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Bohemian Rhapsody

Juliana Merz & Harry Cushing, Dumbo

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"There is no plan. A plan is too static," says Juliana Merz of the primary interior design principle she shares with her partner, Harry Cushing. A quick scan of their loft, one of eighty spaces in a former munitions factory, makes it clear that the two artists practice what they preach. Who else could pull off a drippy Italian blown-glass chandelier suspended over a contemporary dining table in a room fitted out with drapes made from drop cloths? "I always envision our place as being inhabited by a decadent old lady," laughs Merz. That is, one who doesn't mind banging pipes and a little water. "We live with leaks galore—the buckets are always out—but it's worth it," says Cushing. The pair, who are as enamored of decay as they are of indulgence, say their approach boils down to just three simple tenets: scale (sometimes slightly wrong is best), contrast (put something precious next to something beautiful but worthless), and tension (pair attractive with unattractive pieces). "My best paintings are the ones that I have to make with the awful browns that are left when I run out of my favorite colors," says Merz.

Limitations fuel their creativity as much as their imaginations. "Sometimes we come up with the weirdest color scheme we can think of and try to make it work," says Cushing. "The space reminds us of a Sicilian palazzo." And they would know: Cushing was born in Rome, and Merz lived in Florence for fifteen years. These days, they decamp to Lucca each summer to escape the Brooklyn heat. "Muccia Prada is a huge inspiration to us. She's into the whole decadent haggly look," says Merz. German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder is another influence. "Our place looks like the hotel in his film *Beware of a Holy Whore*," says Cushing. "It's a little bit ugly."



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