



HIGH CONTRAST
Left: Irene Silvagni in her garden. Above: an antique wooden bed mixed with a Barcelona chair in the green bedroom. Right: iron campaign beds, floral-patterned wool blankets and plastic-topped 1950s tables in the red living room.

Home/Work

Independent Spirit

With her eye for the unusual, the ancient and the brightly colored, Irene Silvagni orchestrates her Provençal retreat into a wonderfully imperfect harmony.

BY PILAR VILADAS

"I LIKE THE IMPERFECTIONS of things," Irene Silvagni declares. And to look at the rooms of her home in Provence — with their centuries-old stone floors, worn antique furniture covered with vintage textiles and picture frames without pictures, among other things — you know she means it. The rambling, 8,000-square-foot residence, parts of which date back to the 16th century, is a never-ending project for Silvagni, 71, a former fashion editor for French Vogue (and, more recently, a creative consultant for Yohji Yamamoto, and now for Giambattista Valli). She firmly believes

that a house "should never be finished. When the house is finished, you die," she says.

Silvagni's love affair with the house began 24 years ago, when, on an August holiday with her late husband, the film producer Giorgio Silvagni, the couple (who lived in Paris) went to look at a house that had piqued Giorgio's interest with a listing that read, "Ruin for Sale." Silvagni thought her husband had lost his mind — the place had been unoccupied for 80 years — but off they went, and although they had no intention of buying a house, they realized that "there





MULTIPLE CHOICE
Above and below:
Silvagni's photography
collection hangs in
the entry and in her
bedroom. Right:
Vallauris pottery sits
against the far wall of
the kitchen.



was something in that house that was totally magic," she recalls. Three days later, they bought it, and began restoring it. Giorgio eventually painted the rooms with local pigments — yellow, ocher, red, green — and even painted some of the lampshades, lest they look too bare. And they gradually filled it with furniture and objects. The son of an architect, Giorgio had an eye for beautiful things. And Silvagni herself is a self-described "flea-market fanatic" who loves the ritual of going to the market, having a coffee and chatting with various dealers before deciding what to buy.



That almost always involves things that are far from pristine. "As in fashion," she says, "sometimes you have something that looks like a defect, but suddenly it makes the beauty of the whole thing. It's an accident; this house is full of accidents." On the ground floor, the entry to the house contains a huge 18th-century Italian gilt wood mirror and a fragment of a carved wood ornament that Silvagni believes came from an old ship. Four vintage Thonet bentwood chairs, their pale green paint partly worn away, sit under two photographs of the model Tatjana Patitz by Peter Lindbergh, one of many photographers with whom Silvagni collaborated during her brief but memorable tenure at French Vogue. (Among the others were Paolo Roversi, Max Vadukul and Steven Meisel.) Two living rooms — one painted ocher, the other a red that "the sunset light sets on fire," according to Silvagni — are filled with things like an old chesterfield sofa upholstered in kilims, a Louis XVI daybed covered with a silk suzani, a chandelier that was used by French revolutionaries and Silvagni's collections of photographs and black French ceramics from the 1940s and '50s. In the monochromatic library, a pair of vintage post office sorting carts hold stacks of magazines. A giant wooden table, originally used to cut fabrics, serves as a dinner table in Silvagni's enviably large kitchen.

Upstairs, the bedrooms are referred to as the green, pink and white rooms. The green room is so popular, Silvagni says, that her friends specifically request it when they come to visit. The pink room, Silvagni's own, is dominated by a large, strawberry-colored

'As in fashion, sometimes you have something that looks like a defect, but suddenly it makes the beauty of the whole thing. It's an accident; this house is full of accidents.'

PLAIN AND FANCY
Clockwise from right: the barn has its own chandelier; postal sorting carts hold magazines in the library; Roman-style wooden busts in the green bedroom; a wardrobe by Giorgio Silvagni in the white bedroom.



tufted sofa from the 1920s that used to reside in a fashion house. Now Silvagni's friends watch TV on it, while their hostess watches from her bed, which was designed by Giorgio. The room's leopard-patterned carpet is a nod to the French decorator Madeleine Castaing, one of Silvagni's inspirations. "She was really a fantastic eccentric," Silvagni says, adding that she's wary of most decorators, although Jacques Grange's and Tony Duquette's interiors earn high marks, as do "eclectic" English houses. "To have one sort of simple style is a little boring to me," she says.

"I'm certainly not Zen at all." But neither is she a reckless mixer. Just as objects "respond to each other," Silvagni explains, "they can also refuse each other. I find some beautiful things that just don't fit."

But for Silvagni, that's all part of the thrill of living in the house. She maintains a *pied-à terre* in Paris but spends much of her time in the country. "This is the place where I really live," she says. She tends her garden, entertains friends and devotes herself to the eternal work in progress that she calls home. "This house has a soul," Silvagni says. "It's like a person." ▀