



Interior design by
TOBI FAIRLEY

Interview by MIMI READ

Photographs by
FRANCESCO LAGNESE

BLUE AS AN OPAL

Colors that
say sparkle and
glamour

Blue begins at the front door in a Fayetteville, Arkansas, house designed by Tobi Fairley. Venetian glass lamps from Swank Lighting sit on a Darnell demilune commode by Amy Howard. Veneziano wallpaper by Nina Campbell. OPPOSITE: In the dining room, a tufted banquette is "the perfect perch for cocktails and after-dinner drinks." It's done in Stroheim's Angora Mohair Velvet in Lemon-grass. Lillibette lantern by the Urban Electric Co.

The living room's serene Alice Andrews Color Field painting, *First Light*, has subtle layers of blues, ranging from pale to blue-gray to aqua. "The lack of contrast in the painting is what I find interesting," Fairley says. "It adds dimension to the wall without really breaking the visual plane." Walls are Venetian plaster, tinted Sherwin-Williams's Silvermist. Baker's Neue sofa is softened with shaggy Calypso pillows. Nancy Corzine's Curtain cocktail table. Tamarian rug. Jan Showers's rattan side tables. Lamps by Christopher Spitzmiller.



MIMI READ: Give me three words that describe your style.

TOBI FAIRLEY: Dramatic. Classic. Organized. True enough. But this house is flat-out glamorous as well. I didn't expect to find Hollywood-caliber sexiness in Fayetteville, Arkansas, home of the Razorbacks.

That comes from the homeowners—a couple in their sixties with grown kids. Their red Kool-Aid days are over. She wanted to bring home some of the beauty she'd seen at resorts and spas. Every picture she showed me had this sort of serene, sophisticated glamour.

You've given her a controlled range of soft blues, especially in the living room.

I wanted to wrap the living room in layers of pale blue tones without a lot of contrast. If you use color devoid of contrast, it becomes almost like a neutral.

What shade of blue are the walls?

They're powder blue, done in Venetian plaster, which is one of those things that people have decided is overused or out or too trendy. I don't buy into that. Venetian plaster is perfect for this house because it's the epitome of that hazy, dusty, powdery serenity we were aiming for. The painting above the sofa is almost an extension of the wall, but a little grayer. I wanted something there that was almost nothing.

Is there such a thing as too much blue?

Obviously, I don't think so! I've always used a lot of bold color, so for me, this is nothing.

The tufted banquette in the dining room is definitely an evening zone—a dressy, cocktail-sipping perch.

I always fantasize how I would use spaces in the houses I design. I can see myself sitting there having a drink with a friend after dinner when I wanted to stay in the conversation but also wanted to get more comfortable.

What was there before you got there?

A marble-topped buffet that had some ultra-traditional cut-glass pieces on it and a silver service that the owners never used. I love getting rid of items that call for a display! Unless

someone really loves certain tchotchkes, I don't feel the need to put stuff out.

I guess you'd rather save space for more jaw-dropping effects—like that chandelier over the dining table.

She wanted a few truly dynamic pieces for excitement. The chandelier has all these



shimmering strands, all different lengths. It creates this soft cascade of light that's so striking, you don't need lots of stuff on the table. It speaks volumes for the entire room.

I'm suddenly noticing that you haven't used any antiques in the house. Is that legal in the South?

Some people might think it's unsophisticated or nouveau riche, but I like reproductions better than antiques, and always have. For me, everything has to function as well as be beautiful, and I am a fan of the mechanics of modern pieces. The drawers work well. The hinges and handles work. You can customize

the finishes. There are even some pieces that you would never, ever know weren't antiques until you open them and see all the bells and whistles: silver drawer liners, self-closing drawers, Lucite dresser dividers. I'm a busy girl. Nothing frustrates me more than things that don't work when you need them to.

Tell me about the main event in the foyer—that graphic wallpaper.

It's a fabulous Nina Campbell damask print, traditional but so overscale that it's modern and fresh. I really love bold patterns in fabrics and wallcoverings. They work particularly well around here, where people build these huge houses with really tall ceilings, and then they feel the need to fill them with overscale furniture. I'm not a big fan of giant furniture, so using out-sized patterns helps make visual sense out of the scale of the room.

That silvery-blue master bedroom could be Jean Harlow's.

It really is the epitome of Hollywood glam, which is what my client wanted. The smoky silk-satin headboard set the tone. Then you throw in the mirrored bedside tables, the lustrous bedding, the Lucite curtain hardware, and the starburst mirror, and you're so far down that road you can't go back. But she feels like a real star in that room.

Is there anything absolutely Southern about your approach to design?

My rooms are a lot like the way I dress—quite feminine and colorful, which I suppose is a pretty Southern concept. In early spring last

year, I attended a design event in Manhattan. It was 10 in the morning, and I had on what I thought was a perfectly appropriate outfit: a full-skirted red poppy print A-line dress with a little black bolero jacket. Everyone else wore gray or black as if it were the dead of winter. Chris Spitzmiller, who designed those gorgeous blue lamps in the living room, turned to me and said, 'Here you are in your little red dress in this sea of black and gray, sticking out like a sore thumb, yet you're so confident!' I've always been a stiletto-and-pearls type. There aren't many of us left.

PRODUCED BY ROBERT RUFINO



ABOVE: In the stair hall, Fairley used an overscale damask wallpaper to make soaring ceilings seem more human-scaled. Rug and runner from New River Artisans. OPPOSITE: Boyd Lighting's Cascade Grand Luminaire chandelier serves as light, art, entertainment, and focal point in the dining room. "When it's lighted, the cascading glass beads are so mesmerizing, they really don't need any accessories," Fairley says. Curtains are Pindler & Pindler's Carmona.



Aqua and red are a powerful combination. Hickory Chair's Inman ottoman is covered in Eliana from William Yeoward. Oly blue resin vases. OPPOSITE: Fairley designed the breakfast room around the turquoise Empire beaded chandelier by Marjorie Skouras. Floor stripes are Wythe Blue by Benjamin Moore and Wool Skein by Sherwin-Williams. Oly's Ajax side chairs are covered in Highland Court's Palazzo in Aqua and Cocoa. Hickory Chair Kimball dining table.

“The master bedroom is the epitome of Hollywood glam. The silk-satin headboard set the tone. Then you throw in the layers of misty blues, the lustrous bedding, the mirrored furniture, and you’re so far down that road you can’t go back.”

TOBI FAIRLEY

“I just love this Barbara Barry wallpaper,” Fairley says. “The print is so small and subtle, like a man’s tie pattern.” Chic Link in Seamist from Kravet. Baker’s Paris bed is dressed in Ann Gish’s quilted Frost Charmeuse coverlet and shams. Belvedere mirrored chests from Hickory Chair. Seville starburst mirror by Julian Chichester. Quartz lamps by McCoy Design.
FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES

