

Look on the bright side

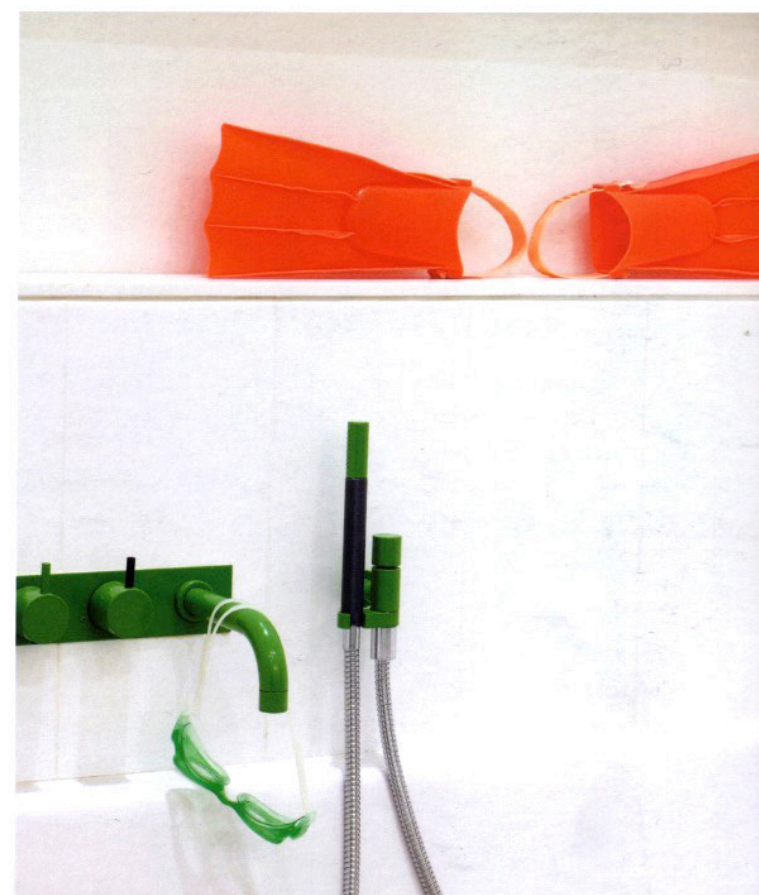
A wonderfully colourful and wacky townhouse in New York is the result of an especially fruitful relationship between a gallery owner and an innovative interior designer.

TEXT: IAN PHILLIPS PHOTOGRAPHY: ERIC LAIGNEL / TRIPOD AGENCY

The vivid hues in the kitchen were inspired by a painting by Lisa Ruyter, which hangs on a wall nearby.



Clockwise from top: Viñas chose semi-circular sofas and a black palette for the living room to add a touch of sophistication; the taps in the boys' bathroom were designed by Arne Jacobsen and Vola; A guest bedroom dominated by green, a signature colour used by the decorator on each project.



Left: The Styrofoam sculpture, created by Brooklyn-based artist Jason Rogenes, hangs by the main staircase. Right: The colours and ceiling light in West's office were inspired by a photo of a parakeet, which West gave to Viñas.

Ask New York-based decorator Ghislaine Viñas why she likes colour and she tells you she doesn't know. "It's just something that is very much intrinsic," she asserts.

Viñas claims she inherited a sort of fearlessness from her mother and recalls being incredibly excited as a child every time she came across a bunch of crayons. "Colouring books were huge for me," she remembers. As a decorator, she's never been interested in working with beiges and browns; she also has trouble understanding why anyone would be scared of bright hues. "I'm scared of walking in the woods and being attacked by a bear or something," Viñas recounts. "But, colour? I don't get it. I think it makes you happy."

Vivid tones certainly play a large part in one of her most recent projects – a wonderfully wacky, 1,440sq/m, six-storey townhouse in New York's TriBeCa district. The entrance hall features an orange fleur-de-lis motif, two broad red horizontal bands wrap their way around the children's playroom, the island in the kitchen is egg-yolk yellow and the library features two sheep that look for all the world as if they're grazing on a grass-green rug.

The home in question belongs to developer JC Keeler and his wife Paige West, who runs the gallery Mixed Greens in Chelsea and also curates a family art collection that runs to more than 3,500 works. The couple previously lived in a townhouse in the West Village, but as they started to have children, discovered the inconvenience of constantly having to go up and down stairs. They now have three young boys – Charlie, five, and twins Jack and Fred, three.

According to Keeler, their new abode offers "the best of loft living with the best of townhouse living". They still have their own building, but this time with large floor plates and an elevator to whisk them between floors. There had previously been a crumbling 1915 warehouse on the site, which he transformed with the help of his business partner, architect Pete Guthrie.

Of the original structure, they kept only 70 per cent of the existing floor joists and three of the exterior brick walls. Otherwise, they added a penthouse to the top and a roof garden above that, and created two distinct units within the

building. The lower two storeys are home to independent guest quarters, the upper four to the family home.

Although the old façade was replaced with bluestone from Keeler's native Catskill Mountains, the original window placement was maintained. "It was important that the building not make too splashy a statement from the street," Guthrie declares. "The whole point of the project is for the architecture to be restrained so [Paige and Ghislaine] can really bounce their colours and pop within the space."

The townhouse is actually the seventh project on which the two women have collaborated and West asserts she would never work with anyone else. "We think alike," she explains. "We've got so close that we now finish each other's sentences."

As for the Dutch-born, South African-raised Viñas, she insists that the design process is effortless. "It's very spontaneous," she says. "It's not brain surgery. It's just instinctual kind of fun."

"Ghislaine understands my high-brow, low-brow approach," West says. "I like nice things and yet at the same time, I have three boys under the age of six, and don't like fussy things. Ghislaine understands that and has a wonderful way of making things look spectacular and over-the-top, and yet extremely liveable and very difficult to destroy." One example is a pair of chairs that has been upholstered in a vinyl fabric.

Inspiration for the décor came from numerous sources. The top-floor library, for instance, features natural wood to reflect West's Scandinavian roots. For her office, West presented Viñas with a photo of a parakeet she'd ripped out of a magazine. "It's bright blue and yellow, and fluffy and gorgeous," West affirms. "And I said to her: 'This is exactly how I want the room to feel!'"

Viñas's response? She came up with a large ceiling light that sprouts turquoise feathers. In the living room, meanwhile, the carpet bearing a motif of yellow snowflakes and veil is meant as a nodding wink to the fact that Keeler and West were married in the ski resort of Aspen.



Clockwise from left: Ghislaine Viñas; Hans-Peter Krafft's sheep "graze" on a wool rug in the library; vintage wooden chairs upholstered in vinyl and dipped in the entrance foyer; green features in another guestroom with the *Pop Duo* armchair and a painting titled *Scene No. 11*.



Throughout, there are lots of quirky, amusing touches. A wall near the library features an installation of evergreen trees from train sets; another in the kitchen has hundreds of plates from flea markets and garage sales arranged in circular patterns.

"There are some hideous ones in there," Viñas laughs. "I get so much fun out of finding disgusting things." As for the formal dining room chairs, they bear images of the family's favourite dishes. Among them sushi, spaghetti meatballs and ice cream with sprinkles.

Given West's profession, it is not surprising that art also plays a large role in the house. The only piece that was placed in her mind before work started on the interiors was the vivid red and yellow Lisa Ruyter painting *Hoodlum* in the kitchen. "It's bright and fun and just kind of represents what I wanted the house to be," West comments.

In the boys' bedroom, she commissioned one of Mixed Greens' artists, Mark Mulrone, to paint a mural and in the middle of the stairwell placed a Styrofoam sculpture by Brooklyn artist Jason Rogenes. On one of the living room walls, meanwhile, is a round paper cut out by Simon Perriton, which she jokingly refers to as "our large doily".

As for Keeler, his presence is felt outside, where he insisted on the installation of a 12m-high climbing wall (Viñas chose neon green for the hand and foot holds). He started climbing in Colorado some 20 years ago and according to West, "looks at most walls and tries to figure out how to scale them".

Inside, however, he more or less let West and Viñas have free rein. "They get to collaborate and do the fun stuff they want to do," he says. "If there's something they have a question about, I will often get the last vote. But they have a very strong sense of their own aesthetic, which I fully embrace. They pretty much command the show." And what a show it is. 