

Decor Score: Bring drama to your room with trompe l'oeil

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: I saw some terrific trompe l'oeil paintings in a designer showhouse last year and can't get out of my mind that I'd love something really exciting for my living room walls. I collect blue and white dishes and garniture. The artist said she could paint them really big. My husband usually lets me do what I want, but he's not thrilled with this latest idea and I'm getting cold feet. What do you think?

A: I think you should have the courage of your convictions - even when they may seem a bit over the top. It takes courage to make a **DECADENT DINING** - The natural habitat for a fashionista, Donatello Versace's dining room is upscale, oversized, and intriguing. CNS Photo by Johansen Krause. real design statement, so most people just swallow their inspirations and go for beige. To help screw your courage to the sticking point, as Shakespeare said, we present this glimpse into the natural habitat of fearless Italian fashion diva Donatella Versace.

The sister of the late Gianni Versace, now head of the famously flashy fashion house, Donatella is "no minimalist," as she once told an editor from Elle Decor magazine (we borrowed this photo from a new book called "So Chic," by Margaret Russell and other Elle Decor editors; Filipacchi Publishing).

One glance at Donatella's swellegant dining room confirms her understatement: There's eye-dazzlement everywhere, from the inlaid wood floor to the sculpted, gilded ceiling. But the wall paintings are what I want you to see: big, beautiful, trompe l'oeil paintings of Japanese and Chinese vases akin to the real ones on display. Teamed with the exotic tile work under the chair rail, the paintings turn the room into a veritable art gallery. Dining here, one could imagine, would be an awesome sensory experience.

Leave this photo on your husband's pillow. He'll come around to your, ahem, off-the-wall idea.

Q: I'm doing over a guest bath and don't want to spend a lot of money. The sink is right under the window, and the plumber insists that it needs to be moved so we can install the medicine cabinet-mirror over it. What's wrong with putting the cabinet on the wall beside the mirror?

A: Not a thing - your guests should be clever enough to look over their shoulders. But I have seen a better idea in another house under renovation. Richmond, Va., homeowner Jean Wight revamped a smallish bath for her husband in their handsome historic house, creating smashing space without killing the budget (they're redoing all the other living areas, too).

Her secrets: inexpensive ceramic tile that looks like slate covering floors and the partial wall she had built between the open shower and sink. Plus, inspired use of the window, which, like yours, is over that sink. She hung an inexpensive metal-framed mirror, a Home Depot special, on short chains so it swings free in the window, covering enough for modesty's sake but not blocking the natural daylight. Clever! And kind to the pocketbook.

As thoughtful as she is ingenious, Jean covered the back of the mirror with black to avoid offending her neighbors' aesthetics.

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