

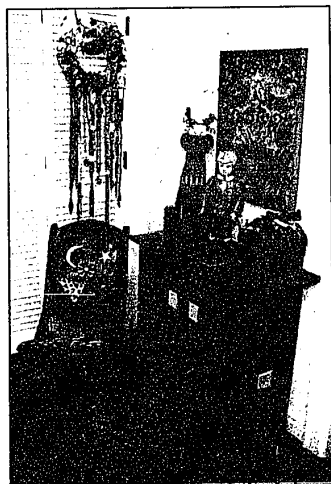
COVER STORY

LIVING WITH EXCITING ECLECTIC



Neo-rustic nostalgia: The corner of this formerly hot room is now subdued with drying herbs, a much-painted desk restored to its natural wood, a whimsically painted chair, antique lamp and Emil Weddige silkscreen.

Easy quilts: Sally Gerak loves quilting, with a brush not a needle. She painted a square quilt pattern on this chest and a crazy quilt on the chair. The softsculpture doll is by Nancy Camden Hauser, the little boy is a "flea market find." The framed art is a salvaged textile piece. Hanging above it all is a Gerak made "salvaug" on which people can hang their mementoes.



Attention grabbers
The chests that flank the arch between the living and dining rooms grab your attention immediately. They started life as kitchen wall cabinets. We added a base and top. These chests were either gonna go to the trash or on each side of the archway. Resourcefulness is the guiding principle in my art, she said.

By chance, she picked a hardened, old miller to paint them blue and came up with a pleasant surprise—the texture and color of washed denim.

After seeing a picture of an Amish quilt, "Broken Bars," said to have inspired one of her favorite contemporary artists, Paul Klee, she knew the chests needed patches of bright color on the front. When completed, she named and signed each "Quilt I" and "Quilt II."

"I saw a piece in a folk art show at Cranbrook Museum signed 'The Folk Artist' and I thought if he can call himself that, then I am the folk artist who made these."

The name fits, she said, because folk artists are untrained. "I love quilts, but I don't have the time and patience to do quilts by hand."

French artist Henri Matisse is another creative giant who has influenced her work and it's most apparent in the bedrooms.

In these, Gerak has painted bold fields of bright flowers and abstract forms based on the vinyl floor topped off with seven to eight coats of super polyurethane for a lasting waterproof finish.

In her most recent guest bathroom project, where she said she always wanted a painted floor cloth, she painted her own fake floor cloth on the vinyl.

On the walls, she wrote humorous, pithy sayings in bright colors, giving credit for several to funky, poppy Michigan artist Nancy Drew. Those at eye level are written backward so they can be read while looking in the vanity mirror. Others are easiest to read sitting down.

As the Gerak children grew up and left, she sold their bedrooms. The boys' room where her first and future grandchildren will sleep

is in process.

Gerak calls her changes in daughter Julie's 1970s room "neo-rustic nostalgia." The white curtains, hanging from an apple tree branch rod, are secured by raffia loops. Remnants of dried natural materials hang from a ledge mounted on the top of the window frame. Gerak designed this to avoid making nail holes.

The bed and the top eighth, now a wallhanging on a wrought-iron rod, are farm sale finds. The flowered pastel dust ruffle started life a long time ago as a tablecloth and gave it a natural finish to show off the original woods. She found a straight chair for the desk, painted it black, splashed a few daisies across the back and for fun and the benefit of tiny folk, painted grass around the feet.

Guest room

Down the hall is another guest room, designed, it appears, for those who won't make it to France's Cote d'Azur this winter but wish they could.

The brown and yellow color scheme, appropriate when it was occupied by a teenage son, has been replaced by rich blue set off by lots of white and accents of bright colors.

Gerak used a sponge to make the blue and white checked border just below the ceiling. When the blue she had chosen for the walls looked too dark, she said, "I started experimenting, so I mixed 50 percent water with 50 percent paint."

While fixing the drips, she was sidetracked and when she returned, she found the drips had turned into beautiful, undulating peaks and valleys.

"If you give up control and let the paint do what it wants to do, it looks wonderful."

When one son called her attention to a drip in the border, she told him it was OK. "I wanted it to be something I had done and I wanted it imperfect."

The two flower wallhangings, somewhat reminiscent of a Matisse design, but actually silk screens by Ken Done of Sydney, Australia, came from a shop in Harbor Springs. A loose, white silk panel behind each screen increases the contrast.

Gerak painted the headboards on the wall, to have the look but not the bulk of real ones. The flower print dust ruffles on the twin beds, too, are recycled tablecloths.

To add a splashy touch of magic at the windows, she went to her basement workshop and gathered up scores of ribbons, lengths of lace and trim of all kinds and looped them over the curtain rods. The light filters through, but upon waking after a night's sleep, it could take a few seconds for a guest to think whether this is Morocco, Martinique or good old Michigan.

But then, that's true of the entire house. It can't be slotted into a specific style or time frame. It's an ongoing work of art that keeps evolving, changing and growing more interesting all the time.



On the cover: Sally Gerak sits in one of her imaginative guest rooms, drip painted in a Mediterranean blue with painted headboards, a popper made mask that makes her smile and a bright scarf wall hanging by New Zealand artist Ken Done. Staff photo by Steve Cantrell.



Sunny days: Bright colors and child like design bring warmth to a guest bathroom. The lettering can be read in a facing mirror. The "rug" was painted directly on the vinyl floor.