

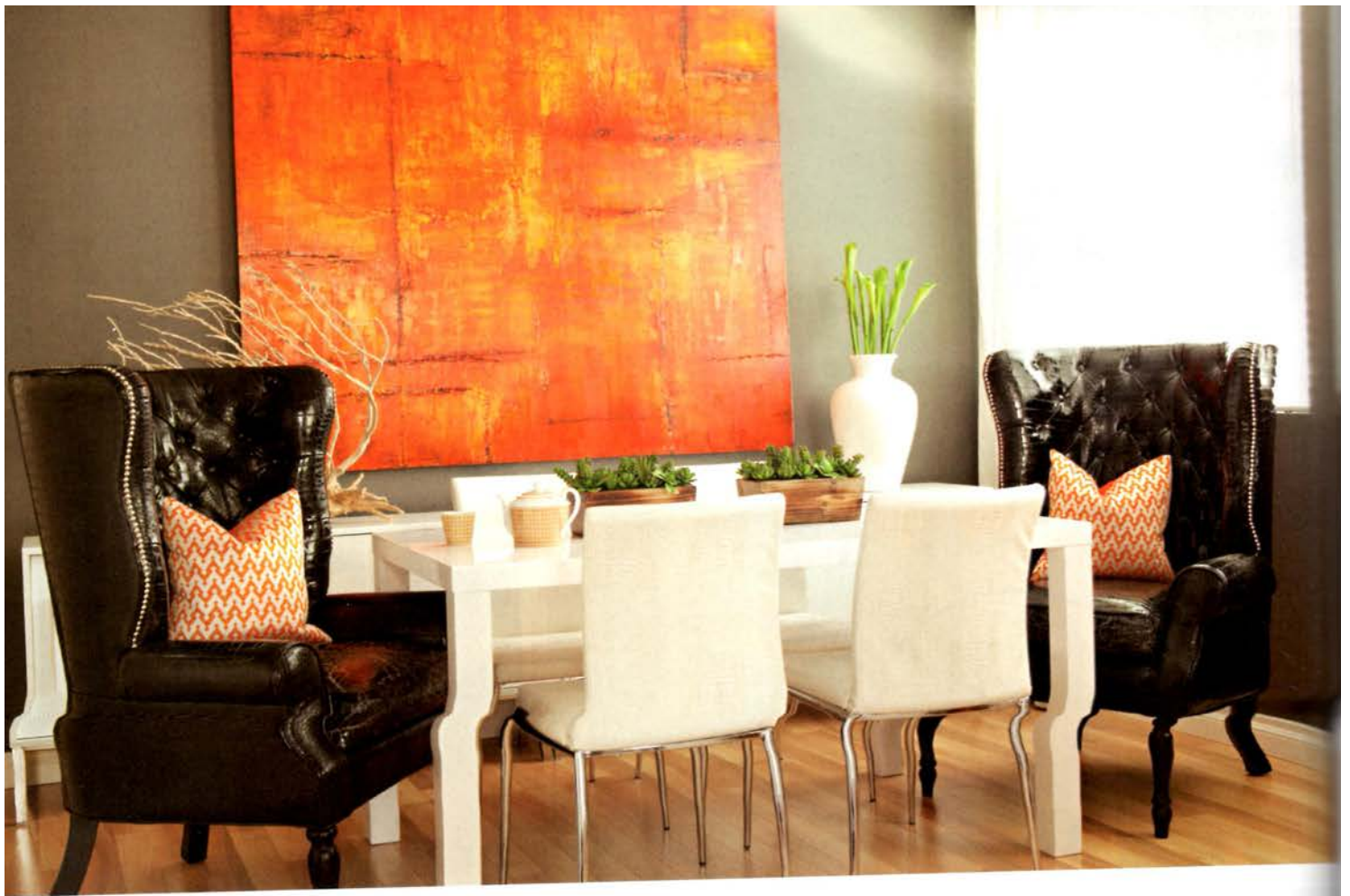


The home of interior designer Sabina Vavra is in constant transformation. Call it ...

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY KARYN R. MILLET





PREDICTABILITY ISN'T SABINA VAVRA'S STYLE.

As her friends and neighbors know, change is always around the corner, especially in the interior designer's 1,600-square-foot Aliso Viejo home. Inspiration could rush in at any moment and prompt a living room makeover—fresh paint, throw pillows, and accessories—in a matter of hours.

Vavra follows her heart. In 2003, while working as a banker in San Francisco and Century City, she realized the fire had gone out of the life she was leading, if it had been there at all. So she enrolled in the Interior Designers Institute of Newport Beach and found a sense of purpose. She launched Madison West Interiors design firm in Laguna Beach in 2004 (she now works out of her home), and graduated from the institute in 2005.

Soon she was ticking off impressive achievements—designing the celebrity gift suites for the 2008 Emmys, appearing in the only season of A&E's "Tackling Design" with Keyshawn Johnson, and putting finishing touches on a dream project, the Hard Rock Café in Manila in the Philippines.

Walking into Vavra's two-story, three-bedroom home is like having an intimate conversation with the 33-year-old. In what

otherwise could be a forgettable tract house, her style is evident. Just inside the front door, Vavra's foyer spells out her spirited style with its graffitied walls. But where überdesigner Kelly Wearstler papered her stairwell with red-and-white graffiti, Vavra gave the L.A. tagger Jet license to scrawl on hers.

Her own black-and-white photographs hang in that space and tell the story of the favorite places she's traveled: Gstaad, Switzerland; Corsica, France; Masai Mara, Kenya; to name a few.

"I tend to gravitate toward a feeling rather than a particular design style," Vavra says in defining her eclectic décor, a mix of custom pieces, reinvented vintage, and personal mementos. "I love color, I love texture, I love shine. I love things that make you want to touch them and feel them, so I wanted that mixed with a relaxed California vibe."

Many of her walls, painted in soft tans and grays, show her love of local artists, including abstract expressionist James Verbicky. "Artwork is something I've splurged on," she says. "It's so sensory. I instantly fall in love with a piece, and I have to have it."

Vavra purchased the home in 2003, ready to get her hands



Opener: Lyrics from U2's "Mysterious Ways," on Sabina Vavra's foyer walls, can also be seen from the living room; a Catherine Steinberg painting is the focal point of the dining room; Vavra in her home office, in front of her "inspiration board," with photos of her grandmother, Kate Moss, and Gwen Stefani; the welcoming patio beneath a blooming bougainvillea.

dirty. Only two years old at the time, the house already was showing signs of neglect, with holes in the walls, dirty carpet, and a barren back yard. It was exactly what she wanted. "The day I closed escrow, I had a crew here," she says of tackling a complete interior overhaul. "I was ripping floors out, redoing cupboards, and painting."

Some things, such as drafting a custom-tufted sectional in white microsuede for the living room, and adding dark soapstone countertops in the kitchen, came easily. Others required more contemplation.

"I would sit out here for hours and just think," she says of the back yard. "It was such a blank slate, which is beautiful because you can do anything." The resulting microcosm of pink blooms and green foliage now is the perfect place to think about her next TV show, design project or, in a rare moment, nothing at all.

SARAH WOMACK'S last design story for Orange Coast was "Color: How to Live With It and How to Bring It Home!" in June 2010.



The soft palette of Vavra's master bedroom, above, contrasts with the boldness of the guest room, left. An African horn turned on its side displays bracelets and bangles atop an antique Chinese sideboard.