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EXCLUSIVE FICTION BY MARY WESLEY



A FARMHOUSE IN TUSCANY

The plain walls and decor of a 10th-century house are transformed by a riot of brightly coloured paintings, artefacts and ceramics



East and West blend beautifully in Pamela's sitting room. Kilim cushions decorate the striped sofa – similar ones, £23.95–£30, from Country & Eastern (071-938 2711/0603-623107). On the wall is a tapestry from Africa's Ivory Coast. Pamela's own ceramics are displayed on every surface





The vibrant colours and asymmetrical patterns of Pamela's paintings and ceramics give a warm, slightly haphazard, lived-in feel to the sitting room – and the array of different-coloured cushions make the sofas all the more inviting. The kilim-covered stool is from The General Trading Company (071-730 0411)



Pamela Ferrari (left) is an American painter and textile and ceramics designer whose work has been described as 'an explosion of colour and pattern'. Yet the decoration of her home, just outside Florence, is based on natural, traditional colours and textures, with typical Tuscan terracotta, Florentine grey stone and cream-coloured walls.

'I like to change my rooms with the seasons, or even overnight, and the easiest way to do that is to keep your background as neutral as possible. Then I use different textiles – rugs, cushions and throws – ceramics and paintings to give the house a spring, summer or Christmas look,' says Pamela.

GH Design Director Liz Bauwens adds: 'I was attracted to this house by its contrasts of neutral shades and brilliant colours, and the way in which Pamela combines traditional and modern elements. If you look past her brilliant paintings and pottery, you'll see a surprisingly plain background with paint and fabrics in monotones. The striped sofa is in neutral colours and the plain, pale walls in the sitting room are calm and classic, but the whole

room is brought to life by the paintings and lamps. As Pamela enjoys creating different looks for different times of year, she can do this simply and quickly just by changing these accessories. Her home also shows how old and new can live together – the crewel-work chairs and carved cupboard in the dining room are the traditional element, while the bright, modern china makes the room look individual.'

The building originates from the 10th century, when it was a guard tower, but 500 years later a land-owning family built the main house to live in. Most Italian homes like it were built to keep the animals on the ground floor, with living quarters upstairs so the humans could benefit from the heat the animals generated. When Pamela and her Italian husband Luciano bought the house, it had stood ruined and deserted for several generations, its downstairs dirt floor very much as the animals had left it: 'There were owls flying around inside the building. We knew the Contessa who owned it, but originally she refused to sell. We looked around for somewhere else but couldn't find anywhere we loved as much, ▶



Pamela has a knack for giving each area of the house its own special atmosphere. She can change the tone of a room overnight with different accessories. Above: plain terracotta wall tiles are the perfect foil for her extravagantly coloured napkins and ceramics. Above right: the family enjoys dining at fresco at this table. A kiwi fruit plant covers the bamboo roof in summer. Left and right: the intricate appliquéd felt cushions were designed by Pamela.



and then she suddenly rang us and said she would sell – but we had to make a commitment by that night!

That was 17 years ago, just after their son, Niccolo, was born, and there followed three years of restoration, along with another baby, Annalisa, now 14: 'We didn't have a lot of money to spend and it was extremely hard work. I couldn't do it again,' says Pamela. There are strict regulations on renovation in Italy; none of the windows could be altered, for example, which means that the traditional small ones remain: 'So I don't have any curtains – it would make the interior too dark,' says Pamela. They had to clean the tower and the wooden beams by sandblasting them, and lived on the upper floors while the downstairs was made habitable for the first time. These rooms are now used mainly in the summer, because they are cool and dark and have easy access to the garden. The whole family loves to eat outside on the terrace.

During the winter they prefer the views of Florence, enjoyed from the kitchen and living/dining room on the first floor, where

it is also much lighter and sunnier: 'The kitchen is original to the house, and still has a big open chimney,' explains Pamela. They intentionally kept the whole of this area open plan: 'I didn't want it to be too kitcheny. We avoided flowered ceramic tiles, for example, or anything that would clash with my own pottery.' Wooden cabinets and an unusual terracotta-and-white marble tile pattern on the wall make a warm but neutral background for the primary colours of Pamela's designs.

Pamela and Luciano have collected furniture from all over the world over the years, and the result is that the house contains a blend of antiques and primitive artefacts: Kenyan shells and a Dutch armoire, French glass, antique Tuscan tables and a wall-hanging from Africa's Ivory Coast. The combination is particularly striking in the living room, where the geometric shapes of the primitive wallhangings and cushions collected from abroad echo the strong lines of Pamela's ceramics.

Pamela has now lived in Italy for 22 years, and her work sells ▶

Antique and modern furniture and artefacts happily coexist throughout the house

Left: the dining room mixes an 18th-century cupboard and crewelwork-covered chairs with Italian lights and Pamela's ceramics. Crewelwork from Country & Eastern, £14.50-£16.50/m, (071-838 2711/0603-623107) or Nice Irma's, £17.50-£20.50/m, (071-580 6921)

Right: an ash-panelled sauna-style bathroom
Bottom right: white bedlinen is offset by the bedhead, which Pamela covered in a patterned sheet



in Britain, the USA, France, Japan and other countries. The inspiration for her painting and designing comes from Tunisia, Venice, Greece, Brazil...wherever she takes her camera to record the colours and shapes. In fact, her ambition at the moment is to show all her work under one roof, but the cushions and bedlinen tend to be shown in one department of a store, while the ceramics are in another, and the paintings are in art galleries: 'It seems that the linen department never talks to the ceramics department, so my work has never been seen all together except in my home!' she says.

The bathroom is the only room where she allowed Luciano to have his say: 'He wanted a bathroom that looked like a sauna, so it would feel warm - and it has a lovely view over a vast greenhouse next door.' Traditional terracotta urns are placed around the terrace and in the garden, where the Ferraris grow much of their own organic fruit and vegetables. They also keep chickens, geese and ducks.

The mad mix of colours and objects in the house works very well. You may think that, with her eye for colour and design, Pamela can get away with combining different themes that could look messy in another house - but she believes that you shouldn't worry about whether things match. Everyone should put together all the things they have collected over a lifetime, and the result will have just as much panache.

'If you like things, enjoy them. After all, they do all have a common denominator; you chose them.'

A range of Pamela Ferraris's ceramics is sold by Ceramica Blue (071-727 0288; mail-order catalogue available).



