

# 'Northern Exposure' a promising debut

all about color

**Helen Diane Vincent**

## Make yours country style

Q. For a number of years I've been enjoying country style-furniture using Laura Ashley fabrics for both my dining and living room. Although I still appreciate how well the whole thing is put together, I'm looking to make a gradual change into something simpler and more contemporary. At present, the wallpaper is in a pale gold and white stripe; the chairs upholstery and drapery used a coral and green floral motif. There's a pastel colored chandelier on the floor, many decorative accessories, and a lot of fringe and ruffles. What else can I do to achieve my goal, other than removing the excesses, without redoing the two rooms completely?

A. One of the secrets to the country look in general and the Laura Ashley look in particular is to achieve a humble elegance by juxtaposing various elements without any one standing out. This is done by using a variety of themes and motifs based on some strong underlying scale or proportion as well as very straightforward color harmonies. Most often, the color harmonies consist of one color on a white ground, or two, or three tones of similar colors used in combination. And, as you've pointed out, the look also relies on accessories and detailing such as fringes, bows, and ruffles.

You can gradually shift to a cleaner, more contemporary look by using some of the ingredients already in your possession. A good starting point is your pale gold and white wallpaper. Replace your coral and green floral chintz with a pale apricot and white, geometric pattern in an unglazed chintz or other type of fabric. Continue with the same theme by adding a pale green and white for the dining room chairs or other pieces. When seen in combination, these soft colors will fuse and give the impression of a color neutral surrounding. The style of your new slipcovers should be tailored, and all fringes and bows are to be removed. Use a solid pale green or gold color fabric for the drapery, or for the pull-up Roman shades at the windows.

You can also explore the color principle of assimilation by using the same gold, apricot and green with

grey instead of white. Because grey is influenced by its nearest color, it will look quite different in each combination. In this way you will be adding an additional subtlety, contributing to the idea of a color neutral. Your dourie will fit in very well with this approach.

Q. We're both in our early 20s, about to get married, and have the problem of combining two distinctly different furniture styles and color preferences into one apartment. My boyfriend's furnishings are very basic, functional pieces. For example, his favorite chair is a brown leather recliner that he definitely wants to keep. On the other hand, my furniture is mostly white wicker, with pink and gold chintz for the upholstery as well as the coordinated drapery. How can we combine the two styles and have it look good?

A. Despite all the advice you may have heard about mixing and matching furniture styles, I don't think it's possible in your case. My recommendation would be to reserve the white wicker and pastel colors for the bedroom, then use the functional pieces in the living and dining alcove. Add a soft terra cotta color in two tones for the living room walls. This will soften the functional look, especially if you add accessories in seafoam green or jade to relieve some of the sameness of the warm neutrals. As you grow up together in your marriage, you will find your tastes naturally modify. Just let it happen naturally, and don't force any issues centering around color or style preferences.

Helen Diane Vincent will be a guest on the WJR (760 AM) radio talk show, Mid-Day Magazine, hosted by Warren Pierce, at 2:40 p.m. Friday. Aside from a general discussion on color psychology, her topics will include highlights from her forthcoming classes on color and self-development to be conducted under auspices of the Bloomfield Hills Schools Recreation-Community Schools beginning Wednesday, Jan. 30. For more information, call 433-0885.

"Northern Exposure" by Ann duMuis McCormick (234 pp., St. Martin's Press, \$16.95)

AS THIS first novel by Grosse Pointe Farms writer McCormick begins, Dianna Jarrett, a 30-ish San Francisco photographer (and former painter), has just divorced her second husband, David. "The truth was she didn't love David. She still loved her first husband, Alan Forbes."

Not only does the newly-divorced Dianna still love her dastardly first husband, she intends to leave San Francisco, travel to Boston where the unsuspecting Alan lives, seek him out, and win him back.

Two slight complications: (1) Alan is married. (2) His wife is Dianna's best friend, Emily.

Hmmm.

NO MATTER. DIANNA gets into her car and heads out, simply following the road before her, something like Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz." (A pair of red shoes figures prominently here, too.) Along the way, she encounters bad weather, bad food, a bad guy, and car trouble. Also, along the way, she picks up a high-spirited hitchhiker named Liz, who dresses like a scarecrow and is also headed for the "red brick city" of Boston.

Together, the two women arrive at their shared destination on a rain-soaked day — and find plenty of surprises waiting.

This is a lively, entertaining, voyage-of-self-discovery novel that moves along at a nice, swift pace from its arresting start to its rather zany conclusion. But to McCormick's credit, its touching scenes (especially flashbacks of the troubled Emily's childhood), humor, and life-like char-

book  
break  
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acters make it much more than just a page-turner.

This is not to say that "Northern Exposure" is perfect. First, it's never quite believable that McCormick's lead character — short on resolve as she is ("A change in weather could change her mood, a change in her mood could alter her plans") — would really drive 3,000 miles, overcoming numerous hazards along the way, so that she can find and win back a man she's heard not a single encouraging word from in more than a decade.

SECONDLY, A PIVOTAL character, Leo Chauvin, is rather confusing, leaving a reader to wonder just how he's supposed to be viewed. Apparently, judging from the conclusion of "Northern Exposure," he's meant to be an appealing type. At the same time, however, Chauvin, a poet and old friend of Dianna's, displays an annoying tendency toward a kind of smug sermonizing, proclaiming to Dianna, on more than one occasion, just who she is, along with what, where, when, how, and why, etc., etc. Perhaps Dianna could have figured some of this out without the help of such an all-knowing male.

Nevertheless, "Northern Exposure," a book about human relationships, loss, taking risks, and surviving the past, marks a promising debut for this Michigan author.



Ann duMuis McCormick  
author of 'Northern Exposure'

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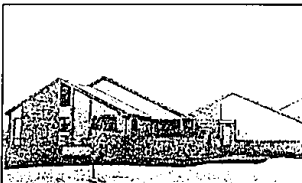
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