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Interior design by JILL SHARP BRINSON

Interview by LISA CREGAN

Photographs by SIMON UPTON

RUSTIC RICHER!

IN ATLANTA, THE
ROUGH LUXE MAGIC
OF JILL BRINSON





Rustic and industrial make a happy marriage in designer Jill Sharp Brinson's Atlanta house. She and her husband, Rob, renovated the 1936 cottage's old barn beams to define the living room loft and used steel shelves to hold books. OPPOSITE: A nine-foot-tall steel door replaced a wood door in the entry. The floor is reclaimed French limestone; mirror and chandelier from Oly Studios.





LISA CREGAN: Hard to believe this little Eden of yours is next to a 20-story apartment building.

JILL SHARP BRINSON: We live in total denial that we're smack in the middle of a big city. My husband, Rob, and I have a love affair with rural settings. We decided to pretend we have lots of land, even though we're on less than a half acre in Atlanta. And we opened the house up to the outdoors almost to the breaking point.

I'll say. Those windows!

When I was young, I saw the orangery at Mount Vernon and I was blown away by its huge windows. The openness made a lasting impression on me.

Is this your version of a farmhouse?

It's part farmhouse, part loft. The style is a blend of our interests in both humble, rustic houses and turn-of-the-century industrial-style warehouses. The beams are salvaged from North Carolina tobacco barns. The casement windows have a nice cottagey touch, but we exploded the proportions and made them warehouse-esque.

What about warehouses appeals to you?

The aesthetic is sharp and clean, and also very livable and serene. Actually, a lot of people who've seen the house and garden say that it reminds them of an English cottage, with a bit of Flemish, Italian, and French thrown in.

I notice a bit of Morocco, too.

I travel a lot for Ballard Designs—I'm the creative director—and that explains the layers of Europe and North Africa. I once spent two and a half weeks just documenting European butcher shops.

Why?

I'm fascinated with the look—the shine of white marble and tile, the sheen of metal surfaces. It's all about a pared-down aesthetic, not much color but a lot of texture. That's what I wanted my kitchen to look like. My dining room looks a little mercantile, too. Like a cool dish shop in Sweden or France.

Can you point to specific examples of how you brought the look back home?

The Martha Stewart table in the kitchen. It had a tile top, but plates wobbled on it. So I put this honed marble on it. Then there's the steel windows. The grids of steel. Notice how they're tall squares over the counter, and tall rectangles in the larger window? It keeps your eye interested. It's repetition, but within the repetition there are little tweaks.

You've made sure the eye stays interested in every square inch of your house.

I'm hopelessly a stylist, much to my husband's dismay, because I'm always exhausted from thinking about things, about what should be where. I lived in Japan as a teenager, and oh Lord, I'm influenced by

the Japanese aesthetic of everything being set out just right. But then there's another side of me, the American side, that can mess it up, too.

So it's not perfection you're after, then.

Oh, no! I'm more about little bits of organized randomness. It all starts with the exterior. Some windows are black, some are truffle, some are Dijon mustard. Right away when you drive up, you know something isn't right. You can't figure out why you like it, but you do. In the living room, one door is framed with barn beams, the other with traditional trim. It's wonky, and it looks like a million bucks.

What about wonky makes it look like a million?

It has soul. I love that melding of rustic and traditional, with the industrial chrome slamming into the side of it. And see that metal table in the entry? Did you notice that it's a little crooked, a little off?

No, but I did notice those big fig leaves pouring out of that bucket—in an organized, random sort of way.

Oh, gosh, and the boots. Real life.

What do you mean?

Boots on, in the garden with our three dogs and our pruning shears. That's what we love. That and giving dance parties in our living room. There have been some pretty amazing dance moves executed on the living room loft.

That fabric hanging on the loft—what's the story?

I always have something hanging there. It's like throwing on a beautiful scarf.

I notice you've pruned your boxwoods into spheres.

That's an homage to my favorite garden in the world, Nicole de Vésian's garden in Provence. She's an idol of mine. For years, she was the creative director of Hermès. Like her garden, mine is limited to green. Any time one of my succulents sends up a colorful bloom, I cut it off.

Morticia Addams, snipping those nasty roses off the thornbushes?

Yep. I'm a huge no-color girl. Oyster shell and steel gray with a lot of truffle, that's my palette. But there's a depth to every single color here. Every floorboard has its own particular voice.

Just like your house.

It's a wonderful way to live, all open like this, and so understated. That's exactly my vibe.

Can you put that vibe into words?

Soft but not feminine. I think the house is like a white shirt. You can wear it with a fabulous long skirt and heels, or with black tights and flats. Either way, it looks great.

If you didn't live here, where would you live?

In a safari tent. I think campaign furniture is the height of sophistication.


PRODUCED BY DORETTA ASPERLITO & JENNIFER BOLES

A Moroccan tapestry hangs from the living room loft, between mirrored sconces that are "like earrings for the wall," Brinson says. She constantly changes the look of the seating area with different textiles, pillows, and lampshades. The antique French industrial table is one of a pair—the other one is in the entry. Pillows from *Two Girls in Avignon*.





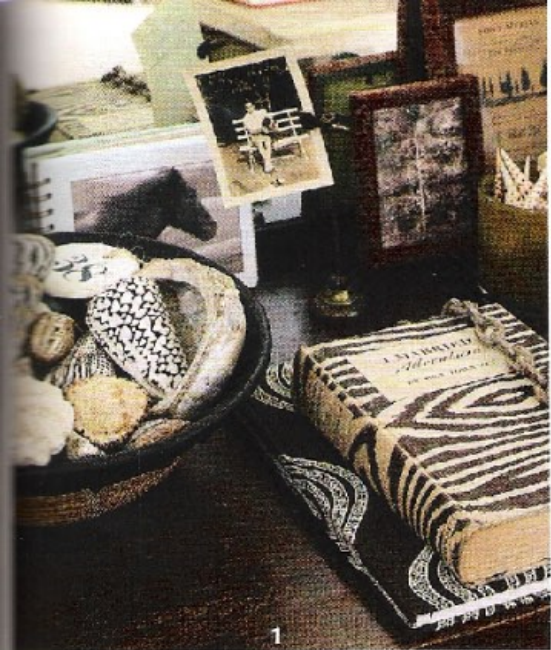
The dining room has a soothing, dreamy aura. "I can't stand faux anything," says Brinson, "but I love the cabinets—I did three layers of white mixed with gray, and a spray-on lacquer finish. And I love seeing dishes through the chicken wire." Wicker chairs and white cowhide soften the industrial edge of the table, which extends another three feet; "if we have a dinner party, we just whisk the bench over and grab some of those weird little stools we have around." A Moroccan necklace drapes a bottle from BoBo Intriguing Objects.



A stone faux-bois dining table from France and iron gazebo from Anthropologie sit at the end of Brinson's gravel driveway. "The gazebo was a display at a mall store in Atlanta, and I lusted after it for years. One day I was there shopping and I saw a 'for sale' tag on it. I bought it on the spot." With the help of Dan Cleveland of Boxwoods Gardens and Gifts, Brinson planted waves of clipped boxwood, magnolia, hydrangea, anise, and holly to screen out the 20-story building just 15 feet away.







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1. Objects arranged with a deliberate eye. 2. The outdoor sofa and ottomans were painted gray and upholstered in taupe Sunbrella to harmonize with the stone terrace. 3. One doorway in the living room is framed with salvaged barn beams, the other with traditional wood trim. Floors are limed ash. 4. In the library, antique French shutters serve as closet doors. 5. "I didn't incorporate upper cabinets in our kitchen because I didn't want to block the view of the garden," Brinson says. The Dijon mustard-colored stop sink was an online find. OPPOSITE: Brinson replaced a tile top on the Martha Stewart table with Georgia marble; "Honed white marble makes it look like it's salvaged from some great patisserie in France. At least I can pretend. But the showstopper in my kitchen is the 14-foot-high arched steel window and door. The drama is big in here."



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Library walls are upholstered in a crewel fabric from Brinson's extensive textile collection. "It's a great background for these old Polish factory shelves," she says. "It reads as a neutral. And so does that Manuel Canovas micro-check on the chairs." OPPOSITE: An antique French writing table is paired with a wing chair from Interior Philosophy.







“Our bedroom window is insane! It makes the kitchen window look short. The ceilings are 22 feet high, and the window is almost the same height. You can’t live here if you don’t like waking up to the light.”

JILL SHARP BRINSON

No curtains required in the master bedroom: The garden screens the room from view. Brinson added steel testers, to raise the bed height, and designed adjustable clip-on reading lights. Bed curtains are in Les Indiennes’ Indian Flower. “I think simple nature-based patterns are the most restful.” The duvet is protected with a no-frills vintage French sheet: “Sometimes we have three dogs watching TV with us—I have to be able to launder easily!”





The Waterworks Cambridge tub was a birthday gift from Brinson's husband. "I wanted it to feel like a trough in an old barn, with the faucet coming directly out of the wall." A mirrored cabinet hides a television. OPPOSITE: The design of the sink base is adapted from a French draper's table Brinson saw in Provence. Rohl's Bridge faucets in Tuscan Brass complement the antique look. Target mirror; Pottery Barn vase. FOR MORE DETAILS, SEE RESOURCES