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Good

At home with Lydia Shire: The star chef's dining room showcases her eclectic style

by Cheryl Fenton | October 03, 2011



Photo: MELISSA OSTROW

Lydia Shire's red hair is unmistakable - a flame of brilliant color flickering around her kitchens at Towne Stove and Spirits, Scampo, and Locke-Ober. But does her home have a look that is just as recognizably red-hot?

The short answer is yes. Whether designing a dish or a dwelling, Shire knows how to turn "bland" into "brilliant." Using creativity instilled by her artistic parents and help from her architect daughter, Shire spiced up an abandoned Greek Revival home in Weston, reinventing it to reflect her own bright, bold, and unique persona. "Colorful, curvy, and [with] nothing matching" is how Shire describes her home, filled with a joyful mixture of Brimfield finds and international artisans' creations. Her spin on controlled chaos even earned her a spot on the annual "Design 100" list by *Metropolitan Home*.

"Good food and good décor go hand in hand," she says. Since edibles are the epicenter of her career, we pulled up a chair (a mismatched one, of course) in Shire's dining room to learn more about the star chef's taste in interiors.

A. This '50s copper light is an out-of-this-world lesson in patience. After going 12 years without a chandelier because nothing felt "right," Shire discovered this Sputnik-inspired light in an NYC antique store. When it comes to design, says Shire, "It makes sense to wait sometimes instead of forcing the situation."

B. To celebrate the "rich experience" of dining, Shire "pulled out all the stops" by adding lots of golden accents: a 150-year-old mirror, a tea service, and even a gold ceiling created with oil-based high-gloss paint. The mantel's hand-made gold-leaf gesso frame is somewhat damaged, but that endears it to Shire all the more: "After all, what's perfect in life?"

C. The lacewood fireplace is double-sided to keep the chef toasty in her dining room and study, located on the other side of the wall. It's one of the five fireplaces in Shire's home, and she chose the Moroccan encaustic tiles herself. "They're very flat, rather large, and the natural pigments are saturated and splendid," she says. The blue hues play well off the soothing green walls, which are done in Benjamin Moore 635 (appropriately dubbed "Parsley Snips").

D. Many of us agonize over finding just the right set of chairs, but Shire shows you can create beauty with mismatched mayhem. "I can't stand conformity," she says. "It's more interesting if what you purchase has a story." The hand-painted chairs around her dining-room table are treasures she discovered in Mexico, while the Queen Annes are upholstered in colorful Persian rugs called kilims.

E. With so much going on, Shire knew the room needed space where eyes could rest. To bring out the beauty of the surrounding objects, she kept large expanses of wall space bare. She also chose a toned-down sisal rug that contrasts nicely with the rest of the room. "It brings it down a notch," she says of its soothing natural color.

Cheryl Fenton is a freelance writer who also blogs at EasyPeasyBlog.com.

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