

When Mimi Ortiz-Glass and her husband Garrett Glass sit at their breakfast table, they enjoy magnificent views of the Italian countryside.

“It’s as though we’re looking out at these vast Tuscan scenes,” Ortiz-Glass said.

The couple live in an Oak Park Edwardian (1900-1920) home built in 1908, a time period where dark rooms were a characteristic of the time.

Fast forwarding to the late 1990s, Ortiz-Glass and Glass wanted to transform their breakfast room from its innate dimness into a fresh, lighter room reflecting beauty and tranquility.

“There are no big windows or skylights in the house, and we wanted to bring some light into the home,” Glass said.

The couple commissioned artist Michael Zieve to paint custom murals for the breakfast room, an informal dining space off the kitchen. Glass and Zieve worked together to come up with the Tuscan countryside as subject matter or the murals.

Zieve looked at earlier Italian art and photographs for ideas for the project, which took two to three months to complete.

He painted each mural with acrylics on a huge sheet of canvas in his art studio and varnished them with a protective finish. He also did faux marbleizing in decorative panels

Mural Mural *on the wall*



Written by |
Sherry Giewald

Mural brings a taste of Tuscany to Oak Park home

underneath the pictures.

“These murals of the Italian countryside were kind of imaginary, more of a fantasy of an earlier time inspired by Italy, and they give the illusion of one looking out into different vistas,” Zieve said.

Painted in soft, light colors, with columns bordering each mural, one wall features a quiet,

pastoral scene with a man, boy and horse walking by a bridge with a sailboat in the distance.

Another wall shows Roman ruins in the foreground with a maiden and a little girl modeled after the couple’s daughter, Marisa. The two are picking flowers, and the mural has a springtime feel.

The third wall is a painting

of the Tuscan countryside with rolling hills, vineyards and a small village in the distance.

For the fourth wall, Zieve framed the window with paintings of two women copied from Italian paintings several hundred years old.

“Michael was very clever in putting lots of real inspiration into a fantasy scene,” Ortiz-Glass said. “He put Roman ruins into the Tuscan countryside and created a lovely landscape with Mount Vesuvius. The lady walking down a path was inspired by a figure on a wall in the Pompeii frescoes. He even put a horse in the painting. Our daughter always wanted a horse.”

Zieve, earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, has been decorative painting for 25 years. His art



Mimi Ortiz-Glass and Garrett Glass commissioned Michael Zieve to paint custom murals for their breakfast room, an informal dining space off the kitchen. Inspired by the 16th century Villa Barbaro in Veneto, the mural above depicts a quiet, pastoral scene in Tuscany.

Tuscan murals cover all four walls of this Oak Park breakfast room. The mural depicts the Tuscan countryside with rolling hills, vineyards and a small village in the distance.

studio is in Three Oaks, Michigan and he works throughout the Chicago area.

The murals were inspired by Villa Barbaro in Veneto, a villa from the 1500s, the most richly decorated of all the Palladian villas. The interior of the villa was decorated with murals by Paolo Veronese, a Renaissance artist of Italy, and is famous for its Veronese frescoes.

The wall paintings included portraits of the Barbaro family, and the ceilings opened to blue skies and mythological figures. Many of Veronese's paintings are in major art museums.

While in Italy, the couple toured the villa, which was away from the main tourist area, and they often brought friends there when they visited.

Many wealthy people who lived in Venice liked to have a country house, and, like the Barbaro family, they built huge villas out in the countryside amid farms and vineyards.

"I'm a New Yorker and not yet accustomed to the long, gray Chicago winters," Ortiz-Glass said. "We loved Villa Barbaro, and we wanted a room to remind us of Tuscany – the sun, outdoors and greenery."

The breakfast room's coffered ceiling is an ornate plaster cast of a neo-classical molding from

the 19th century. Glass, who has put a lot of work into the home, took on the tedious project of doing the ceiling himself.

"I enjoy it because it's fun to create this sort of thing, and you hope the next buyer won't paint over it," Garrett Glass said. "That's the biggest fear."

Ortiz-Glass and Glass named their newly decorated breakfast room The Italian Room. They enjoy their meals at the glass-topped table as they look out at the Tuscan countryside.

The table's centerpiece is a glass bowl of marble fruit from Florence, while the chairs are upholstered with material from Italy. A glass ledge displays Wedgewood pieces.

"The project was a bit unusual because the owners wanted murals on all four walls from floor to ceiling," Zieve said. "It was also a unique project because the home is very old and has some historical significance, and the owner wanted to do something in keeping with his classical art collection."

The couple's classical art collection includes reproductions of Greek urns and an original oil painting of The Family of Darius before Alexander (1565-1570), which is a copy of the original Veronese painting that is in the National Gallery in London. |



Neo-classical moldings from the 19th century accent the Tuscan mural that covers the walls of this quaint Oak Park breakfast room. The table's centerpiece is a glass bowl of marble fruit from Florence, while the chairs are upholstered material from Italy.

Photos by Whitney Curtis / Daily Herald



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