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Cheerio in Los Feliz

Artist Lisa Borgnes Giramonti stamps her brand of old England style with a modern touch.

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Artist Lisa Borgnes Giramonti in the living room of her house. (Lawrence K. Ho / Los Angeles Times)

The iPad on Lisa Borgnes Giramonti's kitchen counter is propped up by an intricately carved wooden bookstand near an Old World-flavored Aga stove. Call it a study in contrasts. Better yet, consider the scene to be the embodiment of the artist's primary obsession: weaving British gentility and the elegance of a bygone era into our tech-obsessed present.

"I'm a huge Anglophile," Borgnes Giramonti says. "I've always wanted to go back to England, but it's not going to happen, so this is how I'm re-creating that."

And by "this," she means almost every aspect of her life: her Los Feliz house; her much-followed blog, *A Bloomsbury Life*; and her art, which involves presenting old-school embroidery as a modern-day form of social commentary. "Stitching Up the Noughties," a show featuring Borgnes Giramonti's twist on traditional 17th and 18th century cross-stitching, recently opened at the Acme Gallery in Los Angeles and runs through May 29.

With meticulous stitching on burlap, Borgnes Giramonti's pieces at first glance look like they would convey biblical verses or quaint homilies. But take a moment to read the text, and one discovers her reflections on a culture that genuflects to TMZ, "it" handbags and the quest for eternal youth. The result feels like Jane Austen took a ride through "The Hills." After reading about reality TV star Heidi Montag's plastic surgeries, Borgnes Giramonti wrote in one of her pieces:

*Who will you be?
A plastic, smooth divinity?
Or choosing age
and softened grace,
Reveal your life
upon your face?*

"It really disturbed me that someone so young and pretty would feel that she had to so drastically alter herself," Borgnes Giramonti says. "And I wondered how a parent would feel gazing down at his or her sleeping daughter and wondering if her young face would be allowed the gentle privilege of growing old. It's not a given anymore."

Borgnes Giramonti has a similar Botox-free attitude toward houses.

"The same way a cast-iron pan has traces of all meals, a house has a sense memory of everything that's happened to it," she says. "You want to layer it with not just furniture, but with experiences."

Which is what she has done in her 2,500-square-foot house. She decided against major architectural surgery when she and her husband, Piero Giramonti, purchased it five years ago. Instead, she focused on blending London past with Los Angeles present.

"This house is like a little eccentric manor house. It feels like a Lilliputian version of Gosford Park," says Borgnes Giramonti, 46, who calls herself a "domestic explorer." An American born in Belgium, she has lived in Norway, Sweden and New York, but it was her time in London, as a child for two years and later as an adult with her husband, that have left the most lasting impressions.

She has imported those cherished influences throughout the house. In the kitchen and breakfast nook, she used Scottish company Timorous Beasties' Thistle HS wallpaper and upholstered a bench cushion in a tartan. The decorative cherry on top? A Union Jack pillow nestled in the corner.

"I was thinking of the Sex Pistols meets Vivienne Westwood meets country manor for this room," she says. "I can be here even in July and feel like I'm in the north of England. I find a palette and then I don't worry too much about all of the pattern matching."

Although each room seems to have its own collection of objects and colors, the visual through-line is literary.

"Books are my lifeblood," the artist says. "I have to have them in every room."

In the living room, she had floor-to-ceiling shelves built along a wall that now houses a few hundred of her favorites tomes. She had planned to install more shelves in the dining room until she realized that she wouldn't have enough room for her parents' midcentury Danish dining table. So she settled for wallpaper with a bookshelf design made by London-based Deborah Bowness.

These and other design decisions are detailed on her blog. Started in 2008, the site is an exploration of what she describes as "seeing the modern world through an old-world lens."

Borgnes Giramonti blogs about pieces of newly acquired furniture, like a brass hourglass that she hung next to the TV in the breakfast area. ("It's a half-hour glass, perfect for timing TV shows for Luca," she says, referring to her 8-year-old son.)

She has blogged about great meals, about her travels, about the Liberty of London collection coming to Target, about downloading the writings of the late Brit Lytton Strachey onto her iPad. And then there's the blog's namesake Bloomsbury Group: writers, artists and intellectuals who figure prominently in the posts.

"I've always had a lifelong fascination with the group and how they devoted their lives to art, friendship, literature and a well-lived life," she says. "I'm trying to go back in the past, to Edwardian and Victorian times for the graciousness and civilized life. I'm exploring how to bring those forward so that we don't lose the elegance and simplicity of life."

It might appear to be a niche endeavor, but with an average of 30,000 hits a month, Borgnes Giramonti has won a following. She earned a guest blogging gig for W magazine, where she made weekly style picks for must-have objects.

"We knew our readers would be interested in what she had to say simply because several of us in the office are completely addicted to her blog," W Senior Editor Jenny Comita says.

The blog may be a relatively new endeavor, but her preoccupation with preserving life's moments — and environments — isn't. She has documented her previous homes with an anthropological passion. Photographs on the blog detail past residences, and the artist even has depicted rooms of previous homes in her embroidery.

"I specifically wanted to record pieces of furniture that I knew were iconic," she says, "that people would look at it 30 years later and say, 'That's an Arco lamp, that's a Jonathan Adler pillow.'"

But as for preserving her current house, Borgnes Giramonti isn't in a rush: "I've lived here for five years, which is the longest I've lived anywhere as an adult," she says. "And I don't plan on moving anytime soon."