



Marjorie Tomaso created or modified just about everything here, from the icy-beaded, faux-Asian pear centerpiece to the lamps' gilded little birdies. The photo on the sideboard, of two sisters on a camel, is an image from the Art Institute of Chicago's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis exhibit, scanned in from the catalog and blown up. It's reminiscent, Mrs. Tomaso says, of her and her sister, who lives next door.

Indomitable Design

Marjorie Tomaso's sleek M.O. is all about DIY.

BY MARGARET BAUER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALISE O'BRIEN

Nowadays, it's pretty easy to find what you want for your home. Hop online, type in some search terms, and you're there. But what if your heart's desire simply *doesn't exist*?


Designer Marjorie Tomaso made it herself.

"My favorite TV show is *Mad Men*. I was watching it one night, and there was a scene in which Don Draper is having drinks with Miss Menken," Mrs. Tomaso recalls. "I *loved* the walls. So I started to research it. I'm like, 'I've gotta find that wallpaper; I've gotta have it.' And then I realized that that wallpaper does not exist, because other people were trying to find it as well."

The sultry pattern turned out to be a zebra print from the banquettes at an old New York City club named El Morocco. "So I took the design and put it on the walls," she says.

But it wasn't quite that easy. Mrs. Tomaso imagined it as a quick summer project, but it took her six months to complete, from scanning in banquette photos to creating 5- by 2-foot stencils to stapling up the finished fabric.

Hers is an uncommon devotion. When Mrs. Tomaso and her husband, Bob, decided to renovate the rest of their Creve Coeur home eight years ago, they moved out entirely for two years, waiting patiently for the screened-in sun porch, the walk-in closet...

"I think I planned this house for five years in my head before it actually came to fruition," Mrs. Tomaso confesses. She's already done the same for their next project: "We want to do a pool and pool house, and that thing is already *waaaaay* designed in my head," she says. "It's just a matter of doing it." 





Lighting control is key in a room with double exterior French doors (opposite page), so Mrs. Tomaso papered the walls, vents, outlets, and switch plates with dark-red grasscloth. Out of frame to the right is a safari-themed mini bar, with martini glasses, shakers, and zebra-painted cups on wall-mounted shelves; behind the photographer, a rustic wine closet is sealed by a clear glass door with a perfectly matched glass knob. Squares of antiqued mirror line the top of the wall to the left.

The kitchen countertops (left) are done in oiled green soapstone with brushed stainless-steel fixtures and appliances, resembling a sort of designer chemistry lab. Before anything else, says Mrs. Tomaso, they purchased the kitchen table, then consulted with the architect to create a space it worked well with. Most people do it the other way around, she says—and end up with less-than-satisfactory spaces as a result.



Mrs. Tomaso made this room monochromatic, enveloping visitors in a curry yellow that summons to mind spices and trade winds. On the wall is a painted scarf, purchased at Ivey-Selkirk Auctioneers. She procured the seated Buddha, originally an outdoor statue, in Michigan. "It's so heavy, but it's authentic," she says.

The Tomasos' teenage daughters, Sophie and Sydney, laugh together on the porch. The lush canvas behind them, picturing a verdant tropical retreat, was painted by a Michigan artist. Tucked away on the tables flanking the settee are a variety of mementos: scallop shells, a bowl of moss, porcelain artichokes, an orchid terrarium, and other curios.





The porch, added during the home's renovation, sweetly evokes the Michigan lakeshore, where the Tomasos travel regularly. Sitting in this space, with its beadboard walls and ceiling, candlelit lanterns, dark wicker chairs, and surrounding sweetgum tree, is like stepping back in time to a 1950s camp-out. It's easy to imagine gathering the family round to dine or play cards amid the loamy scent of a rising summer storm.

