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**Hamptons Cottages and Gardens**

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## rainbowinabox

by Lockhart Steele / photographs by Michael Grimm

The place where fantasy and reality come together and blur offers a potent nexus for decorator creativity. In a 1980s-era Quogue house, Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz turns a standard box design into a Hollywood stage and fantasyland through the use of individual colors for each room and clever positioning of shapes.

**Color Code** | Noriega-Ortiz gave each room its own color identity, bathing a bedroom (LEFT) in apple green. "It's a very sexy room," he says. The table light is Tizio by Artemide. The illuminated acrylic cube is custom-made by PlexiCraft. See Resources.





**AS ADVICE GOES,** “Think inside the box” doesn’t sound like the greatest way to encourage creativity. Yet that was the marching order given to decorator Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz two years ago by a married couple seeking a creative makeover of a flat-roofed box house in Quogue they’d recently purchased.

The decorator responded in out-of-the-box fashion, turning an unexceptional, early 1980’s spec house into a dreamy fantasyland through the creative use of shape and color. In the process, he authored a lesson on how beauty can be created on budget with a lot of vision—and a little patience.

The owners—Jessica Ushan and Ron Schechter, residential real estate sales agents at Charles H. Greenthal—bought their Quogue residence six years ago. Longtime Manhattanites, they found themselves drawn to a contemporary house despite their preconceived notions of what they would find in the Hamptons. “Initially we thought, ‘Oh, an old shingle house would be nice,’” Ushan recalls. “When we saw the light in a contemporary house, we changed our minds. This was a sunny house—and it looked like an easy one to manage.”

At least she was half right. Following a surprise roof replacement soon after they bought the house, the couple turned to Noriega-Ortiz to bring the same sense of flair to their Quogue house that he’d lavished on Ushan’s Manhattan apartment and office. In the city, Ushan

**Stage Set** | “I wanted to make the entry to the house more theatrical, so now you enter the house through drapery,” says Noriega-Ortiz about the dramatic front entryway (OPPOSITE). The semi-sheer nylon drapes are custom-made; the columns are from the clients’ collection. **Poolside** | At the rear of the house, a swimming pool (TOP) lures visitors. The plastic chair is by Steen Ostergaard via eBay. See Resources.







and Schecter were impressed with the decorator's use of a mostly monochromatic color palette to create an ethereal feeling of light in dark spaces. Now, confronted with a Hamptons house flooded with natural light, Noriega-Ortiz took a different approach, bathing each room of the house in a single, distinct rainbow color.

"When I went to see the house, I realized it's really a box," Noriega-Ortiz recalls. "It has a center living room area, like a courtyard, and rooms around it like you'll find in a Spanish house in my hometown of San Juan, Puerto Rico. We decided to make this 'courtyard' into a big entertaining room. The surrounding rooms we'd do in individual colors—that way, the house would look bigger."

Budget limitations restricted the homeowners to decorating one room at a time. So one by one, over a two-year period, the rooms received their color christenings. The living room became a very pale blue, the master bedroom light purple, one of the three guest bedrooms an apple green. Noriega-Ortiz's color concepts did not stop there. "It's an old idea to do rooms by color, but we extended that to do things in the room with a hint of the color," he says. "Furniture often matches the respective wall color. There are no patterns—I really dislike them. I use interesting shapes instead. So this house is a study of shapes and colors."

It is also a study in the dramatic. The house's front exterior is framed with giant semi-sheer nylon drapes that are passed through on the way into the foyer. Inside, another set of translucent drapes blur the reality of the



**Center Stage** | The living room (OPPOSITE) features a mix of modern and antique pieces. Custom feather-shade lamps are by And Bob's Your Uncle, NYC. The sofa is from Donghia. The coffee table is from Far Eastern Antiques, NYC. **Glass Act** | Usban collects the white glass that adorns a wall of the living room (ABOVE LEFT) on eBay. **Soft Touch** | The apple green bedroom (ABOVE RIGHT) shimmers. See Resources.





living room beyond—where a final set of drapes separate the interior space from the swimming pool at the back of the house. “It is a great set to enter,” Noriega-Ortiz notes. “I think of it as a layering of fantasy and reality.”

The living room’s high ceilings and dramatic natural light ensure that the room is the house’s true center stage. Noriega-Ortiz closed off one entry to the kitchen to change the room’s proportions, uniting the living space. The dining area sits off one side of the room, with the kitchen tucked behind it. The four bedrooms open off the living room, each sharing a design aesthetic that mixes modern pieces with the occasional antique. “In a modern house, I decided to use modern forms,” he explains, “but we added a few antiques from Hamptons stores because the shapes go with each other.”

The abundant sunlight toys with the colors in the house. “The living room can look white, but when the light changes, you feel the colors change,” Ushan says. “I was having a debate with someone about the color of the fireplace—is it blue or purple? When you look from one room into another, the colors always look a little different against one another.”

This transformative nature makes the house a literal dreamscape for its owners. “Once we’re there, it actually feels like we’re not in a house but somewhere in another land,” Schechter marvels. “We weren’t afraid to go with Benjamin’s vision of what it could be, and thank goodness we did, because we believe it worked on every level.” ☀



**At Table** | The dining area (ABOVE LEFT) opens off the living room and faces the swimming pool. The photographs on the wall were taken by Schechter, an accomplished amateur photographer. **Summer Medley** | Vegetables overflow a bowl on the antique dining table (ABOVE RIGHT). **Master Suite** | The master bedroom (OPPOSITE) is a study in purples. “It’s another ethereal room,” says Noriega-Ortiz. See Resources.