

HOME DESIGN / ART / GARDENING / WINE / REAL ESTATE

CHARLESTON STYLE & DESIGN

SUMMER 2021





MASTER OF COLOR

Historic doesn't have to mean traditional

by ANGELA CARAWAY-CARLTON / *photography by* HOLGER OBENAU

STEP THROUGH THE WROUGHT-IRON GATES of this historic Charleston carriage home on Lamboll Street, with an impressive address South of Broad and almost touching the nearby ocean, where Alexandre Fleuren has created a vibrant color story for the new homeowners. Freshening up the 2,000-square-foot home, Fleuren—known for her design transformations of historic properties and numerous carriage house conversions in the historic district—moved beyond the traditional and expected that's often seen in the area.

"My first thought was to wash it in all white and give it a fresh start, but that would be easy and not in keeping with the new owners' personality," says the principal of Alexandre Fleuren Interiors, who's been in the industry for more than 25 years. Instead, she boldly bathed the entire property in a raffia palm grasscloth wallcovering by Thibaut in an unexpected apple green hue. "It's on every inch of this property, even in the laundry room," says Fleuren of the unpredictable wallcovering that wraps the interior of the three-story home. "It seems like a bold choice, but it's a way to unify a small place, and the cohesive palette offers an expansive feel."

Using that same apple green color as the foundation, a hue that she feels resembles new life, Fleuren brazenly fashioned a different color narrative on every level. The main floor is splashed in caramels, deep indigo and icy blues; the second floor hosts magenta, purple, fuchsia and turquoise; and the top level reveals yellow, navy and orange. "It's easy to tie everything together with safe neutrals," says Fleuren, "but I wanted to show that we can have fun with one bold color that looks totally different in separate spaces with other strong colors."

Awash in white, the second-floor master bedroom is where Fleuren allows the eye to rest. The room stands out with a custom upholstered bed in a Thibaut chinoiserie fuchsia and white colorway and a purple wool carpet. "I couldn't completely abandon that apple green color," adds Fleuren, who touched the bed with a custom bed scarf in a similar green. "When they tuck in at night, they can cozy up with that apple green."

One of the biggest challenges Fleuren faces when reimagining historic homes is finding rugs that fit the often oddly sized rooms. For this project, she worked closely with Fine Rugs of Charleston to source large, vibrant afghan rugs from the Middle East, which act as pieces of art in the rooms, along with paintings from Mary Martin Gallery.

Another interesting design choice: There's not a single lamp or dropped chandelier in the house. Instead, all the lighting is recessed, spotlights or wall sconces over the beds. "When you have these small spaces, lamps take up a lot of visual space," Fleuren explains. "If you can avoid them, it's ideal."

While the rooms brimming with color offer a fresh, modern take, spaces are sprinkled with antiques in keeping with the character of the historic home. Fleuren highlighted the gorgeous wood rafters and brick masonry in the four fireplaces, which are the original focal pieces of the home. In the dining room, draped in indigo and caramel colors, a set of French art deco chairs features upholstered seat cushions in a marigold shade that offers a nice contrast with the ebony wood of the petite table. In the living room, Fleuren re-homed a French armoire from another Charleston project, with an interior that lovingly boasts cutouts from a French newspaper that dates to the early 1800s, along with custom upholstered swivel club chairs and a French art deco drum table in pressed copper that is inlaid with tigerwood veneers. Six sets of French doors off the living and dining rooms make a statement and lead to a private, lush courtyard meant for sipping coffee, reading and relaxing.



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The first thing that catches your eye in the study is an afghan rug dashed in a profusion of magenta, fuchsia, eggplant and purple colors. "It's the most colorful rug that I've ever seen," says Fleuren of the piece that was the starting point of the room's décor. It's flanked by two French art deco seashell chairs swathed in blush French velvet; a custom table made of limestone rests upon the rug. A French Provincial secretary, a beloved piece from the homeowner's collection, touts its original pink gilding.

Like the secretary's prime placement, Fleuren relishes incorporating pieces that are special to each homeowner in her designs. Move up to the third-floor guest room where a custom navy-and-white bed scarf in a mulberry tree pattern is a brilliant reminder of a special tree on the property. Silk pillows are enveloped in cantaloupe, turquoise and deep navy blue hues, and there is an Asian silk screen from a private collection. Silver Indonesian water drums serve as nightstands, and an adorable window seat—cloaked in another vivacious Thibaut fabric—overlooks the courtyard.

Locals and visitors in Charleston had the unique opportunity to step into Fleuren's kaleidoscope of color during a historic tour of homes this past May. "There's no way you can walk into this home drenched in all that color and not be happy. Each room offers its own surprise without straying from that apple green that ties it together," says Fleuren. "This is me at my best. I want people to walk in and recognize that I'm a master of color." *

Angela Caraway-Carlton is a Miami-based freelance writer, travel and lifestyle expert, and television producer. Her works have appeared in *Indulge Magazine*, *Time Out*, *Elysian*, *Aventura*, *South Florida Luxury Guide* and *Modern Luxury Weddings South Florida & the Caribbean*. Caraway-Carlton has covered lifestyle trends in South Florida and beyond for more than a decade.

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