

THE MAGAZINE OF SPLENDID HOMES AND GARDENS • MAY/JUNE 2010

# DESIGN

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**Cape Town Connection**

Mally Skok fills her Massachusetts home with the laid-back atmosphere of her native South Africa.

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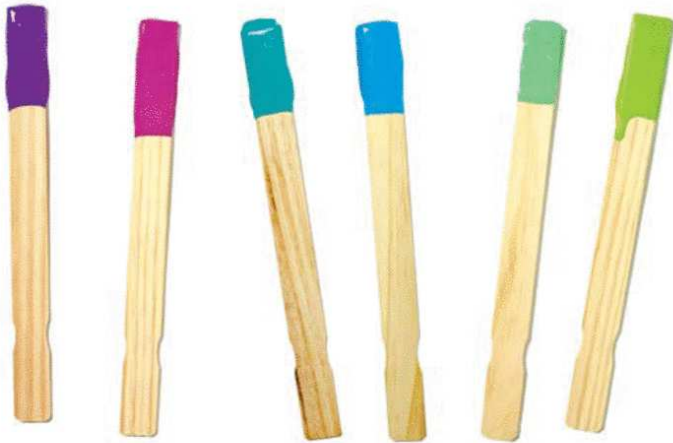


**LEED by Example**

Tref LaFleche uses his own home as testing ground for a smart, sophisticated, sustainable standard.

SELECTIONS ▼

We chose our favorite shades of feverishly bright paints, then looked to local architectural color consultants for advice on how to incorporate these bold hues into any room.



GREEN ESSENTIALS ▼

**Outdoor Fabrics** • The hunt for stylish, eco-friendly textiles is over.





THE CORAL HUES in the silk taffeta curtains enliven the sitting room of Mally Skok's Lincoln, Massachusetts, home. The antique chairs, bought years ago in London, have been reupholstered many times.



# Cape Town Connection

Fabric designer Mally Skok fills her Massachusetts home with the laid-back atmosphere of her native South Africa

WRITTEN BY JILL CONNORS • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC ROTH

**D**ECORATOR. FABRIC DESIGNER. GLOBE-TROTTER. Stepping into the entry hall of her Lincoln, Massachusetts, home, Mally Skok sees not only objects, but also memories: the 19th-century French console table from a shop in Groton, Massachusetts; the gilded mirror she has had since her days in London; the bench covered in an ikat from the fabric collection she introduced last year. And straight ahead, through French doors, she sees the landscape and pond that inspired her and her husband, David, to buy this 6-acre property 13 years ago and build a home for their family of five (one son, two daughters, now in their late teens and early 20s).

"I did not realize it when I was designing the house, but I had replicated the layout of the classic Dutch Colonial houses you find in and around Cape Town," says Skok, who was born in the South African city and grew up in Johannesburg. "I love the wonderful light of a front-to-back entrance hall — and seeing a view of the garden on the other side is so pleasing."



THE FRONT ENTRY'S sense of scale and graciousness derives from railings on the stairway and second-floor gallery, marble floors, and French doors. The bench is covered in Skok's "Ikat Crazy" fabric. Nelson, one of the family's two dogs, watches for visitors. Skok (FACING PAGE), with longhair dachshund Rosy at her feet, serves a guest on the terrace.

Cherished antiques and homeward-bound memories — things such as these matter to Skok, who still travels regularly to South Africa to visit family. Having developed an interest in the interior design industry while living in London (“a South African friend and interior designer dragged me through all the scary antiques stores and snooty fabric houses”), Skok started her own design firm in 1998, not long after arriving in Boston (a result of her husband’s high-tech business interests). She became known among clients for unerring taste in color and interesting textiles (Central Asian suzanis and ikats) and an ability to find the odd antique that conveyed personality.

Skok has been a collector for years, and she doesn’t part with too many treasures. Instead, she re-covers them. Side chairs, love seats, sofas, and slipper chairs throughout the house have been reupholstered and slipcovered many times over the years. And she uses them. The Georgian-era dining room table and chairs are family heirlooms. Antique transferware plates fill kitchen shelves; vintage glassware stands ready in the dining room.

Color plays a leading role as well. Palettes in shades of coral, aqua, and jade appear throughout the house, referencing her lifelong love of the sea. (A family home in South Africa overlooks the Indian Ocean; she and her husband own a cottage on Cape Cod.) Natural light streams into rooms through windows that extend to the baseboard. “I wanted the look of windows from English country houses, where you can walk out onto the terrace,” says Skok. “Love huge splashes of sun on the floor in the morning — such a happy sight!” Throughout the house, 9-foot-high ceilings enhance the sense of spaciousness.

Working with The Hartwright Co., a design/build firm in Concord, Massachusetts, Skok incorporated architectural aspects into the design that replicate those in Dutch Colonial houses in South Africa. In the first-floor layout, for example, the front-to-back entry is flanked by two “reception” rooms — a formal sitting room and an elegant dining room. Functional spaces extend from there. Beyond the dining room is the butler’s pantry and kitchen; beyond the sitting room is the sunroom and study.

Embracing design inspirations from all her travels — not to mention a fascination with textiles — Skok took her design business in a new direction when she launched a fabric line last year. Gradually, she is bringing the patterns into her rooms and her outdoor spaces. One daughter’s bedroom got the full



treatment, with delicate pink wallpaper and curtains in a coordinating stripe. Elsewhere, Skok’s fabrics appear on slipcovers, pillows, and outdoor furniture.

Perhaps because of her global base of family and friends, Skok has taken to the online social-network world quickly and wholeheartedly. She Tweets regularly (to more than a thousand followers) and frequently posts to her blog ([mallyskokdesign.com](http://mallyskokdesign.com)). Indeed, the kitchen table in her Lincoln house — with a table skirt of her own fabric, of course — is Twitter central. There, Skok taps her laptop keyboard while taking in the pastoral landscape of pond and garden, working on new fabric designs and colorways, and keeping her reach, as always, at least one continent away. ■

#### DESIGN DECISIONS *For the Love of Textiles*



Interior designer Mally Skok’s global vision inspired her first fabric collection. During a trip to India in 2008, she began sketching patterns as she traveled. Returning home to Massachusetts, she made small watercolors and took them to Peter Fasano, a Western Massachusetts fabric and wallpaper artisan whose work she had long admired. The result: the “India Collection,” Mally Skok Design’s first fabric line, which debuted in the fall of 2009. Many of the fabrics feature small-scale patterns in aquas and pinks on neutral backgrounds, but there are stripes and vivid overall patterns as well. Skok’s newest fabric line is “Ikat Crazy,” in linen or silk taffeta, her rendition of an ancient woven textile. The line, carried in major showrooms in the United States, England, and Australia, is available in Boston at Studio 534 in the Boston Design Center. Recently, she even fielded a call from noted New York designer Mario Buatta: “He wanted some of my fabrics on the spot! I was soooo flattered,” she says. What’s next? Skok is already working on the “Africa Collection.”



UPHOLSTERED WALLS, heirloom furniture, and vintage glassware give the dining room its ambience. Says Skok: "I wanted to create a warm and slightly womb-like environment. The fabric on the walls is great for acoustics when the wine starts flowing and things get a little noisy!"







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WALLPAPER AND FABRICS of Skok's design (FACING PAGE) brighten a daughter's bedroom. THIS PAGE: 1 A guest bedroom is a sunny hideaway, with a chair covered in a Skok fabric. 2 Vintage transferware collected over the years is kept on kitchen shelves. 3 A sconce doubles as a jewelry hook in this who-needs-formality house. 4 Colorful upholstery and accent pillows in the family room speak to Skok's love of textiles. 5 Skok at her kitchen table, which is covered in one of her fabrics. 6 The master bath has a pastoral view.

FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES



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