



OTTAWA CITIZEN
STYLE

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Think Spring

Vintage fashion,
bright brollies,
flower power

Eat

Inspired eggs,
seasonal sippers

Live

Three ways to dress
a bed, a sofa, a table

Garden

Found flower pots

SPRING 2009



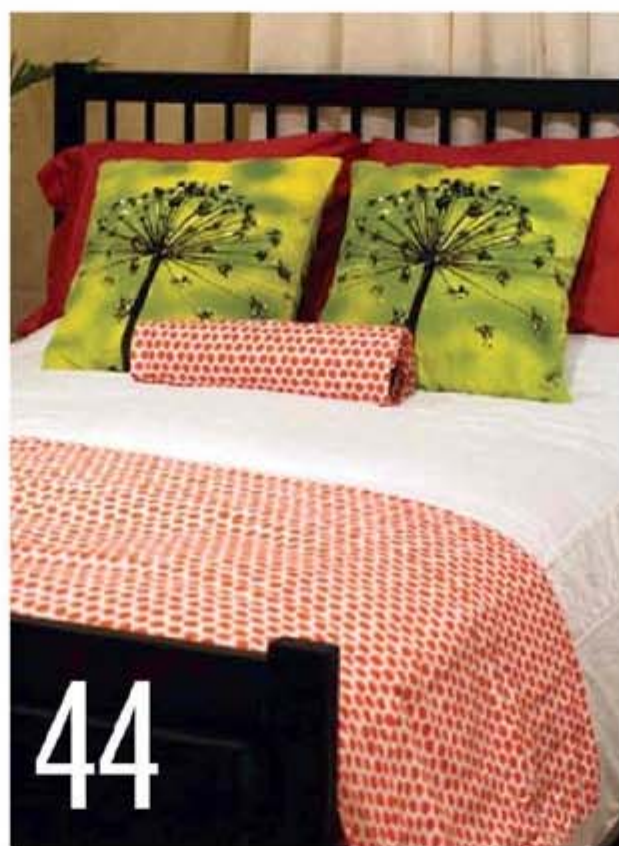
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AT HOME



Erika Ferrarin's home looks typical from its Westboro street. But inside it's anything but. Here, she sits on a three-legged stool she found at a garage sale. At right, a three-part display unit she bought at an Eaton's closing sale for \$400 serves as a room divider and display surface for her wearable ceramics.

Erika Ferrarin's urban oasis is as imaginative as the jewelry she creates. And the interior designer has achieved unique looks by bargain hunting in the most unusual places

Cool

on a shoestring



By Patrick Langston

Photographs by Ashley Fraser

Sturdy and three-legged like an old-fashioned milking stool, but with a sweeping semi-circular back and arms like a chair, the dark wooden object in Erika Ferrarin's bedroom is a conversation starter.

"I saw it at a garage sale outside Bancroft," says the commercial interior designer and part-time jewelry artist, "and I said, 'Hey, we've got to stop. There's something really cool there'."

Three-legged chairs were apparently all the rage in the middle ages. Ferrarin's, snapped up for \$30, is a lot newer than that, but what it was doing outside Bancroft remains a mystery.

Even more mysterious — at least for those of us who would have driven on without a second glance — is Ferrarin's unerring ability to spot the funky potential of cast-offs like that chair. Her gift for reusing and repurposing, along with an aversion to consumer culture, means she has been able to transform her Westboro house into a stylish, comfy

home on a shoestring.

"I grew up in an Italian family," she says (her parents still live across the street in Ferrarin's childhood home). "I'm used to living modestly. I learned that you could have things, but it's how you use (them) that's really important."

Lifting a silvery metal container from her bedside table, she says it was probably once one half of a mould for very large chocolate Easter eggs.

"I'm attracted by shapes and colours, so I can close my mind to what it actually is and see something else in it." In this case, that alternative "something" makes an elegantly simple jewelry and trinket holder.

Ferrarin's talent for repurposing and bargain-hunting blossomed after she built her home in 2002. Narrow, three-storeyed and glowing with natural light, the 2,700-square-foot house sits on an infill lot her father owned on the quiet, sunny street jumbled with pleasingly mismatched dwellings. Even though Ferrarin, 29 at the time, laid out the interior herself, the project still chewed up her financial resources so she now rents out the first storey. But furnishing her home

economically has long been habitual.

You'd be hard-pressed to find anything more economical than the tall, stainless steel cabinet that accents her dining room; designed for restaurant use, it was \$60 at a roadside sale. The same room's low, slick hutch was scooped up for \$30 at a St. Vincent de Paul store. And way up on the cool scale are the dining room's semi-sheer curtains: They have the faint image of a gigantic shirt pocket on them, not surprising since they were once part of a shirt display at a now-vanished Eaton's store. "Omigod!" she exclaimed when she saw them for a buck each at the Great Glebe Garage Sale. "Bedskirts! Curtains!"

Even the cushiony, multi-square carpet under the glass-and-steel IKEA table was done on the cheap. Turn it over, and duct tape holds together manufacturer's carpet samples.

Ferrarin's generous kitchen wasn't furnished second-hand, but she reined in costs by blending sleek steel and frosted glass cabinetry from IKEA with pricier custom-made melamine versions. Inside one cabinet is an Italian stainless steel racking system from

Richelieu Hardware that lets dishes drip dry onto a removable pan.

What, no dishwasher? "Washing dishes is Zen," responds Ferrarin, who seconds later is enthusing over the kitchen's ceramic tile floor that her uncle helped her lay (she found it, a discontinued line, at Euro Ceramics for a negligible \$1.50 a square foot).

Good thing she likes washing dishes, because she's not big on actually preparing them. "No cooking, no gardening," she says. "All the Italian stuff? I don't do it." Fortunately, her boyfriend, Mike Ketcheson, likes to cook. As for gardening, it's not an option since Ferrarin filled the backyard with a deck complete with a stainless steel kitchen sink from a "second-hand place" for washing up after outdoor meals.

If, by the way, "second hand" telegraphs images of slightly shabby when you hear it, you need to meet Ferrarin in the flesh. A devotee of clothing thrift stores, she'll knock you dead with her second-hand stylishness. That includes using a screw from an old set of eyeglasses to fasten a chunk of ebony to a bold, stainless steel ring, one of three she's wearing the day the *Citizen* drops by.

When not perched in her third-storey home office designing commercial interiors at her maroon work station (value, \$5,000; her cost, \$90 at a government liquidation sale).

This page, top: Above the sink, Ferrarin's innovative dish rack. Below, she uses convex mirrors from Canadian Tire to jazz up her bathroom. At right, a clay mask from Mexico. She buys one piece to remind her of each of her trips.





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Top: A leather couch creates a sitting space in the bedroom. Right: Some of the "tribal beings" wall hangings Ferrarin is creating as a series. She's a drummer and dancer in African styles and has visited Morocco and Ghana.

Ferrarin is usually creating jewelry in the second-floor studio. "I have to create or I get antsy," she says, though "my boyfriend sometimes gets me to sit on the couch and watch TV."

Her Wearable Ceramics pendant jewelry comprises ceramic, metals, wood and other found or natural objects. Regarding jewelry as art as much as adornment, she signs each piece, promises never to replicate it, and suggests that it's as striking on a wall as on a body. Ferrarin won the Fusion Design Award from the Ontario Clay and Glass Association for her jewelry in 2007 and for sculpture, yet another of her interests, last year.

Ferrarin is also creating a "tribal beings" series of mask-like wall hangings with a clear African influence. "I'd never been to Africa, but when I started building the house, I suddenly got interested in African art." Now a drummer and dancer in traditional African styles, she has visited Ghana and Morocco.

"In Ghana, I was fascinated by how they reuse things. A pail of water is used for washing dishes and then to flush the toilet or water plants. We're so wasteful here. I'm really interested in trying to make connections between our environment and primitive environments and materials."

