

# Panamanian PERSPECTIVE

VIBRANT HUES AND OLD WORLD  
ELEGANCE INVIGORATE AN APARTMENT  
OVERLOOKING THE SEA



"The scale, volume and furnishings make the space dignified; the color makes it happy," Samuel Botero says of an apartment in Panama that he designed for a longtime client. **THESE PAGES:** Saturated golden hues prevail in the living room, which looks out to ships en route to the canal. The 1973 aquatint is by Joan Miró. Oriental carpets from FJ Hakimian.









“Good design has lots of layers—color, texture, types of furniture,” says Botero (below right). ABOVE: For the hall, “I played with vaulting and coloring,” says the designer, who worked with architect Ignacio Mallol and interior painter Antonio Rimada. The canvas at rear is by Venancio Shinki. Stool fabric, Clarence House. David Duncan sewing table in living room, at right.

OPPOSITE: A seating area in the enclosed terrace takes in distant views. FOLLOWING PAGES: “I referenced Old Panama,” Botero says of the room, which features stone floors grained to resemble wood. “Draperies with valances relax the hard edge.” Gilt-iron table from Profiles. Clarence House drapery fabric; Donghia stripe. Carpets from FJ Hakimian.

In an enclosed terrace on the Pacific coast of Panama—modeled after the loggia of the Canal Zone’s gracious old colonial Hotel Tivoli—walls of glass afford broad views of ships waiting to enter the canal. Potted palms, rattan furniture, teak ceiling panels and pendant fans evoke a tropical 1940s glamour, and you can almost imagine Humphrey Bogart standing there, striking a match.

Created by Samuel Botero, the terrace is part of an apartment he designed for a Panamanian businessman with whom he has worked for nearly two decades. They met at a cocktail party in New York: “My wife disappeared on me,” recalls the husband. “She knew Sam’s work, and they talked for over an hour. Soon she found us a larger apartment in New York, which she and Sam decided to gut. Then we went back to Panama, and she conferred with

Sam long-distance while he did the whole job. No architect, just Sam. It was perfect. There was not one thing we could have done to make it better.”

After his wife died three and a half years ago, the man sold the New York residence and the large house he owned in Panama and commissioned the Colombian-born Botero to design an apartment in a new building in Panama City. His instructions: “You know exactly what my wife would have wanted. I’d like you to design this apartment as if it were for her.”

Working with the architect Ignacio Mallol, Botero transformed 8,000 square feet of raw space into an elegant, cosmopolitan three-bedroom apartment. “My challenge,” he reflects, “was to create a tapestry of the old and the new—to set some of the traditional pieces and paintings the couple had acquired over the years in a















fresh modern context. Also, to capture her sensibility, I wanted to balance the spirit of old colonial Latin America with European elements and style.”

Color plays a starring role in Botero’s work. Rich, saturated hues cover most of the walls, which Venezuelan painter Antonio Rimada finished with an ombre technique. In the processional main hall—a long corridor of sandstone and marble—Rimada shaded the wall progressively, from turquoise to gold, a stunning backdrop for the owner’s collection of Latin American art. “My wife and I traveled a great deal,” he notes, “and we bought paintings and drawings from the best artists in each Latin American country.”

Off the hall, both the living and dining rooms also have 14-foot ceilings, and both open onto the spectacular terrace facing the sea. The dining room’s crystal chandelier and Queen Anne chairs already belonged to the family. But the color of the room—the young green of trees in early spring—gave the owner qualms. “I’m a conservative person,” he says. “I told Sam, ‘I’m not sure I want that color.’ Sam said, ‘You’re going to like it.’ Well, my family liked it, and then I started liking it. I wouldn’t have gone ahead, but Sam was right!”

In the dining room and living room, Botero put down floors of rare Panamani-

an tiger wood, which has the strong, handsome markings its name suggests. He kept one section of the living room exactly as the wife had arranged it in New York, with an Oriental carpet, an 18th-century Flemish embossed-leather screen and a wide sofa set at an angle to the corner. The color on the walls—golden with a hint of melon—“makes people look beautiful,” says Botero. “I love using color to make people look good.” Crown moldings accentuate the room’s height, and a pale blue panel in the center of the ceiling “looks like punctured space,” Botero says. “Ceilings bring interest and dimension to a room. It’s very sad to see undressed ceilings.”

The only white walls in the apartment are in the bedroom of one of the daughters, who visits from abroad. Designed in shades of bone and cream, the serene room is set off by bold red-striped draperies. “It’s a calm space with fire at the windows,” says Botero, “to suit the daughter’s fiery personality.”

Because of his affection for the entire family, Botero regards this apartment as “one of the five projects in my career that I’ve cared most about.” When the work was finished, the owner told the designer how well he had fulfilled his mandate: “It looks as if it had been done for my wife. It looks like her.” □



**OPPOSITE:** In the hall, lanterns, from Holly Hunt, create “a delicate shadow pattern reminiscent of Baroque plasterwork.” Edelman leather on chairs at rear. **TOP:** A white bedroom is “cool and soothing,” Botero notes. The painting is by Jorge Montealegre. Drapery stripe from Cowtan & Tout. Night table from FP Victoria & Son. **STARK CARPET. ABOVE:** Over the vanity is an octagonal mirror by Karl Springer.