

Life in *colour*



This picture The kitchen's wide doorways lead into the bedroom beyond. The rattan screen pendant is by Market Set. **Opposite left** The Mondrian rug by Didier Benichou in the dining room is from a Paris flea market **Opposite right** The green walls and ceiling of the kitchen stand out against the black cabinetry. Mid-century jugs and pots by Robert Picault add a vintage twist



Vibrant walls, painterly ceramics and oodles of antiques — the holiday bolt hole of French creative Safia Thomass is brimming with Gallic charm

Words **Emma J Page** Photographs **Bénédicte Drummond**

“Eclectic, chic and cool” is how Safia Thomass describes her style — and judging by the colour-laden interiors of the bijou Provençal apartment she shares with her husband, Bruce, it’s an apt appraisal. Everywhere you look there is something to intrigue the eye, from 1950s tapestries and collections of vintage ceramics to Murano glass lighting and upcycled rattan garden furniture.

The couple’s love affair with the Luberon, and in particular the hill village of Ansouis, started decades ago, prompted by the pull of a slower pace of life. Born and

bred Parisians, the couple head south as often as possible, the better to appreciate the city on their return. “When we decamp here, everything changes,” Thomass says. “I don’t look at the clock. There is time for lunch and dinner with friends, reading, walking and exploring flea markets.”

That pastime has resulted in a relaxed, loosened-up decorating scheme that riffs on Provence’s association with art and colour. “I really wanted to create a bold look,” says Thomass, 62, a creative strategist. “For us, the key was to avoid anything too traditionally Provençal and twee. I

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was inspired by my childhood holidays in St Tropez. I found the decor there felt strong and joyful, not bourgeois. I wanted to do the same thing here by using colour as if I was building up the layers of a painting."

A former publicist for the fashion house Sonia Rykiel and Ladurée, Thomass has picked up some valuable lessons in curation. For this home, which the couple bought three years ago, after friends in the area spotted it was for sale, the key was to open it up to the terrace and the panorama beyond. So the first thing she did was ask her builders to remove as many walls as possible and to widen the remaining doorways, eliminating a series of boxy rooms and replacing them with a more generous, intuitive layout. "We enlarged the bathroom by losing the



Left Safia Thomass in her living room. The jungle mural is by the French wallpaper-maker Ananbô and the rug is by embroidery specialist Édith Mézard at Casa Lopez. **Right** In the dining room the tapestry on the right is a piece by Pierre Olivier; on the left is a tapestry by Jean-Jacques Picard. The pendant lights are 1960s Murano glass

guest room," she says, as the surrounding area has plenty of rental accommodation, "The village acts as a guest-house for our friends so we weren't worried about needing space for visitors."

The result is a new layout that naturally draws the eye towards the terrace, which can be accessed from every room. Vibrant colour blocks define this area, from the lipstick red wall in the bedroom to a richly woven 1950s tapestry by Jean-Jacques Picard in the dining room. Throughout, grounding green tones act as an anchor, whether a painted wall in lieu of a kitchen splashback or as a foil to an exotic jungle wallpaper in the sitting room. "I like to be daring," Thomass says. "A career in fashion teaches you that artistically, anything is possible."



This picture In the bedroom, a bright red wall acts as a foil to the Jean Royère Liane light. **Right** In the ensuite bathroom, a Tiger Eye mirror from Reflections Copenhagen echoes the graphics on the rug. The cabinet is from Ikea. **Below right** Accessed by all the rooms, the terrace space acts as a year-round additional living room. The vintage table and chairs are by Mathieu Matégot



Ceramics, especially those inspired by artists who settled in the neighbouring town of Vallauris in the 1950s, are Thomass's most treasured items. "I've been collecting for years," she says. "In Paris it's Wedgwood, but here it's pieces by Robert Picault, who was inspired by his next-door neighbour, Picasso. I find nothing more beautiful than these objects. I prefer them to beautiful jewellery."

Thomass has ensured that indoors seamlessly merges with outdoors: the dining room features 1940s rattan garden furniture, while the terrace is treated as an extension of the living space, a place to watch the world go by, as well as a safe harbour for the couple's two cats and two dogs. Laying the table for lunch is a particular pleasure. "I use ceramics as a starting point and layer up from there, picking out their colours and patterns," Thomass says.

Above all, though, this is a home that plays on the senses. "My grandmother loved jasmine and its scent pervaded her home, as it does our terrace and our dining room," Thomass says. "Being here makes us happy. The vibrant schemes, an open layout, our simple pieces, the pleasure of being part of a beautiful village: each evokes a sense of joy." ■