

New Classic Interiors

Alessandra Branca

Stewart, Tabori and Chang (November 2009)

\$60.00 (272pp)

978-1-58479-787-6

*When in Rome... *well, we all know what to do, but what about when we *leave* Rome? Roman-born art historian-turned-interior-designer Alessandra Branca knows exactly what to do. Her keen eye and imaginative designs have been coveted from Rome to Chicago, and from New York to Beverly Hills. She's painting *all* the towns red...and ochre and cerulean, weaving her love of art and Roman architecture into rooms that are a rich interplay of color and texture, form and spontaneity. As owner of a Chicago-based design firm and acclaimed as top designer by *House Beautiful* and *Traditional Home*, Branca has received numerous accolades for the designs she creates for her clients.

In this book, the author invites us into her own homes in Rome, Chicago, and New York, rewarding the reader with lush and inviting spaces, where one feels compelled to nestle in and stay a while. Branca describes what she loves best of her favorite cities and how that impacts the spaces she creates. Of Rome she writes, "I might stop by...Santa Maria sopra Minerva—the only Gothic church in Rome, built directly on the foundations of Pompey's temple to Minerva... Outside in the square is one of those sculptures that always make me smile—Bernini's whimsical white marble baby elephant, balancing an Egyptian obelisk on his back..." The influences of her favorite places are readily apparent as entire rooms transform into breezy Roman tents, and otherwise dull walls are resurfaced to appear to be built of marble block. Her juxtaposition of different styles is like Bernini's sculpture; she creates something new and playful. Her rich and nuanced use of color she also accredits to her Roman roots: "I grew up in a culture that is saturated with color. You can't help but love it. It bombards you. Think of the scarlet reds and cobalt blues of Italian Renaissance paintings. The architecture of Italy—yellow stucco walls dripping with ivy, terra-cotta tiles—... Even the earth of Italy is not brown; it's red, as if it has been baked in the sun for centuries."

To illustrate these passions over 200 artfully composed photographs mingle with the author's own analysis of space and function. Special attention is given to the elements of color, pattern, space, scale, and comfort, aiding the reader in understanding the craft in these compositions. She writes, "There's a word in Italian, *estro*, which means 'spark.' It's the driving force, that little zing that makes a person or a thing original and unique." While Branca may not be the first to be impacted by the Italian Renaissance or the composition of the Pantheon, her design sensibilities definitely have their own divine spark. Meandering through her rooms offers a refreshing change from styles more commonly highlighted in current design books, and her deconstruction of the spaces affords the reader insight to create one's own inspired spaces, regardless of one's particular aesthetic sensibilities. Recommended to interior designers and lay persons alike, and to all displaced persons seeking to recreate the essence of home: Branca's contemporary use of Roman aesthetics demonstrates that even if you can never go home again, maybe you can take it with you.

(November / December 2009)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.