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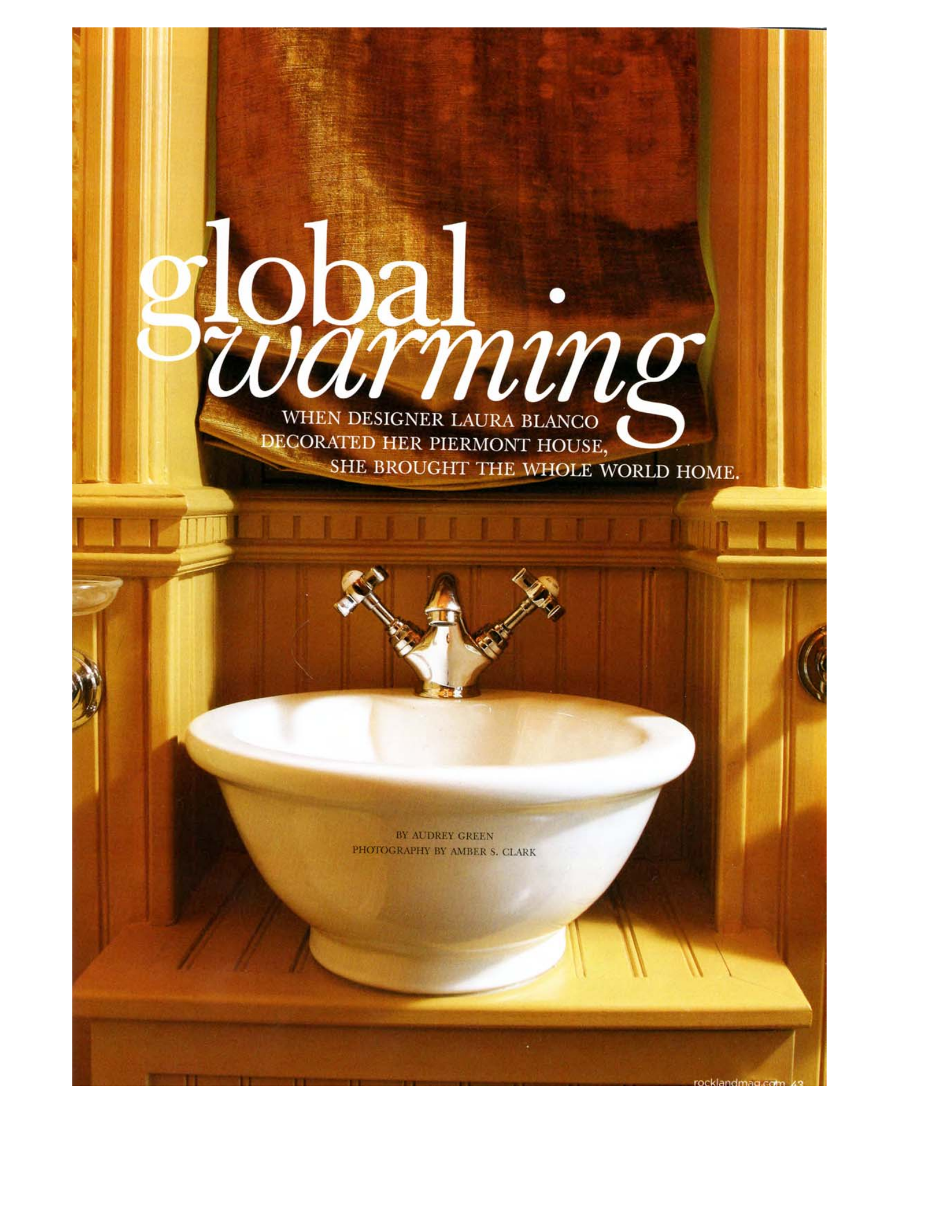
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MAGAZINE



GLOBAL CHIC

PIERMONT'S MUST-SEE
DREAM HOME



global warming

WHEN DESIGNER LAURA BLANCO
DECORATED HER PIERMONT HOUSE,
SHE BROUGHT THE WHOLE WORLD HOME.

BY AUDREY GREEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMBER S. CLARK



Blanco brings her eclectic style into her 19th-century Queen Anne Victorian. Here, a sitting room off the entrance.

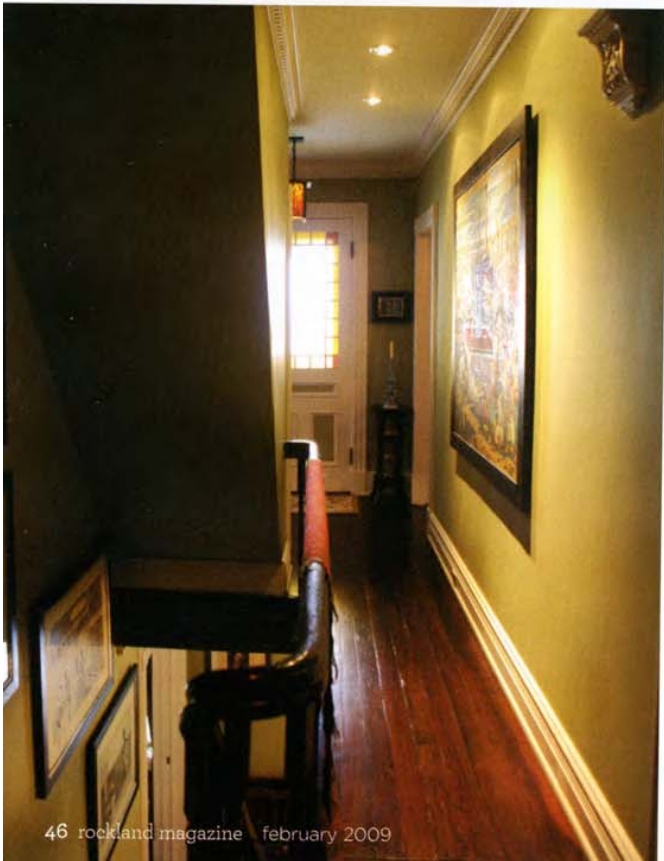
Interior designer and landscape architect Laura Blanco calls herself a New Yorker, but one look around her Piermont home betrays her proud ethnicity. Like her native Cuba, Blanco's home is a tapestry of global cultures that blends tradition with progressive zest. Combining diverse elements of art, architecture, scale, and light is no easy feat; it took Blanco more than 10 years to restore and decorate the late-19th-century Queen Anne Victorian she purchased with her husband in 1993. But with the luxury of time, she's created a masterpiece: a spectacular cultural mix that intertwines her distinct style, her heritage, and her imagination.

When her father was taken as a political prisoner by the communist regime, Blanco was forced to flee Cuba with her mother in 1960, at the tender age of 4, but her vivid memories of her homeland have influenced both her designs and her life. "I remember my father driving, singing in the car," she says wistfully, staring at a picturesque panorama painting of the island's countryside by Cuban artist Juan Gil Garcia.

After more than 25 years in exile, Blanco finally returned to Havana in 1996 to see her family home and reconnect with her roots (She had also been there briefly, in 1983, just before her dad was released: they eventually reunited in Miami, though he died



"Take chances with color," is one of Blanco's favorite decorating tips. She takes her own advice in the bold sitting room, the hallway, and the kitchen. **RIGHT** the hearth's unique Minton tiles.



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soon after). She stocked up on art, and managed to bring back original paintings by Cuban Master artists, and four enormous paintings by then-23-year old Douglas Perez Castro, who would go on to be one of the Havana’s celebrated artists. Despite the years of heartache, she holds deep reverence for her homeland.

“Cuba is in a beautiful state of decay,” Blanco says.

Until two years ago, the same was true of her house. Though the 3,400-square-foot home was intended to be a relaxing escape from the couple’s pulsing professional lives in New York City, it would be years before Blanco and her husband, Wall Street consultant Robert Shainheit, could really relax there. First, they had to replace the crumbling floors, which were doubling as the structure’s foundation because there was no sub-floor. They removed and restored the dilapidated staircase, retired the brown shag rug that covered the entire ground floor, and peeled a rainbow of old paint from the original Eastlake hardware, the slate fireplace mantels, and the hearth’s encaustic Minton tiles.



"What could be prettier than light dancing on crystal?" Blanco asks referring to the Waterford chandelier in this sunny guest bedroom.

Rich colors and Iranian end tables, bought at an auction, give the master bedroom Middle Eastern flavor. Blanco mixed and matched Bradbury and Bradbury wallpaper (below) to complete the room.



HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

As for decorating, Blanco tried to bring in something from every corner of the globe, “even from places I’ve only been in my mind.” Each room has its own ethnic flavor, enhanced by its structure and location. Says Blanco, “You let the room speak to you.”

The theme of the sun-starved master bedroom reflects the Middle East, decorated with rich velvets, deep burgundy, and mahogany. From auctions, she acquired ornate, Iranian end tables inlaid with Mother of Pearl, but most impressive, Blanco and Shainheit sleep beneath deep red, blue, and gold stars papered on the ceiling. Blanco used ornate Bradbury and Bradbury wallpaper, which she mixed and matched, on both the walls and ceilings. A specialist she knew from San Francisco (where the wallpaper is from) came to her house and put it together, piece by piece—a 10-day project.

In the smallest guest bedroom Blanco seized the opportunity to experiment with scale. An enormous armoire from the Civil War era takes up nearly half the room on one wall, while an antique Chinese screen spans the other. A peacock fan from New Orleans is framed above a smiling Buddha statue. Meanwhile, sunlight pours through opaque cream curtains in the bigger guest bedroom. Watercolor paintings of birds, accentuated with real feathers, adorn the walls, and soft white linens enhance a twinkling Waterford chandelier. “What could be prettier than light dancing on crystal?” she asks.

But then, a true masterpiece is never complete. “It’s been years, and I’ve never found just the right finial for the staircase,” Blanco exclaims. “There’s always something.”