

This page: Deborah Silver regards her sunroom as a grotto (a cave-like summer room). She also calls it a "reliquary," because its furnishings are antique. The table and chairs are from Savoir Faire Birmingham. Silver says the Clarence House fabric on the chairs is her all-time favorite. A tower/skylight was added and then covered with seashells/recycled, tumbled white glass. Silver also "upholstered" the ceiling in moss. The ceramic floor tile is original to the house.



Vibrant personality

BRILLIANT COLOR ENLIVENS A HOME WITH INDUSTRIAL ROOTS

BY REBECCA POWERS / PHOTOGRAPHS BY BETH SINGER

IT MAKES SENSE THAT DEBORAH SILVER would gravitate to a stylistically strong older home. She grew up in Detroit's architecturally significant Indian Village neighborhood.

She just took a detour along the way to finding her perfect house. Silver had been living in an almost rural setting on five acres in Orchard Lake when she decided the commute to her company, Detroit Garden Works in Sylvan Lake, was too time consuming.

Around that same time, her friend Frech Southerland, an antique dealer and florist, kept urging her to check out a house for sale in Pontiac's Seminole Hills neighborhood. "I thought Pontiac was too urban," Silver says. But Sutherland pushed her to just go and sit in front of the house. She did. And when she saw the 1930 residence, with its blend of Mediterranean and Arts and Crafts architectural styles, she was sold.

She's been there nine years now and loves its intimate floor plan, accessible location, and relatively small yard. "When you stand in the kitchen at night, you can see the pink neon of the laundromat," she says. "I just like the feeling of an older home."

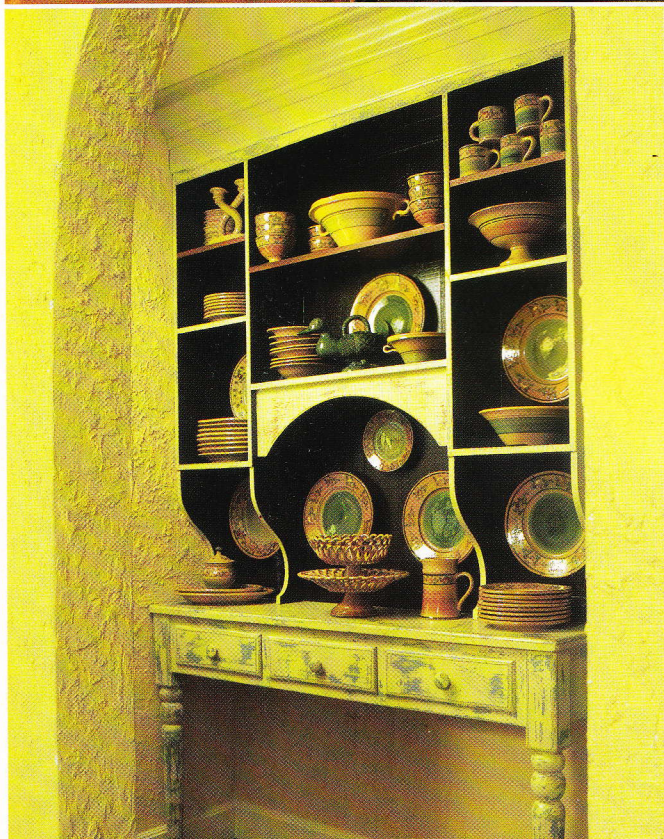
It's a house with an industrial pedigree. "The man who owned the Pontiac [General Motors] Foundry built this as a wedding present for his son, so it's commercial-grade construction," Silver says. "The front urns are the only urns General Motors ever made. I had to buy the house to get the urns."

She proudly cites its other sturdy assets produced by the commercial construction: a 3/4-million BTU steam boiler, 12-inch



This page: The dining room walls and furnishings are painted in several shades of green. Silver wanted the ceiling colored lime so it would look as though the lights were always on. The dining chairs were purchased at the Ann Arbor Antique Market. Don Taylor built the dining table and sideboard, which Silver designed to be a little "irreverent." Images of saints are visible throughout the house, because Silver is very interested in iconography and the stories of the saints. She says it's logical that a gardener would be interested in miracles.





This page top: The kitchen, designed to have the feel of an Italian farmhouse, has a wood floor routed to emulate bricks. A cobblestone inset accents the floor beneath the island, which was built of antique barn wood. The counters are soapstone and the new utility sink is by Kohler. A collection of Portmeirion Compleat Angler is displayed on the walls. **Below left:** In the back hall, a custom hutch by Don Taylor displays Veronique Pichon handmade French ceramics. Silver did the wedding-cake paint finish on the walls herself.

basement joists, and an in-garage car wash with a car-length overhead heater. But the muscular house needed some help with decor. "Everything in it was pink and mint green," she says.

A garden designer with a background in fine arts painting, Silver set about giving her home a vibrant personality. She likes color — strong color — and the mint-colored Formica in the kitchen was among the first elements to fall victim to her vision. The home's walls and ceilings now wear shades of green, orange, burgundy, hyacinth and gold.

The kitchen is Italian farmhouse in style. And the dining room sports multiple shades of green on the furniture, walls and ceiling. But what may be most *her* is the tower in the grotto. "I'm interested in garden places, and I'm particularly interested in grottos; they're a little spooky," she says. So she asked contractor Don Taylor to install a tower in the ceiling of her rear sun porch. "I

At right: Built in 1930, the home combines elements of Mediterranean and Arts and Crafts styles. The owner of the Pontiac (GM) Foundry built the home as a wedding gift for his son, which explains why the urns are heavy, factory-construction. **Below:** Silver takes a rare break during her busy spring season. She owns Detroit Garden Works in Sylvan Lake and has started a new offshoot company called Branch Manufacturing, which creates sculpture, including faux bois (false wood) pieces.



showed him a picture of a tower in Italy,” she says. And she got just what she wanted. She lined the walls of the tower with seashells (recycled, tumbled white glass) and covered the rest of the ceiling with moss. The overall effect is rather like *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

With the help of Taylor and designers Kelly Deines and Charles Dunlap, Silver pushed the limits in other rooms, as well. In the kitchen, the wood floor has a rectangular inset of cobblestone. The island was handmade of antique pine barn wood. And she had the dining room ceiling painted lime, she says, “so it would look like the lights were always on.”

The house is bold, but it’s infused with a measure of sophistication, thanks in part to Dunlap, a Pleasant Ridge designer and garden client of Silver’s.

“He was very patient about my involvement,” Silver says of Dunlap. “I wanted the house to look like me. I’m sure he thought the shell tower was hideous.” Dunlap helped her select the Baker furniture for the living room, for example, and suggested a traditional mirror above the fireplace.

For all the creative energy it exudes, Silver’s house is most importantly a quiet place to unwind after intense days at work. Sometimes, she says, when she comes home from the business she runs, she sits in the front screen porch facing the westerly breeze with a glass of wine and just watches the cars go by. □



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