

Faux Sure

Marilyn MacLeod's one-of-a-kind wallcoverings improve on the real.

BY REGINA COLE

KEEP IN TOUCH
Marilyn MacLeod created a raised "ostrich skin" surface for the foyer of a home in Norwell.



MAKE AN IMPRESSION MacLeod spent eight days covering 120 square feet of wall for designer Teresa Burnette's client.



OLD STYLE In her studio, in a former distillery in South Boston, MacLeod surrounds herself with materials, samples, and other sources of inspiration.



The absolute artistry of Marilyn MacLeod's work—a foyer that looks like it is covered in chocolate-brown, shimmering ostrich skin, utterly convincing *faux bois* "mahogany" painted onto a library's plasterboard walls—is

the reason she does not call herself a decorative painter.

"If I say 'decorative painter,' people think of sponging," says MacLeod. "What I do is very different."

What she actually does is to create complex, sophisticated,

and very contemporary surfaces using age-old techniques. After a high-tech career that spanned more than a decade, in 2004 MacLeod took a course in decorative painting at Faux Like a Pro in Boston. That led to a stint in Florence studying the classic tech-

niques of gilding and *trompe l'oeil* "with a woman whose family has spent years restoring Leonardo's paintings in the Pitti Palace," she says. "Although I spoke no Italian, I learned a lot."

She is now based in a late-19th-century South Boston red-brick former distillery and does most of her work on home projects through interior designers, who bring her in for her specialized skills. "Faux finishes were originally developed to make a piece of furniture look 500 years old," MacLeod says, but today the craft has evolved to include creating all kinds of surfaces with paint, plaster, metal leaf, and a variety of other materials—though she won't give away the secrets to techniques she's developed.

The faux ostrich-skin foyer, at a home in Norwell, is a good example of the innovative ways she's using her training in traditional techniques. She was brought in by interior designer Teresa Burnette of Norwell's Willow Designs and, after talking with the homeowner and designer, came up with the unique finish. "It was a technique I developed" is all she'll say about the tiny raised bumps that appear every few inches over the walls.

In another project, interior designer Kathie Chrisicos of Chrisicos Interiors in Boston gave MacLeod a challenge, but with lots of room for creativity. "She asked me to make something nice of a red-brick wall," MacLeod says. "The homeowner doesn't like bold color; she wants everything in her home calm, pale, and peaceful." MacLeod covered the brick with washes of white, cream, and rose paint, then applied a reflective glaze to just some of the bricks. The result is ethereal and soft, tactile and rich.

No matter the project, MacLeod's personal aesthetic remains the same. "There is nothing as beautiful as a worn, old surface," she says. Even when she's making it from scratch.

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