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# *Wandering* COLLECTOR

A designer gathers textiles and objects to create a home that reflects the world

"It was full-on hippie days," says Mary Jane Ryburn, referring to her college years in the arts at the University of Oregon. There, following prosaic undergraduate studies in political science at the University of Texas, she was looming large. As a weaving major.

"I had my own spinning wheel," she declares, adding that she also frequented spring lamb shows, where she would buy fleece, dye it, and place it in her backyard to dry. That is, until the birds found it. "They'd filch it! Then when I'd walk around the neighborhood, I'd see it in their nests — lines of indigo or ruby or what have you. Isn't that great?"

Ryburn is the first to liken herself to a magpie. As a kid on family trips to the beach, the Texas native would

return home with pounds of pebbles and stones. Her later wanderings resulted in collections of sculptural branches, flowers, and foliage. Even today, her ongoing travels to places like Mexico and Central America start with enormous suitcases filled with duct tape and packing materials to protect an anticipated trove of textiles and pottery on the journey home.

Fortunately for Ryburn and airline weight limits, her greatest decorative passion is textiles. That obsession has produced a formidable collection reflecting many cultures and traditions, assembled through trips to places as disparate as Europe, India, Central and South America, and Southeast Asia.

The *homeowner* fell for the property's proportions, architectural details, and perfect party-flow floor plan.

But here, too, Ryburn points to the magpie. "I collect with a noncollector's methodology," she says, explaining that regardless of whether her love of Suzani wallhangings, of which she has more than thirty, or old lace seems disproportionate and unencyclopedic, "I don't fill in the blanks; I buy what I like." That dynamic prevails, too, in the way she works as the style director for Wisteria, whose online, catalog, and storefront presence champions design and decorative arts from Bali to Belgium to Baton Rouge.

Such confidence, based on intuition and erudition, is interwoven throughout her home, built in 1927 in a French Normandy style by noted Dallas architect Henry "Hal" Thomson. Ryburn, husband Frank, and their two daughters, Francis and Eleanor, took possession in 1989. "I fell instantly in love," says Ryburn. "And the fact that the exterior has a certain symmetrical austerity, with uniform French doors on the first floor topped by double-hung, divided-pane windows on the second, made it acceptable to my husband, who's a modernist architect."

Ryburn responded to the house's three bedrooms, two-and-a-half baths and ample square footage, insisting, "There is no waste, and we really use the living room for living!" She also fell for the comfortable pre-World War II proportions, architectural details, and perfect party-flow floor plan, as well as the property's seventy mature trees, which provide "terrific

First page: The entryway for a residence in Dallas sets the tone for the rest of the rooms with an array of objects that includes a nineteenth-century Swedish extension table, an Indian display niche/cabinet, and Michael Tracy's painted houses on the wall. Right: Among the most conspicuous elements in the foyer are a painted terra-cotta Italian jardinière (one of a pair), vintage Moroccan olive jars, and an alpaca raj chair, above which hangs Gustave Jean Jacquet's *The Fair Patricienne*. Following pages: Edwardian boardroom chairs are used in the inviting dining room. The table is covered in a vintage Romanian crocheted and embroidered textile from Pandora de Balthazar.









shade for a Texas summer.” One of two small outbuildings serves as a guesthouse, while the other functions as a caretaker’s cottage. But what she found most illuminating was the light. “There’s trilateral light in every room,” she says, stopping suddenly. “Wait, in the living room, it’s from four sides!”

During the subsequent twenty-four years, Ryburn found little reason to rethink the larger pieces of furniture and antiques. The collection includes Edwardian boardroom chairs in the dining room, antique Thai garden gates refashioned as a headboard and a French armoire in the master bedroom, and a camelback sofa, Gustavian daybed, and Edward Wormley Dunbar coffee table in the living room.

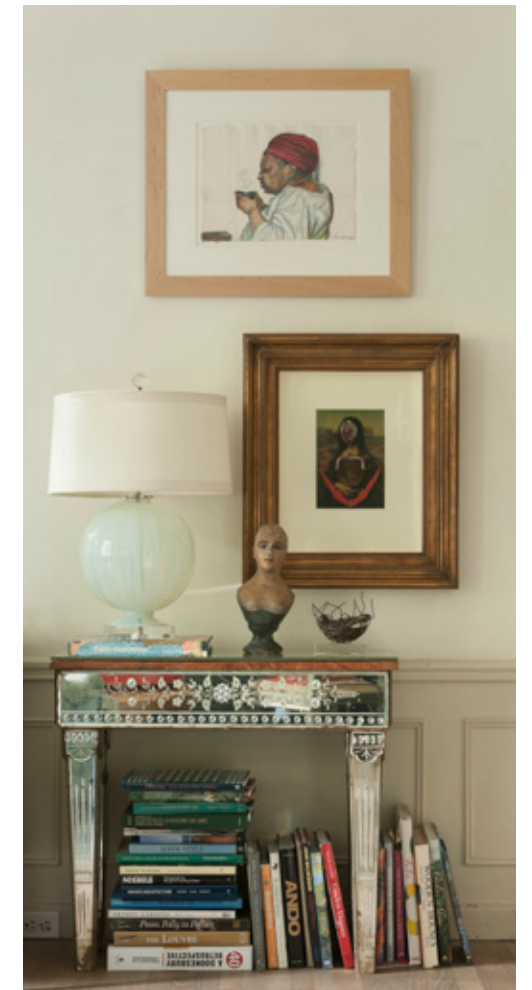
Likewise, much of the art hanging on the walls has been in residence for years. Ryburn’s husband’s grandparents acquired the gilt-framed figurative paintings in the living room and entry on a European grand tour in the 1930s. A surrealist portrait titled *Me and My Shadow* by Susie Phillips graces the living room.

Nor has Ryburn’s tenure at Wisteria gone decoratively unnoted. As evidence, she points to the alpaca raj chair in the entryway, ceramic garden seat in the library and living room, the beaded Yoruba chairs in the master bedroom and library, and the modern glass coffee table in the living room.

But the textiles are on continual rotation, as are accessories. “It’s very easy for me to make vignettes,” says Ryburn. “I love to create tablescapes.” Among the many examples is a jaw-dropping crocheted and embroidered Romanian linen covering the dining room table, in turn topped by a vintage Mexican pitcher with petal plant and an antique majolica mixing bowl with *bois d’arc* fruit. Elsewhere, a papier-mâché bird perches upon a vintage wool paisley sari, while African woven orange crowns rest nearby.

“When I see something new I like, I close my eyes and see exactly where it will look the best,” says Ryburn, adding, “which doesn’t mean there aren’t ten things in that spot already.”

Not that options, even an extravagance of options, daunt Ryburn. Like a magpie, she follows eye and intuition. And like a magpie, the only nonmammal able to recognize itself in a mirror, Ryburn is also self-aware. Of her taste, and of her style. ■



Previous pages: The library features a red-beaded Yoruba chair, a nineteenth-century Oushak rug, an antique burlled English three-legged side table, and *Red Bloom* by Kristan Pelton de Navasqués. Left: A living room vignette features a nineteenth-century Venetian mirror, *Me and My Shadow* by Susie Phillips, and an antique Indian sari over a circular table. This page: A Murano glass bowl, now a lamp, rests atop a Venetian glass-mirrored console. A study for *A Cup of Coffee* by Sedrick Huckaby III hangs above.



Previous pages: The living room seating areas center around a circular 1950s coffee table and a glass coffee table from Wisteria. An antique Indian chest (far left) complements artworks that include (clockwise from top center), *Feeding the Swan* by Diaz; *Urn Series* by Susie Phillips; and a leaf painting by Sam Gummelt. Scenery from an opera set that used Florence's Duomo hangs above a Queen Anne sofa, draped with an Ecuadorian blanket. This page: The headboard is an antique Thai garden gate; elsewhere is a bedside chest and a white beaded Yoruba chair from Wisteria. Right: A seating area in the master bedroom features a white linen upholstered settee and chair, a carved prayer bench from India, and an antique French bone mirror over the mantle.

