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San Francisco

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The Looker

Spring 2013
Design Scout
EDITED BY LAUREN MURROW



LUSH LIFE: A maker of miniature architectural models covers a wall of her home studio in faux foliage.

BRUCE D'AMONTE

Of Miniatures and Mondrian

AN ARCHITECT AND AN ARTIST TAKE DESIGN CUES FROM A DUTCH MASTER IN THEIR RUSSIAN HILL RENOVATION.
BY JOANNE FURIO

IT TAKES SOME GUMPTION to build a three-story addition onto one's home as an homage to the painter Piet Mondrian. What if the primary-color blocks end up looking more Legoland than Louvre? Luckily for owners John Marx, a principal at Form4 Architecture, and Nikki Beach, who creates miniature trees for architectural models, an eye for color comes naturally. "Our whole family is made up of painters," says Marx.

When the pair moved into their 1907 Russian Hill house a decade ago, Beach adopted the tiny living room as a studio for her tiny topiaries. After jointly amassing a sizable collection of art and ephemera over the years—taxidermy, vintage signs, toys, classical-sculpture



Overlying color-block panels by Pleasant Hill glass artist Dan Winterich add pops of color to the exterior view.



The black leather sofa is by Scandinavian Designs. Nikki Beach's father painted the series of portraits above the doorway in the '40s.

On the Douglas fir-paneled floor, 20th-century furniture bridges the transition into the new addition. A 3' form green glass table and Wolfgang Mezger's Lipse chairs top a rug from Donegal Carpets.

The painting studio offers a view of Mount Tamalpais. The Zanotta Wire table rests on a CB2 This Is Art rug. The mobile is from the de Young Museum shop.



reproductions, and many, many paintings—the couple found themselves rich in stuff and poor in wall space.

Marx built a 1,400-square-foot addition onto the back end of the house, doubling its original size. He calls the end result “Mondrian’s Window,” christened after the famed Dutch artist. (“I tend to give everything a romantic name,” he explains.)

Needless to say, blocks of color are the central theme. Rectangular swaths of Kool-Aid red, Yves Klein blue, and canary yellow appear in overlays on the windows, in glass insets in the flooring, and on the wood-paneled walls. Beyond the Mondrian motif, the couple’s eclectic taste is evident throughout, from a gallery’s worth of paintings by their parents, grandparents, children, and friends to a collection of 1930s vacuum cleaners and a stuffed macaw from the Philippines. A particular conversation piece: the faux foliage-covered wall of Beach’s tree-modeling studio, which doubles as an aviary-themed display for her collection of birdhouses and feathered objets d’art.

A steel spiral staircase crafted by San Marcos metalsmith Kenny Reeve bisects two floors of the addition.

The watercolor architectural illustrations were painted by architect-homeowner John Marx. An energy-efficient Rinnai gas fireplace heats the entire floor.

