Palm Beach](#) house—off the beaten path, hidden behind lush foliage, and measuring a modest 2,900 square feet—she dubbed it the Pavilion. The

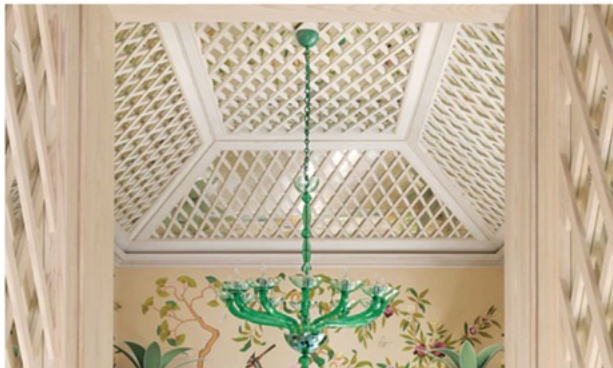
name was a nod to the delightful ancillary structures often built on large European properties in the 17th and 18th centuries. “They were little follies of sorts in the gardens,” Branca says. “You didn’t live there, but it was a place where you went and were entertained—a little escape.”



An Alex Israel painting and a Robert Mapplethorpe photograph are set against walls lined in an Élitis grass cloth in the sunroom, where Bielecky Brothers rattan swivel chairs cushioned in a Rose Cumming print join a custom sofa and a Casa Branca ottoman table upholstered in a woven fabric from Christopher Farr Cloth. The pendant is by Soane, and the lamp is by Lisa Johansson-Pape, from the 1960s.

With spacious homes in the suburbs of Chicago, Aspen, and another Florida enclave, the clients wanted a private getaway. “It’s sort of a pied-à-terre, a pied-à-mer,” Branca says, “a toe in Palm Beach.”

Reconfiguring the 1950s-era, one-story residence with architecture by Fairfax & Sammons, Branca sought to provide “a lot of big living in a small space.” She also wanted to instill a more structured flow by reinforcing separation between rooms. “I believe a floor plan can help choreograph a lifestyle,” the designer says.





The dining room's circa-1940 Venetian chandelier echoes tones in the hand-painted Fromental wallpaper and the curtains, which were made using a Jim Thompson fabric. Branca paired the vintage Angelo Mangiarotti marble table with Bielecky Brothers chairs and installed Mattia Bonetti palm torchères on vintage plaster columns by Serge Roche.



The study, lined in a Scalamandré grass cloth, is enlivened by a Jonas Wood painting framed by circa-1960 Jacques Quinet sconces above a custom sofa that faces a Soane bench covered in a vintage batik and a midcentury slipper chair by T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings.

Branca's biggest changes included converting a guesthouse at the back, across a small courtyard, into the dining room and kitchen, and inserting a proper entryway just inside the home's front door. The latter addition creates an elegant pause, slowing visitors' progression to the living room, where classical elements such as 18th-century Venetian armchairs and a **Louis XV** mantelpiece mix with a boldly contemporary **Hervé Van der Straeten** light fixture and sculptural **Mattia Bonetti** chairs whose frameworks feature gracefully climbing gilt-bronze vines tipped with pink onyx buds.

The chairs' botanical motif is picked up by a Clotilde Ancarani leafy bronze table between them and by the twin bronze **Claude Lalanne** chairs with delicate leaves stationed in front of the fireplace. Not least, it is also echoed by a Philip Taaffe canvas distinguished by a kaleidoscopic pattern of algae, aquatic plants, and seashells above the sofa. "It's a bit surrealistic," Branca says of the decor, noting that "nothing is meant to be thematic. But it all came together."



The front entrance to the house, which Branca dubbed the Pavilion, features architecture by Fairfax & Sammons.



A circa-1880 Italian terra-cotta planter rests atop a 16th-century limestone pedestal, also from Italy.

As serious art collectors, the clients had an enviable trove of works from which to draw. But Branca, who declares that she is "not an artist," says her MO was to focus on decorating first

Branca, who declares that she is not an art snob, says her aim was to focus on decorating first and integrate the art thoughtfully rather than isolating works in what she calls “grand moments.” In one gesture, she positioned an Andy Warhol Marilyn Monroe opposite an 18th-century mirror, so that a person entering the living room would glimpse the silkscreen painting’s reflection before seeing the hot-pink work itself. Similarly, in one corner, she fashioned a charming vignette consisting of a small Diego Rivera gouache, an antique chest, and a 1930s lamp.

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ALESSANDRA BRANCA

In the husband’s cozy study, Branca hung a vibrant Jonas Wood domestic scene against one of the grass cloth-clad walls, which she crowned with cerused-oak moldings inset with antique mirror. That impactful design element, Branca notes, borrows from the legendary 20th-century architect David Adler, whose former Chicago townhouse she calls home, and his sister, interior designer Frances Adler Elkins.

Branca also tips her hat to the other style icons who inspired ideas for the Pavilion, among them Pauline de Rothschild, whose 11-foot-tall canopy bed preceded the custom four-poster in bronze in the primary bedroom. “You have to give credit where credit is due,” she says of her homage.



Branca conceived the primary bedroom’s four-poster bronze bed, which is flanked by Chahan Design ceramic lamps and Osanna Visconti mirrors. A vintage Jansen floor lamp stands next to a circa-1760 Louis XV bergère upholstered in a Fortuny fabric.

Even rooms with a more relaxed vibe don't skimp on flair. The chicly detailed sunroom, an inviting spot for drinks, games, or a casual meal, is highlighted by spirited furnishings, such as a pair of Bielecky Brothers rattan swivel chairs in a Rose Cumming banana-leaf print as well as a vintage Angelo Mangiarotti table ringed by 1970s **Gabriella Crespi** rattan side chairs. Helping to unite the space are two disparate but complementary nature-based artworks: **Alex Israel's** colorful painting *Wave* and one of Robert Mapplethorpe's sensual black-and-white close-ups of a calla lily.

In the new dining space, Branca papered the walls in a hand-painted tropical mural by Fromental and covered the tray ceiling with antiqued mirror overlaid with latticework. "It reflects light really beautifully at night," she says, noting that the room opens to the courtyard. "It ends up being this little jewel box that reflects the little jewel box of a garden."



In the wife's dressing room, a Fortuny fabric clads the custom closets and the vanity. Sheathed in Calacatta Viola marble, the study's bath is outfitted with an Hervé Van der Straeten mirror and 1940s Venetian sconces.

A 1940s Venetian chandelier hangs above a marble dining table. Branca, a veritable textbook of design history, points out that the light fixture's poison-green hue takes its name from bottles that once held toxic potions. "It was a specific color of green so that when you were in an apothecary, you wouldn't take it by mistake, back when many people were illiterate," she explains. After a pause, Branca adds, "I just love that kind of stuff."

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