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IN HER SHOES

“Nothing Beige, Everything Awesome”

Whether it’s the party she’s hosting or the outfit she’s wearing, Kentucky interior designer Isabel Ladd doesn’t do boring

BY BETSY CRIBB

IN HER SHOES

Personal Mantra

"You cannot control everything, but whatever you can control, make it bring joy."



FOR ISABEL LADD, there's no such thing as too much of a good thing. "I have always loved creating spaces that are larger than life, and that's really what my interiors are about—celebrating pattern and color and surprises along the way," says the Lexington, Kentucky, native. "I'm so not into statement pieces. I want all your pieces to be statement pieces." She's also not into doing things a certain way just because tradition says they should be so (think eating turkey on Thanksgiving or reigning in outfit accessories). Isabel has long marched to her own spirited drummer, leaving Lexington for seven years in Los Angeles, but her penchant

for the delightfully offbeat found its footing back in her Kentucky hometown, where she's built her own design firm (@isabel_ladd_interiors). "I wanted to get a divorce and I needed to be independent, so that's actually what kind of prompted it," says the decorator of why she started her business six years ago. Her "nothing beige, everything awesome" approach has yielded a Technicolor portfolio of dwellings, including a graphic, retro room at Lexington's 21c Museum Hotel that was inspired by the Netflix miniseries "The Queen's Gambit." Here, Isabel shares her affinity for over-the-top accessories, the entertaining rule she lives by, and her family's wild-card approach to the Thanksgiving meal.

WHERE I FIND INSPIRATION

"I was born in Brazil and moved to Kentucky when I was three. I've been Americanized in so many ways, and I was really embarrassed of my Brazilian heritage when I was younger. In middle school, you just want to fit in with the people around you. But I've gone to Brazil often, and as I got older, something clicked, and I wanted to express more of my heritage. From what people wear, to the interiors, to the patterns, even the music, everything there is so vibrant and loud. I'm inspired by the Brazilian way of life, which is just 'more is more.'"

MY STYLE M.O.

"I love clothes so much. Coco Chanel famously said that before you walk out the door, you should take a look in the mirror and take one thing off. I look in the mirror, and I put one thing on. It's all about layers and the eye traveling."

THE SECRET TO AN ALL-FUN, NO-FUSS GATHERING

"I entertain a lot, a lot, a lot. When the party starts, the kitchen is clean, everything is cooked, and food is plated. I want guests to come in and give them their pretty cocktail with a pretty napkin and already we're in party mode, as opposed to 'Okay, this needs to be put in the dishwasher,' or 'Can you plate the food?' I know people like to help, but I myself don't want to be doing any of that. I like the idea that once the party starts, there's nothing left to be done. If I didn't do it, I didn't do it. I also need everything to be beautiful: In my house, I swear there is not a bottle opener or a corkscrew that is not also beautiful."

WHY I APPRECIATE LEXINGTON

"When I was a teenager, I was like, 'I'm never coming back! I'm going to the big city, Mom and Dad. You'll never see me again.' And now I can't imagine having a business anywhere else. I feel like I know everybody here. I can walk down the street or go out to dinner and run into so many people I know. And not in a popularity contest kind of way ('Hi, I know your name'), but in an engaging kind of way ('Oh, I saw your sister last week. How's she doing?'). There's a tightness to Lexington while still feeling big."

OUR NOT-SO-CONVENTIONAL THANKSGIVING

"Personally, I do not like turkey or casseroles, so why would we eat them if they're something we don't all love? For our version of a thankful meal together, we all pick our favorite things. Mine is lamb with mint jelly; one kid's is sushi; the other kid's is green tea ice cream; and my mom's is lox, so that's what we do. Same goes for my table. It's my favorite tablecloth; it's not, 'Oh! We need a cornucopia and an orange pumpkin because it's Thanksgiving.' It's just pretty pinks and oranges; I love it."

AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO THE HOLIDAY MEAL

"Thanksgiving is our time to think about gratitude. And when we say thank you, we try to be really mindful of where our food comes from and all the people who helped to get it on the table: the farmers, the truck drivers, the grocery store workers, everybody. It's so important to me that Thanksgiving doesn't just turn into this glutinous food fest."