

rooms of her own

The owner's love of art, bold color, and history give her house its uniquely personal style.

Surround yourself with what you love.

It may be common design advice, but it's often the key to creating a beautiful living environment that's a reflection of who you are.

In Arielle Saiber's small Portland house, a mix of vibrant color, artwork, travel mementos, and family pieces infuse the interior with her personality.

"A home is like a temple; it's a retreat," says Saiber. "It's a place to honor your family, your guests, and who you are."

It's a lesson the Bowdoin College associate professor of Medieval and Renaissance Italian literature learned early, at the age of eight, poring over the pages of *Architectural Digest*, her first magazine subscription. Her longstanding interest in architecture and home design also taught her the importance of self-discipline and attention to detail.

"I grew up all over the world, often living in small spaces, and what you learn is how to maximize space by carefully picking objects that are both functional and beautiful," she says.

In 2005, after giving loft living in the Old Port a try, Saiber purchased an historic house in Portland's West End neighborhood. It is within walking distance of many amenities but offers her the quiet she needs. Saiber, author of two books and numerous scholarly articles, spends much of her time at home writing.

She looked past the drab walls that only emphasized the house's cramped interior and saw potential. Reputed to be one of the oldest continually lived-in houses in Portland, its age is something of a mystery. "There's no doubt it's at least from 1830, and part of it might be earlier," says Saiber.

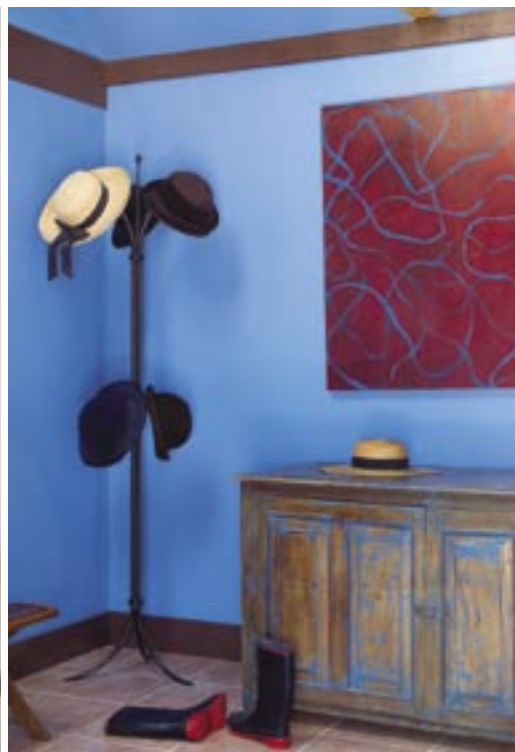
For the young academic, it was a perfect fit, and apparently she's not the first woman to think so. "What's kind of cool about it is that the last three owners were women," says Saiber, who learned as much from a lifelong neighborhood resident.

The owner's cat, Theodore, relaxes on the dining room table, made from a salvaged barn door. "He's basically Velcro. He's with me all the time and follows me from room to room," Saiber says. A painting by local artist Stephen Lanzalotta hangs on the vibrant salmon wall.





top: Cus by her grandfather, a Czech immigrant and New York City bookbinder. bottom: Built-in shelves and a pedestal sink maximize space in the small bathroom. Stefano Ram studying in Italy. at right: A glass panel with whimsical figures by local artist Jess Esch combines function and beauty.





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To make what she calls a “humble house” her own, Saiber first tackled the big stuff. A new furnace was installed, and paint stripped to restore the natural wood floors. The kitchen opened up with the removal of a low ceiling and addition of skylights. Insulation and a new tile floor transformed a dirt floor shed into a practical mudroom. In the living room, walls were lined with custom built-in bookshelves.

It took two months to complete the whirlwind renovation. The owner’s keen design sense and willingness to make quick decisions also helped. “I am a bit of a risk taker, which is part of why this got done as quickly as it did,” she says.

In this college professor’s house, old and new contrast playfully and an uncluttered simplicity reigns.

Removing doors and painting walls with bold, primary colors added a feeling of energy. “I had a sense that bright colors would make small spaces feel bigger, or at least more playful and enjoyable to be in,” says Saiber.

The crayon box color palette begins in the bright blue mudroom. Beyond are mustard yellow walls in the kitchen, and vibrant salmon walls in the adjoining dining room. “When my friends with children visit the house, the children immediately love it!”

The first floor includes Saiber’s office, a small room off the dining room. “My office, where I spend most of my waking hours, is near the bathroom, near the kitchen, and there’s no bed in sight to take naps,” she says.

In the living room, an 18th-century Italian café table pairs with a 20th-century lamp of electric coils made for a film set. A bust of Dante—the author is a main focus of her research—and a large painting by local artist Stephen Lanzalotta enliven the dining room. Interspersed are objects that have been given a new life. A boiler stand is now a unique side table. An old barn door was refashioned into a dining room table, and a Chinese grain barrel serves as a laundry basket and door stop.

“Every piece in my house does double time,” says Saiber. “The house felt like a happy place, and I tried to follow that sense.” *

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