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Hunting for hues

Designer Amanda Nisbet gets the Tribeca blues

(and greens and reds and yellows ...)

COLOR—FOR MANY OF US, it's a design conundrum. We love it, but we're hesitant to use it conspicuously. After all, a vivid vermilion wall may look stunning one day and feel overwhelming the next. But Amanda Nisbet is undeterred.

"Color isn't scary—you can make bold color choices with accessories," says Nisbet, principal of the New York City interior design firm that bears her name.

She certainly can. With the bright combinations of hues in her own office and in the Los Angeles home she designed for comedian Caroline Rhea (her childhood best friend), Nisbet has proven that she is skilled in mixing pigments of the rainbow. But don't ask her to pinpoint how. "There is no science to it—it's a gut feeling," she says. "I'm still getting clients to embrace it."

So to see how accessories can provide a splash of contrast for the tonally timid, *New York Spaces* met Nisbet for a tour of design haunts in Tribeca. Why the downtown trek from her Upper East Side office? "Tribeca has a more interesting look," says the designer. "When I need something funky or modern, I can always find it here."

When we saw the dress that Nisbet had chosen for the day—she called it a "very bright pink" toile—we knew we were in for some colorful fun.

With her pink-striped yellow umbrella in hand, designer Amanda Nisbet traverses Tribeca to show how color can enliven any space.



MIDCENTURY MOTIF

A well-designed window pulls us into our first store, Duane, 176 Duane Street. A pair of orange leather stools by Knoll, \$3,800, stops the designer in her tracks. "These would look good with anything—especially gray," she says. "It's my new chocolate brown." She envisions them in a dressing room, making a statement under a wooden vanity.

As we head into the showroom, we see that Duane's reputation as a go-to spot for midcentury designs by the likes of Karl Springer and T.H. Robsjohn-Gibbings is well-founded. A circa-1960 canary-yellow lamp with a geometric base, \$2,200, is one of Nisbet's favorites. She's drawn to the boisterous piece's unusual height—nearly 41 inches—and glossy lacquer finish. "I've been trying to sell this to one of my clients for their foyer," she explains. "It would create contradiction in their traditional interior."

Moving toward the back, she eyes another fixture with an equally illuminating effect: a turquoise glass urn with painted gold trim, \$2,000. "One standout lamp such as this has a big impact in an otherwise safe space," Nisbet says. Even though it needs another shade, it offers the right vibrancy.

LOCAL COLORS

A few steps up the street we arrive at Room, 182 Duane, an emporium of contemporary pieces by emerging artisans. Nisbet is in search of wall color—and we're not talking about paint. Art is on her mind, and upon entering she is quick to admire a 30-inch by 40-inch botanical abstract, \$2,380, by local artist Sally Bennett. But the designer is looking for smaller canvases to use in a wall montage, and Room

doesn't disappoint. A collection by the same artist, \$300 each for 8-inch by 10-inch pieces, does the trick. Though the palette is more subtle—celadon, yellow and slate—it will still pack a punch in a large grouping, the designer reassures us.

We also spy options for another must-have accessory: pillows. "I

At Duane, the designer is attracted to a gold-trimmed blue lamp, right, and orange leather stools, below, both of which she says would make a bold statement in any room.



Color combines with texture and shape for added interest in the Judy Ross-designed pillow from Room, above, and canary-yellow lamp from Duane, right.



always think of pillows when I think of accessories," Nisbet says. "They are high-impact without a high price and can be changed with the seasons. Swapping pillows makes you feel as if you've done something new."

Graphic floral-print offerings by Judy Ross introduce a fresh look. The Manhattan-based textile artisan is known for applying a modern

Grouping paintings by Sally Bennett from Room, top, provides a colorful punch. At Burden & Izett, right, the designer admires white spiral lamps, while at Mondo Cane, left, brass eggs catch her eye.

sensibility to hand embroidery. For an autumnal accessory, Nisbet selects a new design, Fauna, \$190, in red, blond and chocolate.

A SENSE OF SCULPTURE

Sandwiched between our first and second stops at 180 Duane is Burden & Izett, a showcase of English,

French and Italian antiques. Here, our guide is seeking a table lamp suited for a client's library. A large-scale Italian Art Deco glass lamp with a touch of pink, \$5,375, might fit the bill.

"It's handsome and strong," she says. "That's the irony—it's pink, but it's not flimsy."



Looking to provide her client with another option, she meanders through the showroom and spots white spiral lamps with brass bases, \$6,000 for the pair.

"People don't often think of white as a color," she notes. "But this will really stand out when placed in a dark space."

Now seeking a touch of blue, she spies a circa-1960 cobalt-blue glass vase, \$2,500, that provides a shapely shot of color. Composed of graduating spheres, the sculptural piece could easily be mistaken for art. Sold.

EYE-CATCHING OBJECTS

Hoping to continue our success, we check out Mondo Cane, 174 Duane. The showroom is swapping in new inventory of unusual goods, adding to the tongue-and-cheek flavor that makes it a hot spot for accessories. Nisbet gravitates to a mod coat rack, \$5,800. Its black iron frame is accented by 12 plastic yellow balls. It would provide the wow factor in a stark white foyer, she says.

As we leave, an encased glass display housing a bevy of collectibles

In all-white environs, a yellow and black hat stand from Mondo Cane makes a bold statement. A brilliant blue hue transforms a vase from Burden & Izett, left, into art.



catches the designer's attention. She selects a grouping of brass egg paperweights by Carl Auböck, \$350 each, that will give a tactile quality to a coffee table.

INDUSTRIAL CHIC

For our short walk to Interieurs, 149–151 Franklin Street, our umbrellas come out—Nisbet's is yellow with pink pinstripes. As we dodge raindrops, the designer comments on the importance of details.

"Accessories need to be interesting," she says. "They are the jewelry of the room."

Interesting indeed is our last find.

Walking through the vignettes of furnishings staged in the warehouse-like studio of Interieurs, Nisbet is inspired by a trio of leather balls, \$550 each, sitting on a dining table.

The balls' rugged brown exterior is perfect for adding texture to a glass table. It's proof that any color can imbue a space with a sense of style.

"You have to have all types of dimension," she says. "It's important not to have everything on the same visual plane."

With that lesson learned, our Tribeca trip comes to an end, and it's umbrellas up again for a bit of brightness against the gray sky. ▢