VERANDA

WHERE EXCEPTIONAL TASTE LIVES

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+ THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL HOTELS

SET *for the* SEASON

Alessandra Branca two-steps into the antiques mecca, outfitting a 1,300-square-foot bungalow for *Texas guesting with Italian gusto.*

Red-Hot *Round Top*

A wire-brushed Danby and Nero marble mantel (Strike) is the sociable living room's centerpiece; Casa Branca's faux-bois wallpaper mimics the look of rustic paneling. Pendants, Hector Finch. Rug, New Moon

INTERIOR DESIGN BY **ALESSANDRA BRANCA** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BECKY LUIGART-STAYNER**
PROP STYLING BY **SARA CLARK** • FLORALS BY **JIMMIE HENSLEE** • WRITTEN BY **STEPHANIE HUNT**

The cabin is painted Black Tar and Moroccan Red, both by Benjamin Moore. **BELOW:** On the front porch, guests can recount thrills of the hunt around a birchwood-inspired dining table (Woodard). Lantern, Hector Finch. Cabana-striped rug, New Moon

Ciao, y'all,

pretty much says it all. The phrase is a two-word roundup of what Chicago-based designer Alessandra Branca brings to Round Top: her Italian sophistication plus a wink to Texas swagger plus a heaping dose of Southern welcome. Never mind that prior to this project Branca had yet to join the throngs of design enthusiasts who flock to the tiny Texas town known for its three annual antiques markets.

She was invited down by longtime friends and Texas natives Greg Fourticq and John Cone, the developers and visionaries behind Red Antler Bungalows. Fourticq and Cone had both grown up in Houston and, after years living in New York and elsewhere, returned to their roots with dreams of finding property near Round Top. When this well-located parcel came available and their "bungalow" concept (a grouping of six two-bedroom short-term rentals, with four built to date) became clearer, they decided to turn one cabin into a showhouse with the designer's help.

Branca, for her part, was readily charmed by the small town's friendly character. "Round Top is like Brigadoon—it sort of appears and then disappears before and after the markets, when a town of 90 transforms into a whole world full of wonderful design—but the continuum is this lovely, quiet historic town and all the gorgeous rolling hills and farms that surround it." She also quickly realized that Round Top was red-hot, and only getting hotter, and thus Red Antler Bungalows presented an opportunity to bring in other collaborators, specifically VERANDA and its partners, to elevate her designs.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Brass wall lights (Hector Finch) flank a ruby red mirror that bounces sunlight around the screened porch. • The dining area's soft-pile rug (New Moon) is inspired by Native American southwestern motifs. • An oversize zinc lantern by Hector Finch crowns the screened porch. Furniture, Woodard. • Lustrous finishes reign in the kitchen, where the gas range (Monogram) features ring-lit knobs while the island's quartz countertop (Cosentino) sparkles with gold veining. Wall paint color, My Valentine by Benjamin Moore

"Our cottage is on a creek, so we let the woodsy cabin-like vernacular drive our design," says Branca. "And I loved that the [Red Antler] logo was in red." Indeed in Branca's European-accented world, red means "go" and go big, as she does starting with a red-and-white-striped front porch. The curtains add softness to the ebony exterior but are also practical, "helping control light on the west-facing porch and enhancing privacy," says Branca. In the main living and dining room, form and function similarly saddle up. Twin banquettes tucked on either side of the fireplace expand seating options for entertaining, a clever move enhanced by Branca trading the standard bungalow's flush fireplace for one by Strike featuring a wire-brushed stone mantel.

Faux-bois wallpaper from the Casa Branca collection becomes "a playful version of wood paneling," she says, while her Verdure camo fabrics on the banquettes and porch furniture are an abstract spin on the outdoorsy classic. "Everything's a slight twist on what's expected," notes Branca. "And don't be deceived by the word *bungalow*," she adds. "My clients love art, and though only 1,300 square feet, this is a sophisticated project."

To wit: Abstract cowboy photographs flanking the fireplace are from artist Steve Wrubel's "Rodeo" series. But Branca was careful not to overlasso the western theme. "I'm Italian, not Texan," she asserts. "I'm not about to imitate Texan interiors. But both Europe and Texas have a strong sense of identity and that's where we overlap—the spirit of Texas meets the spirit of me." ✦

TOP AND ABOVE: Textural caramel and ivory wallcoverings (both by Casa Branca) ensconce a guest bedroom and adjoining bath, echoing a graphic Indian wool rug (New Moon). Vanity countertop, Cosentino. ABOVE RIGHT: Designer Alessandra Branca

ROUND TOP ROUNDUP

How to hit the wildly popular antiques fair like a pro

STAY

The **Original Round Top Antiques Fair** is hosted triannually; visit roundtoptexasantiques.com for 2024 dates. Bunk beside the fields and barns at the **Branca Bungalow** (redantlerroundtop.com).

EAT

Set in an early 1800s stone building, **Lulu's** is Branca's favorite dinner spot for Italian fare in the heart of the Texas Hill Country.

SHOP

While **Casa Branca's** tent beside Red Antler Bungalows immerses antiquers in extraordinary home decor and accessories, you can often find the designer snapping up vintage clothing at **modernMarla** and hitting the booths at **Market Hill,** a 135,000-square-foot shop that is open year-round.