

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE



For best-selling author Suleika Jaouad and Grammy-winning musician Jon Batiste, home is a soulful Brooklyn town house that celebrates their heritage and their vision for the future

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HAIR BY JENNA ROBINSON; MAKEUP BY JESSE LINDHOLM; ART: WILLIE COLE, ANNE FRANCEY.

IN THE LIVING ROOM, A WATER-BOTTLE CHANDELIER BY WILLIE COLE HANGS ABOVE A VINTAGE GEORGE SMITH SOFA WEARING A SCHUMACHER'S ANTIQUE STRIE VELVET AND VINTAGE SWIVEL CHAIRS IN A LORO PIANA CASHMERE. OPPOSITE JON BATISTE,

IN A PIERRE-LOUIS MASCIA SHIRT AND SAINT LAURENT TROUSERS, AND SULEIKA JAOUAD, WEARING A CHRISTOPHER JOHN ROGERS DRESS, WITH RIVER, A LABRADOR GOLDEN RETRIEVER MIX. FASHION STYLING BY ANTON SCHNEIDER.





IN THE DINING ROOM, A MULLER VAN SEVEREN LAMP ANGLES OVER A FARMHOUSE TABLE FOUND ON FACEBOOK MARKETPLACE AND VINTAGE BENTWOOD CHAIRS. OPPOSITE IN THE KITCHEN, THE BACKSPLASH IS COMPOSED OF TILE CRAFTED IN TUNISIA. APPARATUS PENDANT LIGHT; WATERWORKS FAUCET; LACANCHE RANGE; HANDMADE COOKWARE BY NETHERTON FOUNDRY FROM NICKEY KEHOE; REJUVENATION CABINET KNOBS.

I sensed it the moment I crossed the threshold.

The soaring archways and streaming light reminded me of the architecture of Tunisia, where my father is from, and it immediately felt like home.

Jon and I had been looking to buy our first place for months. We'd seen close to 70 properties, but none fit our specifications of a space where we could both live and create. Jon needs the freedom to explore making sounds and congregate with fellow musicians. As a writer, I need total silence and solitude. Touring the 1890s Brooklyn Italianate, I saw that the thick walls and large, atmospheric rooms could hold both. I called Jon, who was on the road, to say I'd found the One. In a leap of faith, he made an offer, sight unseen.

Until then, home for both of us had been makeshift and fleeting. Jon's 20s were spent traveling with his band and bouncing between disparate creative projects, with layovers in a small Washington Heights apartment, where he dined on canned beans each night surrounded by suitcases. When he played piano (noon or night) his neighbors would bring out the broomstick and get to banging. For me, a child of immigrants, home always felt elusive. I attended six schools



on three continents by age 12. At 22, I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia, and for the next few years, the grim fluorescence of a hospital was my primary dwelling.

Eager as we were to put down roots, we had a long road ahead. A peek behind the walls revealed a gut renovation was needed. Friends regaled us with tales of couples who'd been Sundered by similar projects, and we soon understood why. Suddenly we were faced with decisions around budget, collaborative dynamics, and division of labor like never before.

We also had to find a way to merge our tastes, lifestyles, and visions for the future in both symbolic and pragmatic ways—and let me tell you, pragmatism is not a strong suit for either of us. I wanted to preserve and restore every decaying tin ceiling—to fill the house with one-of-a-kind salvaged objects, each with a whimsical backstory, including a vintage elephant-shape bar and a taxidermied peacock that became the topic of fraught debate. Jon had his own outrageous dreams, like a yellow brick road running through the garden, and for a while, a Mardi Gras theme: everything furnished in purple, gold, and green. My diplomatic reply was an upbeat: “That sounds great... for your recording studio!”

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THE PRIMARY BATH FEATURES A CAST-IRON TUB BY BARCLAY PRODUCTS WITH WATERWORKS FITTINGS. BESPOKE PENDANT LIGHT BY APPARATUS; WALLS IN PLASTER FINISHES BY PORTOLA PAINTS.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE GUCCI'S LILLIES WALLPAPER HIGHLIGHTS A WALL OF THE STUDIO LOUNGE. MOROCCAN-INSPIRED TABLE FROM QUITTNER, A 1940S FRENCH FLOOR LAMP, AND A VINTAGE LEATHER CHAISE LONGUE FURNISH

A CORNER OF THE PRIMARY BEDROOM. IN THE CALIFORNIA CLOSETS-DESIGNED DRESSING ROOM, A TÊTE-À-TÊTE BY JOHN DERIAN FOR CISCO BROTHERS STANDS ON A VINTAGE WOOL OUSHAK RUG FROM NICKEY KEHOE.



BUT IN TIME, A SHARED AESTHETIC LANGUAGE EMERGED.

With the invaluable help of our friend, the writer and designer Hallie Goodman, who became my collaborator on the interiors, we achieved a balance. Hallie and I both love all things thrifted, and we developed an unconventional, possibly inefficient, but powerfully organic process. We'd find one object, say on Facebook Marketplace or in a flea market, and it would lead to one idea and then another. Gradually a room would coalesce.

The vision for the house was deeply tied to who Jon and I are as humans—to our creativity and our lineage. We began to meld Tunisia and New Orleans into a style we call "Tunisiana," an homage to our shared Francophone and African roots. We wanted a home that felt soulful, timeless, and elegant, with a playful twist.

It's there in the poetry of the arches and curves of the millwork. It's there in the contrast between white lime-washed walls and those drenched in color. The pink kitchen, inspired by the New Orleanian love of saturated hues, pairs perfectly with the blue Tunisian tile backsplash. (The tiles were made by my friend, Mokhtar Lahmar, who hand-makes and paints each tile in a garage turned atelier in the seaside town of Nabeul.) It's in the 19th-century beaded Moroccan light in our bedroom, and the giant, drippy chandelier in the living room made of upcycled water bottles by artist Willie Cole. It's in the art, which ranges from paintings by my Swiss mother, Anne Francey, to the Haitian American artist Patrick Eugène, to my grandfather's collection of vintage posters. It's in the traditional Parisian furnishings and the North African pottery, textiles, and rugs, collected over a lifetime of trips back to the fatherland.

Striking this balance wasn't seamless. At times we found ourselves at a stylistic impasse, though often those yielded absurdly humorous exchanges. Once I fell in love with a pair of vintage Poliedri sconces, made up of smoky Murano glass polyhedrons. I thought they were weird and beautiful, like sexy, moody dinosaur jewelry. I texted Jon a photo, certain he would love them too. He responded: "Like an enemy starship descending upon earth, with several ports to launch flames and laser beams through." Then, "they look like trash hanging on the wall, or a fungal growth." And then later, "I feel assaulted by this design. But if you want them, go for it."

With that, I let the sconces go—though light became a guiding principle for us. Once, in reference to a lamp, Jon said in an exaggerated fashion, "Now this light is healing!" It cracked us up, and we put it on repeat. About anything that we loved, anything that was beautiful and life-giving, we'd say, "This is healing."

THOSE WORDS TOOK ON A NEW TIMBRE and became a more literal guiding principle last winter when I learned that after a decade-long remission, my leukemia was back. A relapse so far out is extremely rare, and my chances of survival were slim.

At that point, we could easily have put the renovation on pause, or dropped it altogether. Instead, we doubled down—as Jon said, we had a plan, and we were not going to let cancer derail it. On February 5, 2022, the night before I entered the

hospital for my second bone marrow transplant, we got married in the living room in an intimate, impromptu ceremony. The house was mid-construction, but Hallie had the first floor swept free of debris and filled with flowers and candles. We served fried chicken sandwiches and champagne to the handful of guests who joined us, and Jon serenaded me on a grand piano that he'd rented just for the night. It felt like an act of defiance, to make a promise to our future life in that space, a wager that all the hopes contained there would come to pass—to say, "We will be here. We will live here." It was another leap of faith.

To have cancer is to live for the next deadline. You have to get through this chemo protocol, survive this procedure, get to this milestone. But the biggest goal for me was making it to this new home. For years now, I've relied on a creative practice to navigate illness by alchemizing life's interruptions into something beautiful, and this time was no different. I spent the next two months in the hospital doing two things. The first was painting watercolors of one fever dream after another, like a self-portrait with a giraffe as my IV pole. The second was scouring the internet for delightfully imperfect objects to make our house completely our own.

I entered the hospital in winter. The day I was discharged was sunny and fully spring. I was weak, in need of a walker to get around, but I was so happy and relieved. As Jon and I made our way through the house, I had tears in my eyes—not just because it far exceeded our expectations. We had finally made it home. ▲



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IN THE STUDIO LOUNGE, BATISTE, WEARING A ZEGNA SWEATER, VIVIENNE WESTWOOD TROUSERS, AND GUCCI LOAFERS, ON A CUSTOM VELVET FLOOR COUCH BY DESIGNWAY. OPPOSITE AN ANTIQUE JEWEL-TONED STAINED-GLASS PANEL FILTERS LIGHT IN THE PRAYER ROOM.