



A collection of 19th and 20th century English, Italian and French majolica vases, a 19th century grand tour bronze and terra-cotta male bust and figures greet guests entering the Ridgfield home of Benjamin Ortiz and Victor P. Torchia Jr.

ridgfield house is owners' perfect palette

by rebecca haynes | photos by amy dolego

The last painting is hung, the beautiful reproduction Greek vase is perfectly placed and those new throw pillows bring just the right pop of color to your living room. Time to relax, put your feet up and enjoy your newly decorated space, right?

Well ... that may be what most of us would do, but not Ridgfield resident Benjamin Ortiz. The independent art curator definitely brings his work home — and not just because he works from a home office.

He and his longtime partner, Victor P. Torchia Jr., have assembled a personal art collection that includes more than 1,500 pieces from various genres and mediums. And with so much to choose from, keeping beloved items out of storage is a dilemma Ortiz solves by rotating in new pieces for display on a monthly basis.

"I always say it's never done," Ortiz says, smiling. "I do a new perspective every month, or every two months depending on if I really like a particular arrangement."

Those arrangements are usually determined by theme. "Every time I change them it's a challenge," he says. "Does this work with this piece or these images? That's where the fun begins. I can pick a theme of animals or abstractions or landscapes or portraiture."

"We don't set a particular design style — we're creating our design style," he says. "Why not live in an eclectic home but do it in a way that's aesthetically pleasing?"

Ortiz and Torchia bought the lakeside home in 2002 and took several years to renovate the 5,000-square-foot deck-

An eclectic approach to the living room features many mid-century modern touches — the chairs, tables, sofa, colored glass collection and artichoke light — paired with pottery, artwork and antique furnishings from around the globe and representing different time periods.

ALL ABOUT ART



Maple cabinets helped to brighten the kitchen that was totally redesigned and expanded with careful attention to lighting. Notice the added architectural detail underneath the island's countertop. The home's open floor plan draws visitors from room to room to see what art treasures await.

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— Benjamin Ortiz

An early 19th century Italian majolica charger anchors some pink flamingo collectibles. Below right, an artichoke-inspired light from the '70s hangs over a collection of mid-century glass vases and a pair of Wassily chairs inspired by Marcel Breuer.



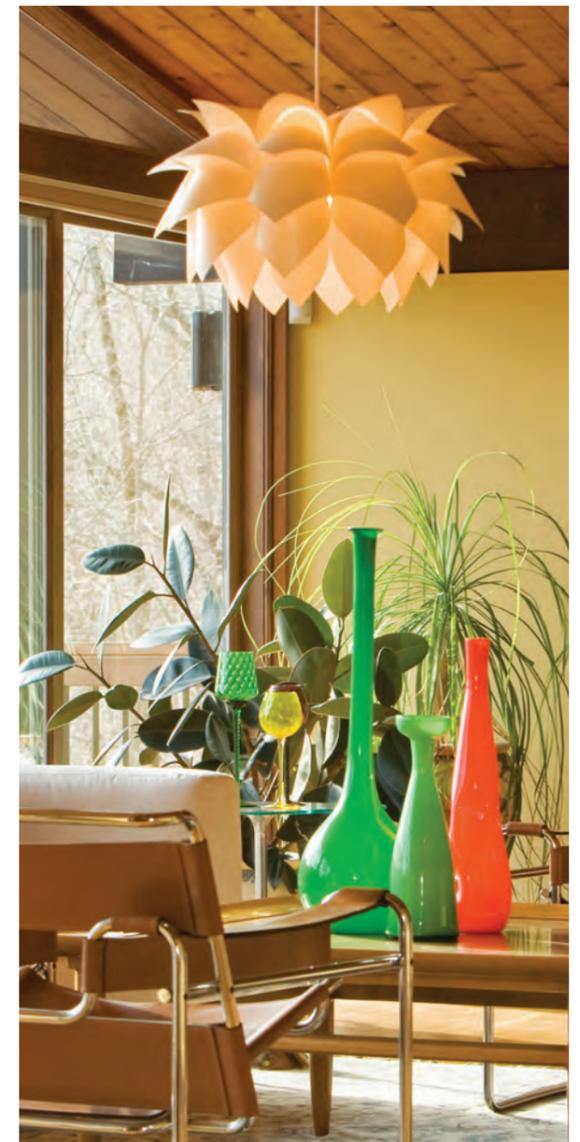
Benjamin Ortiz surrounds himself with beautiful art, seen here in his home office with pieces done by South and Central American and English artists.

house and property. They consulted local architect Sue Tamsett who, Ortiz says, was heading up an inventory of all the mid-century modern homes in Ridgefield. “She looked at it and told us we should conserve this or that. We basically kept the integrity of the house but we put a spin on it and also wanted to maximize our wall space for our art collection.”

Functionality and comfort are their mission when it comes to furnishings — but you'd expect a pair so attuned to the visual arts to find beautiful design there as well. And they don't disappoint. From the modern designs of the Marcel Breuer-inspired Wassily chairs, to tables made of chrome and glass, to rich Oriental rugs, an early American gold leaf mirror, contemporary sofas and a 19th century writing desk, Torchia and Ortiz have made their point in a big way — that styles and pieces coming from totally different backgrounds and genres can be successfully mixed. And their home reflects all price points, with some high-end pieces coming from European antiques shops and others by way of tag sale or auction — such as the \$50 coffee table with a modern aesthetic and the beautiful Henredon dining table that was a steal for \$100.

“It's very eclectic but again, it's the whole idea of function; and comfort is very, very important,” Ortiz says. “We want our guests to feel at home, just as much as we're at home. We want them to feel welcome and relaxed and that there's a real positive vibe and an interesting vibe.”

Patience can be key, however, when making your home your own. “If you're going to be in your home for a while, live with it,” Ortiz advises. “It really is OK if you don't have all the right stuff right away. We lived without a dining room for years, but then we found this table at auction, a beautiful piece that ... is great for entertaining. And we lived for many years without



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- **Design Builders and Remodeling Inc.**, 650 Danbury Road, Ridgefield, (203) 431-9104; www.dbarinc.com
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Featured on this wall are Cuban and Mexican artists; a Seno sculpture from West Africa is at right.



a serious chandelier (in the dining room) and then when we found these we immediately went into action.

“We were going through a wonderful antiques mall in Atlanta and were finishing up renovations and for a very long time we’d been debating what we should do with a lighting fixture to make an impact ... We saw this lamp in the shop and saw that in very small letters it said a second one was available. It’s a nickel and metal chandelier that is a Danish or Scandinavian design, just beautiful. They create such an interesting sculptural look and have an airiness without being too heavy.”

As a senior equity trader and portfolio manager, home really is a respite for Torchia. And although Ortiz may make the decisions about how the artwork is displayed, Torchia gets his hands dirty — literally — when it comes to the grounds, turning the property into a peaceful, Zen-like garden.

“I think it portrays an extension of my own personality,” he says. “The creative side of myself versus the analytical side. Kind of, here’s what I can do to express my own self and my own feelings about art and nature.”

He admits that sometimes he grows fond of a particular piece of art or the way Ortiz has displayed a certain collection. But change can sometimes turn out to be the best thing that could have happened.

“You want to be able to enjoy everything you have, but if all you do is leave it in storage and don’t look at it, then why have it?” he says. “If you are constantly rotating it, it never gets stale and you can’t get bored with it. It creates a very dynamic aspect to the house and when I come inside, every room, I love it.”

Ortiz jokes that their interior designer, Cathy Jones, advised them about wall colors and lighting and lots of basics, but didn’t need to worry so much about the decorating. “She told us ‘That’s your job,’ to hang the paintings,” he says. “This is one house where the artwork does not match the sofa!

“People sometimes say we live in an museum and I say ‘No, we live in the environment that we’ve nurtured and created.’ We’re still achieving it; still doing it; still exploring,” Ortiz says. “If we can share it with folks then we feel we’re accomplishing our job as a cultural curator.” @

The nickel and metal Scandinavian-designed chandeliers, found at an Atlanta antiques market, were the crowning touch in the dining room. Set on dimmers, they add just the right amount of glow to bring out the beauty in the room’s wood.

A collection of American and European pottery, from Art Nouveau to Art Deco jardines and vases, fill the shelves in the foreground and the detail shot at right.

