

Bohemian Rhapsody

With the help of designer Billy Cotton, artist Cindy Sherman recasts a dilapidated 19th-century Hamptons farmhouse as a richly layered, charmingly eccentric refuge

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Throughout her phenomenal career, Cindy Sherman has presented herself in all manner of guises and attitudes—screen siren, Renaissance Madonna, wizened socialite, suburban mall rat, Roman deity, and psychotic clown, to name just a few. Her photographic works, provocative meditations on the construction of personal identity and the nature of representation, long ago secured her place in the firmament of art history, but she continues to break new ground. (Sherman's latest solo exhibition, "Untitled Horrors," which surveys her forays into the grotesque and macabre, is currently at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm and will be shown at the Kunsthau Zurich from June 6 to September 14, 2014.) When it comes to life at the artist's idiosyncratic country house in East Hampton, New York, however, all traces of artifice fall away. Having shed her props and prosthetics, her greasepaint and getups, Sherman simply enjoys the Arcadian delights of life in the Springs, a quiet, curiously un-Hamptons-like hamlet that was once home to Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, and other mandarins of 20th-century art. →





Artist Cindy Sherman with her parrot, Mister Frieda, at the 19th-century farmhouse she renovated with designer Billy Cotton in East Hampton, New York; architect Annabelle Selldorf served as an adviser. In the guest room shown here, the walls are covered in a fabric from Aleta, as is the cushion on the Gustavian daybed. The artworks are by, from left, Rima Mardoyan, Charles Clough, and David Krueger, and the 1930s parchment table stands on a rug from François Gilles Carpets. For details see Sources.



"It's all about nature here," Sherman says of her ten-acre parcel of heaven (about half of it is protected marshland) on Accabonac Harbor, a serene ecosystem of riparian trees and plants, white-tailed deer, red foxes, nesting ospreys, and piping plovers. "I'm crazy about the families of wild turkeys that wander around, especially when they fly up into the trees to go to sleep at night. It's mesmerizing."

Sherman moved to the Springs roughly a year and a half ago, leaving a home in nearby Sag Harbor. At the time she purchased the waterfront property, it contained a main house—thought to have been built in the 1830s or '40s—that had been altered and expanded over the years but that still retained its modest scale and ample charm, as well as two weathered barns.

"I had to redo my last house after the pipes burst, and something was lost in the renovation," she says. "The soul of the old space was compromised. Here, I wanted to do as little as possible, to preserve the character that attracted me in the first place."

Though Sherman hadn't initially considered hiring a professional designer, she found a sympathetic collaborator when she visited a friend's home that had



Above: Wild turkeys roam the backyard of the ten-acre property, part of which is protected marshland. Thought to have been built in the 1830s or '40s, the main house, on the left, had undergone additions and other changes over the years; Sherman transformed the adjacent barn into a studio workspace.

Opposite, from top: Deer crossing the lawn, with Accabonac Harbor beyond. A shed original to the house.

been decorated by Billy Cotton, a New York City-based industrial designer who also works on architectural and interiors projects. "The house didn't look like it was decorated. It seemed like it had always been there," she recalls. "Billy's work struck a balance between practicality, funkiness, and chic."

That assessment is actually a perfect précis of the artist's own bohemian-luxe retreat. After completing a thorough restoration of the structurally unsound edifice—Sherman's friend Annabelle Selldorf, the high-powered architect of choice among the art world's elite, served as an adviser on the project—Cotton and his client embarked on a mission to reuse the original building materials and revive the ambience they engendered. The designer explains, "We tried to reproduce something off-kilter, not precious. This is not a stunning example of Colonial architecture, just a comfortable, formerly rickety farmhouse." He adds, "We both abhorred the idea of faux rustication."

In the spirit of disciplined eclecticism, Sherman and Cotton assembled a polyglot collection of furniture that dates from roughly the same era as the architecture, including an English Regency dwarf cabinet, antique

French and Gustavian daybeds, a stately 19th-century Austrian painted cabinet, and a George III gateleg dining table. To leaven the old-world flavor of those refined yet unassuming specimens, the pair introduced eccentric 20th-century furnishings acquired at flea markets and galleries as well as contemporary pieces such as Joseph Heidecker side tables covered in hundreds of yearbook portraits. There's also a cocktail table that was designed and built in the backyard by Cotton and his assistants using leftover baseboards and wood scraps from the renovation.

Fabrics play a prominent role throughout. "Cindy and I bonded over our love of dynamic, exotic textiles," Cotton says. "So much of the aesthetic sensibility of this project is tied to the fabrics and carpets we selected." Indeed, the globe-spanning array encompasses vintage Beni Ourains and contemporary hand-embroidered cottons from Morocco (notably the whimsical pom-pom-accented upholstery on the dining chairs), vivid Pakistani ralli blankets from the 1920s, African indigo cloths, Indian suzannis, traditional French textiles, and a spectacular 19th-century Italian tapestry that presides over one of the three guest rooms. →



In keeping with the sprightly, pattern-on-pattern playfulness of the textiles and furniture, the artworks that dot the walls consist of what Sherman calls “a real hodgepodge” of thrift-store and yard-sale finds, outsider art, and pieces by friends, among them organic porcelain sculptures by Chris Garofalo and Matthew Solomon, paintings by Wayne White and Bill Komoski, and works by the Bruce High Quality Foundation, a Brooklyn arts collective.

The home’s overall impression is that of originality, nuance, humor, and a certain fearlessness—traits worthy of one of the titans of contemporary art. But for Sherman, the real success of this exercise in restrained historical rehabilitation has little to do with deft decorative choices or art-world savoir faire: “The house has a genuine sense of place, as if it belongs here. After a major yearlong renovation, it doesn’t look like we touched a thing,” she says. “I feel more at home here than any other place I’ve ever been.” □

From top: In the living room, an Akari lantern by Isamu Noguchi hangs above an antique French campaign bed topped with a cushion clad in a Pakistani ralli weaving from Xenomania and pillows covered in fabrics from the Textile Trunk; the artwork on the wall is by Robert Heckes, and the decoupage side table with year-book photos is by Joseph Heidecker. The entry hall, painted in a Farrow & Ball off-white, is furnished with a circa-1800 English dwarf cabinet.



Clockwise from top left: At the other end of the living room, the sofa and fringed armchair are also covered in ralli textiles from Xenomania, and the windows are framed by 19th-century silk curtain panels from Peta Smyth Antique Textiles; Cotton devised the tile fireplace surround. The kitchen's light fixture, table, counter, and tile backsplash were designed by Cotton; the range is by Lacanche. The dining room, lined in a Fromental wallpaper, features a George III oak table ringed with chairs designed by Adam Otlewski and custom made by Cotton.



Clockwise from top left: A 19th-century Austrian cabinet accents a guest room; the ceiling covering and curtain fabric are by Aleta. The master bath is appointed with an antique painted chest and a rug from François Gilles Carpets. In another guest room, a 19th-century Italian tapestry is displayed behind an Anthropologie bed draped with a suzani coverlet from Xenomania.

In the master bedroom, a chandelier found at a Paris flea market is suspended above the bespoke Hästens bed; the indigo-dyed textile stretched across the coverlet and the vintage silk encasing the throw pillows are from Xenomania. The painting is by Bill Komoski, the wall lamps are from Get Back, and the ikat curtain panels are from the Textile Trunk.



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