

inside **QH**



April Cornell

Okay, let's be specific. April Cornell isn't exactly a traditional patchworker who stitches her creations into being. Part of her extensive textiles empire includes quilts that she designs, true. However, when it comes to the piecing together of form and color, of pattern and tone in the countless fabrics she has designed for home textiles, apparel and quilting, well, this girl definitely has some quilting cred.

— Melissa Thompson Maher



Throughout her rambling Burlington, Vermont, “bricks and sticks” home, you can see glimpses of her colorful style and the influences that inspire her work. Although April travels widely—she has an apartment in New Delhi, India, where her fabrics and textiles are produced, and a holiday home in the Grand Cayman Islands—her home base is definitely Burlington, in a three-story home built in 1893 on an acre and a half in the center of this town of about 35,000. Her corporate office is nearby, on the shores of Lake Champlain.

The house is on both the local and national Register of Historic Places, and it is a bit eclectic in its own right. It has two staircases (one in the front and one in the back)



Above right: A hand-painted Indian cabinet holds swatches from April's many collections.

Above left and far left: Nature and India are key influences for designer April Cornell. April's painting of a tree outside her New Delhi apartment graces the wall of her Burlington living room.

Photography by Gregory Case; styling by Elena Morera



Above: Old Guatemalan textiles cover the chairs in the living room, where the walls display more of April's hand-painted original artwork. The Indian brass peacock lamp on the floor near the window is traditionally used in ceremonies to invite good spirits in, a practice April continues today. Some of her quilts take the place of logs in the wood caddy.

Lower left: The nook showcases family art, including the floral watercolor over the bench made by April's former mother-in-law and the ship on the mantel made by her stepfather. The framed Hindi saying above the fireplace translates to "God love you."

Lower right: Embellished cowboy boots from Vermont artist Kelly de Castro set the artistic tone in the entryway. The African paintings on the wall above are actually reverse-painted glass. Through the pillars is the library, one of April's favorite rooms. The shelves are stocked with art supplies. The *jamavar* shawl draped over the armchair is from Kashmir, India.

and two fireplaces. The top floor is a bit rustic, she says, looking like an Adirondack camp, while the second story is "cottage cozy" with lots of windows and slightly heavier wood. And the main floor is classically formal. (Or, at least it was, April claims, before she and her paintbrush got a hold of it!)

Being Montreal-born and bred, she's fond of antique French Canadian pine furniture, such as the farmhouse table and chairs in the dining room. The classic lines and weathered color are a good foil for her colorful textile accents.

Using bold and soft colors, antique furniture and dishes, carefully chosen art and a rich mix of her textiles with those from other countries and cultures, April's home conveys a sense of warmth and genteel informality, with the promise of something unusual or interesting just around the next corner.

It's a great house for parties, April says, with its creamy paneled dining room where the large pine table takes center stage and the living





room with its yellow walls and Guatemalan textile covered armchairs. She often hosts parties for friends and family, and she frequently offers one of her home's six bedrooms for business associates traveling to Burlington to work with her staff. And, with all these great props, the house gets used a fair amount for photo shoots, too.

"It likes to be full of people, this house," she says.

April's nearby corporate office also reflects a lot of the same colorful warmth, style and informality of her home. Although it's an industrial building, the walls have been painted pale pink and much of the furniture is more what you'd find in a cozy home. A bulletin board studded with fabric swatches becomes ad hoc art in its heavily carved Indian frame. Mannequins stand throughout, dressed in designs from April's women's apparel collection. Even the cabinets housing the extensive cotton floss collections that she uses in fabric design add a colorful decorative element.

April's designs are strongly influenced by Asian art and culture, which is not surprising, considering



***Above:** The guest room's block-printed matelasse coverlet was made in India to April's specs. The painting above the bed is by Nova Scotian artist D. McCracken. The faux vintage bookcase is one of April's designs from about 10 years ago, when her company made and sold furniture.*

***Far above:** The rail around the dining room holds pieces from April's travels or collections. The built-in hutch houses antique serving ware often used in corporate photo shoots. The chunk of metal in the foreground on the table is a block used in printing fabric.*



Above: The recently added front porch is a great place for parties, and it can be quite private when the fabric-covered blinds are unfurled.

Right: Being on an acre and a half—yet in the middle of Burlington—the house still has a country feel. The bench and quilt are from April's collections. The New Mexican chimenea—a warming focal point for outdoor winter parties—was a gift.



Right: The swatch library has literally thousands of samples—strike-offs of every fabric April has designed.



her business' roots go back 30-some years to Afghanistan. That's when April first began importing the colorful embroideries, carved wood objects and other goods created by the various Afghani tribes.

"You know those tribes you hear about on the news now? Each tribal group has its own embroidery style and weaving style and carving style," she says. "We collected those things and sold them, and that's how our business started."

Her design references definitely remain global, and she continues to draw from many cultures. April collaborates with several Tibetan artists and is very close to the Tibetan community in Burlington. And she's developed a lasting bond with the Indian culture, in part due to the time she spends there, overseeing her fabric and textile production.

(By the way, you'll see plenty of Tibetan and Indian influence in April's new **Prayer Flag** collection for Moda, due out in stores this spring. Look for block-printed medium tones in turquoise, teal, greens, yellow and gold. It's quite different from her earlier Moda collections, she says, and was inspired by the arching windows of the Taj Mahal and the festive colors used at Indian celebrations.)

Nature is another enduring influence in April's life and art, and it's one that's evident throughout her home. Her love of nature inspired her to paint designs, poems and bits of philosophy and "**April-isms**" on her walls, such as the flowering tree that stretches across the wall in one part of the living room.

"I am very thankful to nature. That's the tree outside my apartment in New Dehli," she says. Underneath its spreading branches are the words, "How do you say thank you to a tree?"

In a corner in the living room, she has painted an original poem about what type of flower she would be during each day of the week, and she's adorned the facing wall with painted examples of those flowers.

She's also an avid birder, and you'll find birds throughout her décor, mostly in the form of hand-carved figurines or carved into heavy Indian mirror or picture frames. Her work schedule doesn't allow much time for birding trips, she says, but because she travels to some "awesome places," she has been able to see many unusual birds in their native habitats.

There is also a strong spiritual undertone in her work, she says, and that interest is reflected in her extensive collection of religious art. A table in the front hall displays some of her many statues of Buddha; figurines of the Indian gods Ganesh, Rama, Sita and Krishna; and a handmade metal Hand of Fatima, which is a Muslim symbol. And in another room, you'll find a statue of St. Francis of Assisi.

"I am not particularly a religious person, but I am spiritual... I appreciate the beauty of the icons and what they represent in other people's lives," she says.



Above: A hand-carved mirror hangs above April's eclectic shrine in the entryway, which includes several figures of Buddha, some Indian gods and a metal Hand of Fatima, a Muslim symbol.

Left: The house, built in 1893, retains a lot of its historical appeal, such as this stained glass panel on the landing.