



Facing page: Decorator Schuyler Samperton outside her Los Angeles apartment. This page: In the living room, 1880s English walnut armchairs flank a circa-1800 chinoliserie cocktail table. The zebra hide is antique, and the curtains are Dragon Flower linen by Bennisson. See Resources.



Basic Instinct

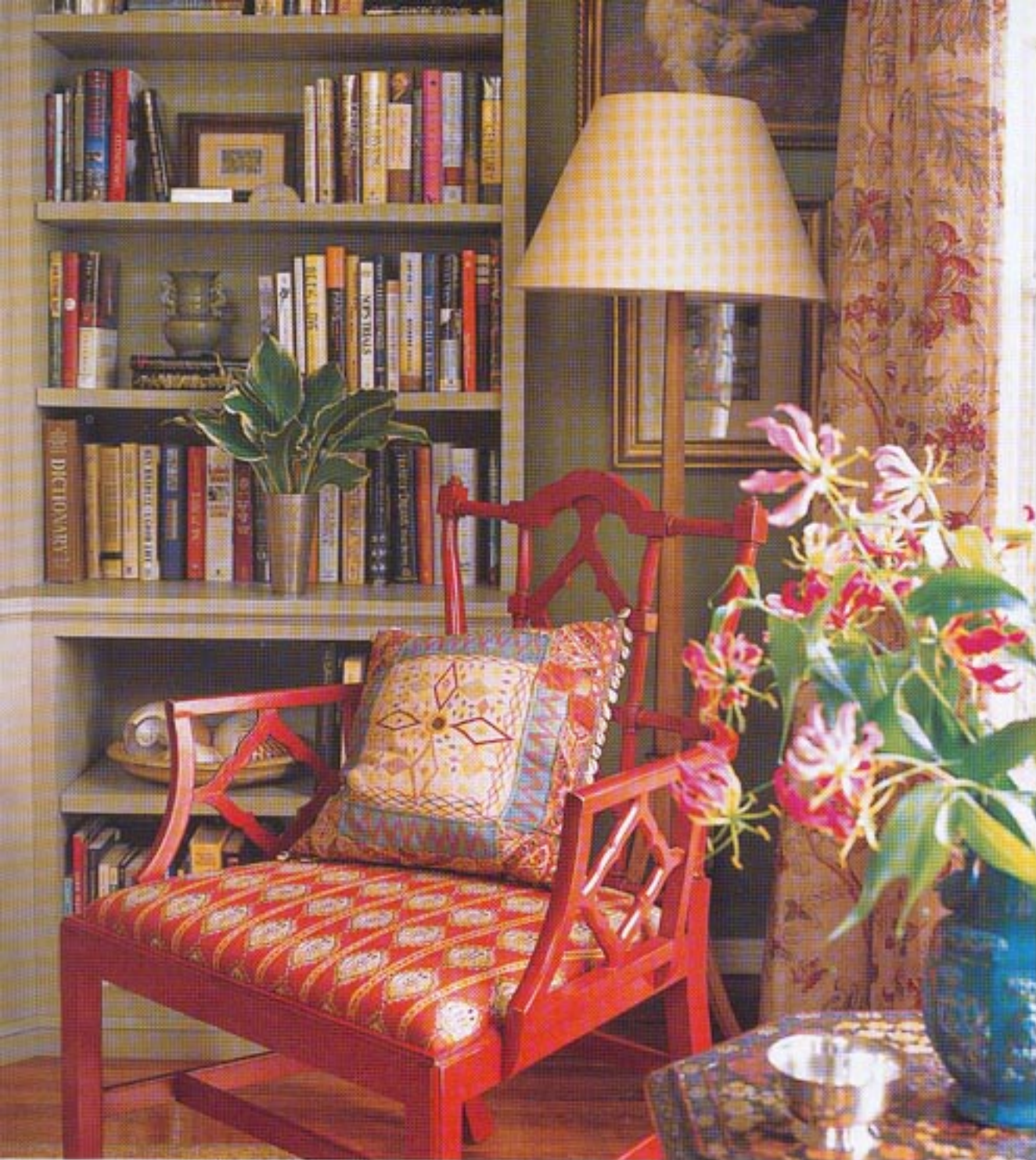
L.A. designer Schuyler Samperton conjures a cozy home of florals, artwork, and prize heirlooms for a new client—herself

Text by Merle Ginsberg · Photography by Grey Crawford

When it comes to decorating, some designers adhere to a mathematical or a logical formula, one that embraces order and organization from the ground up, while others create a magical whole out of an eclectic array of furniture, art, and objects acquired along the way. Schuyler Samperton definitely belongs to the second group. The decorator's newly refurbished Los Angeles apartment (and the headquarters of her nascent firm, Samperton & Hackathorn, with business partner Anna Hackathorn) reflects a life lived organically, where beloved things accumulate without much thought given to a particular outcome.

"I've collected a lot of things over the years," says Samperton. "Basically I buy what I like, and I make it work. I never go in with a plan—ever. When you see something that gives you an immediate reaction, you have to go for it. I never question it."

The Washington, D.C., native, who does nothing if not follow her instincts, moved from New York to the West Coast in 1988, where she worked in the fast-track world of entertainment public relations for a decade before discovering her true calling. Samperton was waiting to hear about a job offer at a PR company when her friend designer Michael S. Smith offered her a position at his firm. She wound up staying there for nearly five years before striking out on her own with Hackathorn.



"Everyone in my family was in the arts, and I grew up knowing that our midcentury-modern house wasn't like anyone else's," explains Samperton, adding that her friends couldn't believe it took so long to figure out that design was the career for her. Working with Smith she was soon assisting on the big-ticket bicoastal projects his company is known for. "Schuyler has a terrific sense of her own style," he says. "I'm eager to see how that evolves in her decorating projects."

For her place Samperton was finally able to do what she'd long dreamed of—creating a pastiche of the furnishings and objects she'd collected: a George III chest of drawers, crystal pieces by Hermès designer Allison Berger, an antique chinoiserie screen from Hollyhock, and four Regency-style dining chairs that have traveled more than most people. Plus she'd been storing some pieces from her parents' home since her college days, including a 19th-century oil painting of a parrot, a zebra-hide rug, and a 1988 Dean Larson canvas of her deceased pooch, Jack. "I brought everything out to L.A. when I moved here,



Clockwise from top left: The armchair by Brenda Antin is based on a late-19th-century English design; the tripod floor lamp is by Paul Ferrante. An early-19th-century plein-air painting from J. F. Chen Antiques hangs above a 1920s Chinese elm console from the Fainting Couch; the crystal objects are by Allison Berger. An 1850s English carved-wood armchair from Nathan Turner; the walls are painted Pratt & Lambert's Myth. Facing page: An 18th-century Coromandel screen from Hollyhock dominates the dining room; a Chinese embroidered-silk bedcover from Renate Halpern Galleries is used as a tablecloth. See Resources.





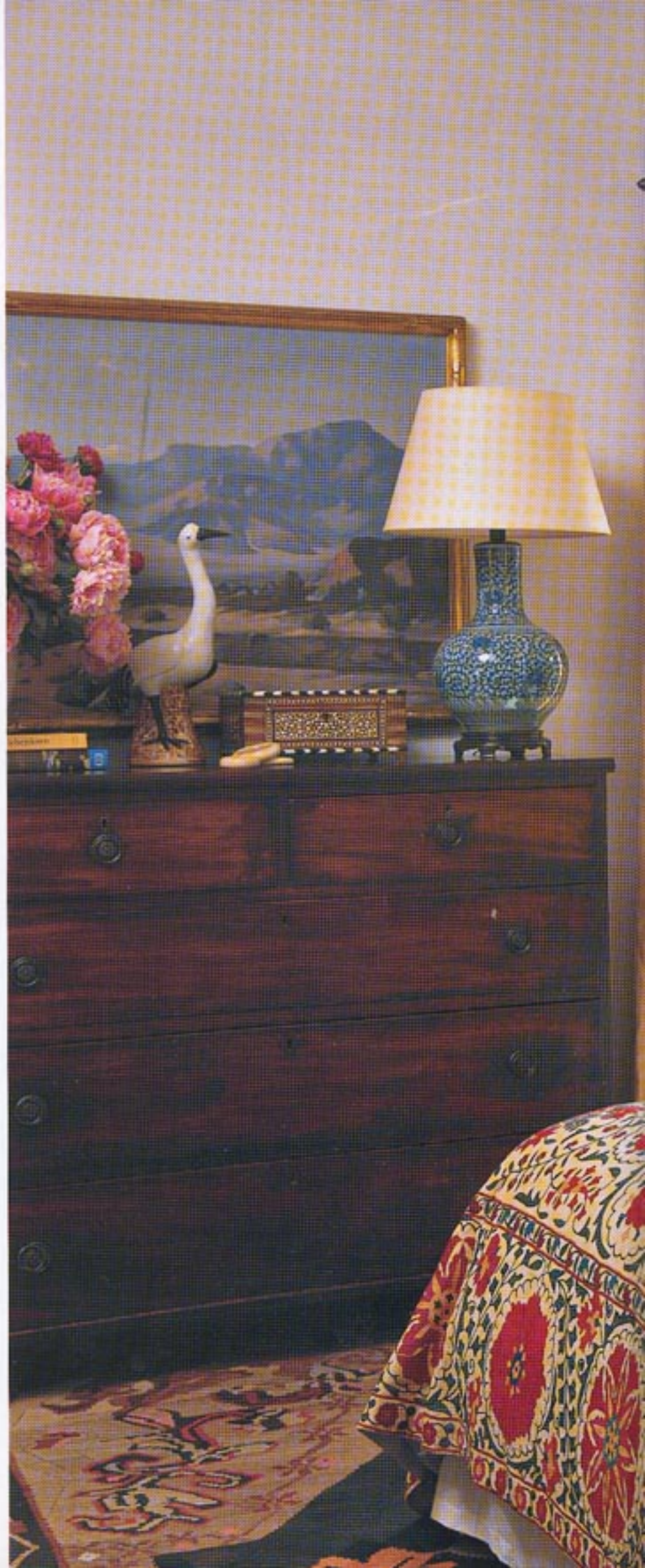
but they didn't look right in my first place, a nondescript 1960s house without much charm."

Samperton's solution to pull together such disparate items in a relatively small space—the five-room apartment measures just 900 square feet—was to use lots of color. "We got pretty lucky with the paint," she says. "None of it was mixed for us—the green in the living room, the turquoise in the hall, the yellow in the dining room. That brightened up that room so much; now it's cheerful where before it was dismal due to lack of light."

Since this was one of Samperton and Hackathorn's first projects, they had to keep Samperton's budget firmly in mind. Still, there were exceptions. While the dining room curtains are stitched-together saris purchased in L.A.'s Artesia neighborhood, the living room curtains were custom made. "They're full-tilt Bennison," Samperton says. "That's where most of the money went. But we had to, to make the room work."

Sitting on the cocktail table there is a clue both to the designer's personality and her style—*Exile*, a book of portraits of the Rolling Stones, with Bianca Jagger and Anita Pallenberg in tow, taken when the band recorded *Exile on Main Street* in the South of France in the early '70s. "It's the decrepit English-aristocrat thing that I like," Samperton muses. "I hate '50s furniture, anything amoeba-shaped, and any shade of beige. There's nothing like a lived-in, slightly depressing look to perk me up. I'm not sure what that's about," she adds, shaking her head.

Now that the apartment is complete, Hackathorn and Samperton are busy with other projects, including the Beverly Hills home of *The Practice* star Steve Harris, a 9,000-square-foot Napa Valley estate, and a lobby for Ron Howard and Brian Grazer's Imagine Entertainment. Yet Samperton makes sure not to get so busy that she misses out on life's pleasures. "I go surfing every chance I get," she says, "and I've started taking more trips to Europe. Our goal is to work with people who have a sense of adventure and who are willing to try something different. And you absolutely have to have a great time doing what you do. In the end I think that shows." ■



An antique English screen painted with military scenes forms a headboard for Samperton's bed; the Uzbek suzani is from the Lotus Collection, and the curtains are made of Rogers & Goffigon's Pandora fabric. Facing page: A circa-1800 French walnut table from Hollyhock and a 19th-century French love seat; the vintage linen pillow is from Brenda Antin. See Resources.

