

THE UPDATED WINDSOR SUITES INVITE GUESTS TO REST, RELAX AND ENJOY THE WORLDLY
VIEWPOINT OF DESIGNER ALESSANDRA BRANCA

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From Rome with Love

WRITTEN BY AMY ROBINSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS LOOF



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Taking in the newly refreshed suites at Windsor is like traveling the world from home. Designer Alessandra Branca brings us to Europe, Asia and tropical island locales through her collected pieces adorning the suites. Every surface invites touch: hand-blocked wallpapers, jute rugs, leather-finish countertops and linens from the new Casa Branca collection that make breakfast in bed the most luxurious meal of the day.

On a picture-perfect day at Windsor, Branca sits under the newly installed pergola on the green before the open house tour of the suites. The pergola is her way of inviting people to gather for conversation after walking through a gorgeous, canopied allee dotted with orchids,



Roman-born Alessandra Branca is known for mixing vintage and new pieces and for her use of color and texture.



In the Doncaster, cypress-clad walls draw the eye to soaring ceilings and contrast with the ebonized teak floor.





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perfect for photos of memorable moments. “Such a pleasant way to enter the space, adding a bit of drama,” she offers.

We begin the tour by climbing the stairs to the second-level suites. Each riser is a work of art that makes it seem as if we are ascending the steps to an Italian villa. “Instead of tiling the steps,” Branca explains, “we hand-painted them to look like concrete tiles.” It is touches such as these that make both the inside and outside of the suites a mix of comfort and elegance. The Honorable Hilary Weston, who co-founded Windsor with her husband, Galen, was the driving force behind the project. Weston collaborated closely with the designer on a shared vision. “I wanted the Suites to feel fresh and exciting for our guests and give them a true sense of how they could live at Windsor,” she says. “It was important to me not only to retain a classic and timeless design foundation for the Suites, but also inject a modern and whimsical twist. Hailing from Rome, Alessandra’s design aesthetic is rooted in a lifelong appreciation for classical design, so she was a natural choice.”

Branca’s Roman roots go deep. As a child, she frequented old churches after school, taking in the use of color and light in the baroque and Renaissance art she saw. “I still go into those churches. You have a very sober, serious space with stone walls, but the frescos are pink, blue and violet in very rich colors.” Her penchant for mixing color is eye-catching without being obvious, and she can tap into the beach vibe very well, having designed homes in tropical climates, including her own home in the Bahamas. “I am inspired by the homes I have done in

The first-floor Epsom Suite opens to a private terrace, formerly underutilized. The designer’s use of color is inspired by the surrounding geography — sky and ocean blue, along with soft, sandy tones.

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The second-floor suites extend their living spaces to generous balconies that can be gated or opened up for larger gatherings.

Florida, California and the Bahamas. I use a play of colors, mix of textures, cultures,” she adds. “I love grass cloth, prints on linen, which are my take on India prints, and stripes, which I am known for.”

Branca has designed a capsule collection of linens for Sferra consisting of embroidered cotton-percale sheets, duvet covers, pillows and more, with playful but classic patterning, that are seen throughout the suites. “One of my favorite combinations that adds drama: green and white with touches of black.” This particular color palette has a starring role in the York Suite — a studio-sized first-floor space with style and substance, feeling larger than it is and easily housing the half-dozen admirers chatting with the designer. She

The two-story courtyard entrance welcomes guests with an iron-frame sofa and chairs by Heveningham upholstered in Casa Branca Collection “Branca Stripe.”



The kitchen in the Newmarket Suite is anchored by oversized wicker bell pendant lamps. The waterfall-edge Cosentino countertop is a modern statement.



The Newmarket's master bedroom is done in soft tans and clean whites. "I use a play of colors, mix of textures, cultures," says Branca. "There are many rich tonalities of whites."

points out a thoughtful addition — window shades that allow for light to come in from above while providing privacy, or able to be pulled as a traditional shade. The bed is dressed with Casa Branca for Sferra white sheets bordered in graphic green and black that complement custom built-in millwork from Siematic that is awash in a light emerald green. "The York is one of my favorites," states Branca. "I could live here. Who needs more?"

We pass through French doors onto the outdoor terrace directly behind, a linear space anchored by limestone flooring and wrought iron furniture. The York's outdoor space mirrors the terrace shared by the neighboring Aintree, both named after iconic English racecourses, as are all the suites. "I love that you can go out and have coffee or read; it's an extension of the living space indoors." To create the outdoor living space on the three first-floor suites, an underused walkway was incorporated. The terraces are private, but not walled off. The sweeping balconies on the upstairs Goodwood and Newmarket suites extend

their living spaces and offer entertaining areas with a view. Low-walled divisions make them private, but open the swinging gates and you have a cocktail party in the making.

Windsor's suites are more than 15 years old, envisioned long before open floor plans were all the rage, but the designer knew great bones when she saw them. "Because the architecture is so classical, it doesn't go out of style," Branca states. "We updated lighting, counters and bathrooms and made more open living spaces. Shelves instead of bulky cabinets and baskets. Easy, vacation-style living." But this is not the road-tripping, motel-hopping, family vacation of your youth. Each suite's furnishings, millwork, wall and floor coverings and surfaces are top-quality and completely customized. In the Ascot, the Japanned screen behind the Asian-print sofa in Casa Branca Chinese Pavilion fabric faces a casual rattan dining table and chairs. "Each floor choice represents a way to change up each suite and make them distinct from one another,"

“Because the architecture is so classical, it doesn't go out of style.”



The living room in the Newmarket allows the designer's use of color to take center stage. "This suite is great for a family," states Branca. "Open up the doors and make some noise."

says Branca. "The ebonized wood is teak that is triple saturated with very dark stain." Bleached oak is used in some of the suites as beach-friendly flooring that forgives a bit of sand tracked in. Honed limestone on bathroom floors is current and classic.

Color and softness work together in each space. Wall coverings are hand-blocked wallpaper, in which the print is stamped on the fabric with a carved block in repeating patterns, a practice dating from 1720, before machinery replaced the artisan-applied technique. "I think any time you layer you add texture and interest," says the designer. Headboards are fabric-covered; curtains are light and lushly printed. The contemporary art in each room draws the eye but does not jolt or shock. "I am fortunate enough to have worked with many clients who were art collectors," says Branca. "They taught me a lot about how to mix old and new." Even the art has texture: layered compositions from French-born Julien Gardair and detailed collages from Stephen Eichhorn of Chicago; textiles adorned with shells and feathers from Turkey and Tunisia

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Custom cabinetry by Siematic is a focal point of the York Suite. Green and white with a touch of black is one of Branca's favorite color combinations.



Honed limestone flooring in bathrooms is cool on bare feet, and the light taupe color forgives a bit of sand tracked in.



in strong graphic patterns from Trudy Elliott; layered, geometric abstracts of iconic Greek, Coptic and early Arabic glyphs by Timothy Hull are all standouts. Bold, modern paintings coexist nicely with Parisian prints from Braquenie, mid-century chairs, bamboo plant stands and rattan tables. "We all take our experiences and incorporate them into our style," Branca notes. "All those touches to the spaces are like cooking; we add a little spice here, a little sauce there until we get what we want. Life is collected; that is how we live. We acquire objects that are meaningful to us and then find a place in our homes for them."

Originally planned and executed by renowned town planners Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk in the New Urbanism style of residential living, Windsor attracts members and guests from all over the world. Hilary Weston's collaboration with Alessandra Branca is a window onto a luxurious beachside lifestyle that embraces dressed up nights or laid back days equally. "The experience of staying in the Suites should feel like visiting a friend's home with a lot of texture and layering, with interesting accessories that add curiosity and create a feeling of being collected over time by a seasoned traveler," says Weston.

First-floor suite terraces were created by taking over an unused walkway. Sofas and chairs are by Century Furniture in Rough and Rowdy Sea Salt upholstery.



Hand-blocked wallpaper in the Newmarket Suite is framed by generous millwork in bright white.



The studio-sized York Suite feels spacious, with large windows facing greenery that is complemented by green and black accents.

ALESSANDRA'S ADVICE

During the Windsor Suites tour, Alessandra Branca, author of the just-released book "New Classic Interiors," freely offered tips on using color and lighting and bringing a bit of Europe to Vero Beach.

Color correction: "Red gives a lot of life. Darker reds are great in the city, but near the beach, shades of coral work better. For color, nature gives us all the inspiration we need. Take a look around you, keep your eyes open. Snap a photo of anything that catches your eye. Find colors that make you happy."

Mixing styles: "It's just like your clothing; you pick some shoes, a top, and some accessories and build an outfit from individual pieces you like. Forget the rules because there aren't any."

Finding vintage pieces: "I scour auctions and estate sales. I have one woman who works for me full time just sourcing older items with character."

Light it up: "Lighting plans are important — look at day-to-night scenarios in the space. I encourage lighting near windows because, as much as we want to bring in natural light during the day, at night it's a black hole."

European influence: "If you have a flat in London, for example, and want to bring some of that sensibility into Florida, bring some Regency furniture which can provide a framework. Bring accents and art that speak to your London mood."

Small spaces: "To make small spaces inviting, use mirrors, landscaping, baskets with trees, chairs and sofas. I almost think small spaces are more fun to design. We all end up there, in a little reading nook. They are opportunities."

Her design process: "First I talk with the client. How do you want to live? Do you entertain or like to lounge with family at home? Then I do layers of materials and work from there. Design is a discipline, just like anything in life you would invest yourself in — hobbies, your career or your children." 🌿