

Designer Fawn Galli on Decorating a Modern Day Fairy Tale Home

In our interview, designer Fawn Galli shares the secrets behind decorating an apartment with an enchanted-forest feel. See all the photos of this fairy-tale New York apartment.

By David A. Keeps



David A. Keeps: Why did you conjure an enchanted-forest look for this prewar Greenwich Village apartment?

Fawn Galli: With all of the busy, crazy agitation of New York City, my client, Romaine Orthwein, who's a photographer, wanted something fairy-tale-dreamy to the point of otherworldly. One inspiration was the C.S. Lewis book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, in which the characters emerge from the back of the wardrobe into a winter wonderland. In this apartment, the front door opens to a white entry hall lined with birch-print wallpaper.

The living room is a kaleidoscope of color.

I go into people's closets to get their color and fabric sense. Romaine had Pucci prints, fashion-forward clothes, and colorful accessories, and she was very particular about wanting strong fuchsia and turquoise accents throughout. My design assistant, Ashley Moyer, brought in this fabulous stained-glass-style rug that has every color of the rainbow, and it really pulled the living room together.



So does that pale green wall. Kudos on the color!

The walls were white, but they needed more depth and personality. We used a Fine Paints of Europe lacquer — a light green with blue in it — which reflects light better.

Why is green so great?

Green is my favorite color because it's of the earth, the trees, the grass. It can be cheery and bright like candy, or dark and sophisticated. Good chartreuse — not too yellow — makes me so excited I can't stand it.

Even though it's beige and white, that lily pad wallpaper in the bedroom evokes the greenery of a pond. The only thing missing is an enchanted frog prince.

The home was designed to feel like a whimsical, wintry forest — the white floors invoke a feeling of ice. Call it surrealism grounded in nature. Or nature with a twist. We played with scale a lot, and we put overscale wallpaper in the master bedroom — and also in the powder room — to draw you into scenery and make you feel small within the landscape. In green, it would be too much with the green headboard and icy celadon chair. Too much color is too aggressive. You need white, beige, or gray to ground it.



The living room sofa and chairs certainly add a dose of Dorothy Draper scale and drama and whimsy.

Her sense of theatrics made her interiors unique, and she could take things really far but knew how to stop at just the right moment. It's a nuance that makes all the difference. We did the chairs in a cheetah print and piped the sofa cushions in hot pink — and that was where we stopped and said, 'No more pink.'

You've also embellished headboards, blinds, and even lampshades. What makes piping hot?

It's so powerful. If you have a scalloped edge, piping, tape, or fringe underlines it and gives it a polish and a rigor.

You're not afraid of teal or striped Roman blinds or floral sheers, either.

Pale curtains aren't passionate enough. Windows should be played up, but I don't like old-fashioned curtains with valances and tiebacks. I like a bold pattern, but on a tailored panel — not too soupy or loopy with extra fabric — and simple inverted or two-inch pinch pleats. And curtains should just kiss the floor, so they don't look heavy.



Why so much white-legged and Lucite furniture on pale carpets and bleached floors?

In small rooms, it makes things more airy. We even lacquered the knife block in the kitchen white. Unless you're in a Chelsea gallery, I think ebonized floors and that whole dark, minimal Christian Liaigre look is over. It just doesn't give enough to a room. I prefer Baroque- and Rococo-style curves and Barbara Barry furniture, which feels French 1940s yet American at the same time. It's graceful and romantic, and the proportions are right for rooms with low ceilings.

You're certainly articulating a new femininity in interior design. But how do the husbands react?

Most of my clients are couples, and the male counterparts are fine as long as they're comfortable. I don't think what I do is alienating to men. It's a 21st-century version of an old romanticism — like the vivid interiors in Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, which definitely influenced this place.



What's your idea of a dream house?

It would be Le Corbusier with windows looking out to the beach, and it would incorporate ideas from Pierre Chareau's *Maison de Verre*. I'd decorate with Louis furniture, Sèvres porcelain from the Boucher room in the Frick Collection, a François-Xavier & Claude Lalanne duck bed, mixed in with Prouvé and Tom Dixon and the latest furniture designers.

Until then, what would you do if the owners gave you the keys to this apartment for the weekend?

I'd have a party for my friends, film directors, painters, and thinkers. Wait, forget that. I'd get ice sculptures and Cristal and big platters of chocolate, fill the room with lilacs and peonies, and play Billie Holiday's 'I'm a Fool to Want You.' And I'd invite Ryan Gosling — all by himself.

