



# sensation

BY JAMIE DIAMOND | PHOTOGRAPHED BY GREY CRAWFORD

Bright whites and warm woods characterize the rooms in Mary Micucci and Jane Downs's house, including the spacious entry. Opposite: A floor-to-ceiling cabinet in the sunroom houses a collection of vintage colored glass.

What was on the menu for top Hollywood caterer Mary Micucci and her partner, Jane Downs, when they decorated their new home? Traditional but relaxed furnishings garished with rich textures, and a floor plan as airy as a soufflé





"We wanted the house to have an indoor-outdoor feeling," says Micucci. "When we open the French doors, the rooms fill with beautiful light."

You might not suspect from seeing the inside of Mary Micucci's two-story, brick Tudor house, in the L.A. neighborhood of Hancock Park, that she once hosted a holiday party for 18,000 on the back lot of Universal Studios or that she was the planner who pulled off the wedding of Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston and the equally lavish nuptials of Barbra Streisand and James Brolin. But you would instantly know that she enjoys playing the role of hostess.

Micucci, who with her life partner, Jane Downs, runs the catering and event-production firm Along Came Mary, has made sure every detail of their home is welcoming, from the open floor plan, a rarity in this historic district of 1920s homes, to the light-filled sunroom. That sense of space is the main reason the couple snapped up the property three years ago.

"We walked into this house and it was like, 'Ooh,'" recalls Micucci. Not only were the rooms nicely sized and laid out, but they also opened up onto each other by way of French doors. As a party planner, Micucci knows how crucial a good layout can be. "A floor plan of a party is just like the floor plan in a house," says

Micucci, who describes herself as a control freak. She has been catering professionally since she started a bartending service 25 years ago and now presides over a multimillion-dollar business. "Everything has to flow, and guests can't feel boxed in."

Or uncomfortable. While antiques and traditional furnishings fill the house, the result is far from formal, thanks to the casual arrangements, rich mix of textures and lack of showiness. Graceful curves and a minimum of hard edges only enhance the effect. "How a client lives, along with the



Top: The kitchen's original wood cabinets were painted a cream hue. Bottom: Micucci sits in the sunroom, which is decorated in green, yellow and red to reflect the colors of the backyard's brick patio and sycamore trees (opposite).







architecture of the house, dictates the direction we go in," says Trip Haenisch of the L.A. firm Martynus-Tripp, whom the couple hired as their interior designer. "Mary and Jane live in a comfortable way, with no pretense, so they didn't want pretentious surroundings."

A careful balance of colors, shapes and materials helped set the tone. The décor in the living room, for example, started with a thin-stripe yellow-and-white English cotton rug made by Connecticut designer Elizabeth Eakins. The yellow Pratt & Lambert paint on the walls was mixed to match the floor covering, but contrasting elements keep

the space lively: White linen drapes hang from oil-rubbed bronze-finish rods, the pale rug lies on a dark-stained oak floor, and much of the furniture has light-colored upholstery and dark wood legs. Except for two antique chinoiserie chairs, none of the pieces in the room matches another. "Symmetry is easily understood," explains Haenisch. "But when you have it, things look stiff." Down fill gives the custom-made sofas an extra welcoming look, while a club chair is upholstered in a playful sky-blue checked fabric.

The contrasts continue in the den, where Haenisch painted the frames of the French doors white and stained the cabinetry that surrounds the room a dark hue. "Mary and Jane wanted a room that felt really cozy, and the rich woods provide that." The rug is a traditional Irish matting weave made of abaca, and the sofa is upholstered in olive-green corduroy. "Textures make a room seem less slick," says Haenisch, "warming it up so it's more inviting."

But it's in the kitchen where Micucci made the most dramatic changes. As a

Top: Playful shapes in the living room come courtesy of a portly ottoman and a curvaceous slipper chair. Bottom: The Austrian dining chairs date from the late 1800s. Opposite: The den's ample club chair is covered in Bellport Check by Chelsea Editions.



"All the wooden shelving makes the den the darkest room in the house," says Micucci, "but because of that, it becomes a special hideaway."





child growing up in Queens, N.Y., she saw her Italian-American mother make events out of the traditional fare she regularly whipped up. "Holy cow, the meals she would make every night, and on top of that, on Sunday, she cooked Italian feasts for our huge extended family," recalls Micucci, who adds, "There was always a sense of drama." Micucci claims not to be an avid cook herself, but she does like to casually entertain lots of guests, a skill she first learned from her mother. For that purpose, however, the house's original kitchen seemed somewhat cramped. So the couple had the wall between the kitchen and an adjoining breakfast room torn down; they further enlarged the space by moving another wall back into a maid's room. Then Micucci and Downs added a marble-top center island that doubles as a breakfast bar. With these changes in place, they felt the entire downstairs had the openness and laid-back quality they craved.

Micucci, who once dressed waiters in armor for a party with a medieval theme, discovered that pulling together the décor of her home—creating a unifying idea, choosing the right mix of elements, ensuring that everything is finished properly—was not unlike pulling together a party. "You assemble a good team who understands your vision," she says. "And the

Above: The bathroom chair is covered in a Rogers & Goffigon linen. Right: A Polo Ralph Lauren fabric covers a custom chair in the bedroom.



"The master bedroom is designed to be very serene and relaxing, and after the hectic kinds of days I have, that's very welcome," says Micucci.



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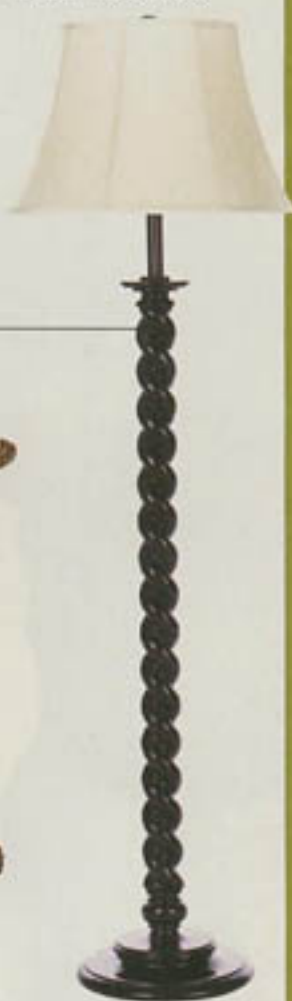
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beautiful golden light," says Haenisch. "We all like to look good in our interiors, and mid-height lighting is the most flattering." He suggests achieving this in your home by relying on a mix of sources, including floor lamps, table lamps, candles and, wherever possible, natural light.

- **Choose a subtle palette** "Pale paint colors give rooms an open feel," Haenisch says. Avoid bold, primary shades, except as accents.
- **Be picky about fabrics and prints** Embroidery, floral patterns and lightweight fabrics keep a home bright, says Haenisch. "Delicate linen cur-

tains will create soft and sensual light" as the sun filters through, he adds.

- **Use casual arrangements of flowers throughout** Rather than overdoing your bouquets, says Haenisch, "they should look like you just went out to the garden, clipped some blossoms, and put them in a pitcher."



Designer Trip Haenisch