A colorful LIFE

PAINTER HUNT SLONEM HAS A FEARLESS WAY WITH COLOR AND A PASSION FOR ANTIQUES. IT'S ALL ON EXTRAVAGANT DISPLAY AS HE SHARES IN HIS NEW BOOK, WHEN ART MEETS DESIGN.

HOUSE BEAUTIFUL DEC/JAN 2015
In pulling together the palette for this upstairs parlor at Cordia Maison, Sloan started with Lee Jofa’s Buckingham velvets, which he used on the high-back sofas. Full Spectrum Violet, a color Sloan finds “reverential,” was chosen to complement the study purple furnishings in the room.
ENETING HUNI ON ONE SIDE OF THE DOOR LIES THE GRAY AND QUIOTIDIAN, ON THE OTHER, DAZZLING TECHNOLOR.

Over the past few decades, the artist has fashioned an alternate reality, a surreal cocktail of tropical jungle meets baroque grandeur: in the combined 75,000 square feet in which he lives and works. These spaces, ranging from a floor of a former parking garage in New York City to a collection of plantation houses in Louisiana, crystallize Solow's artistic vision and are works of art in their own right.

A brilliant colorist, Solow understands the emotional connection between color and mood. Curator Marilyn A. Zeifin has written that in Solow's paintings, color and content seem inevitably fused. "This equally applies to his romances. "How do you want a room to make you feel?" is how Ellen Kenyon, a Louisiana-based color specialist who has worked with Solow to create colors for his historic Louisiana properties, approaches color. Instead of developing a scheme to coordinate elements in a room, Solow takes this visual approach to color and chooses those that resonate emotionally as well as suit the room's theme. He chooses mainly cool colors, described as "anti-depressant" by Kenyon.

The painter's client by sending him her Magical Gems set, comprising colors such as amethyst, tourmaline, and malachite. Most people use these intense hues in small spaces, such as the inside of a closet or a bookshelf, Kenyon says. But Solow, by far her most intrepid client, has no qualms about using them in a 40-foot bathroom or parlor. The enormous scale of his spaces and the heavy over-layer of pictures and objects help carry off even the brightest colors, while their vibrancy works to contract the space and cozy it up. He chooses these same saturated colors as backgrounds for displaying his work because he believes a white wall distracts the eye away from the piece.

The artist sets a loose parameter of historic appropriateness when choosing colors. "I always find an existing example of the use of that color within a hundred years of the house—not after, but earlier. They used great colors. Everyone think his houses were white, but they weren't. First of all, so many had faux finished doors, which were more expensive than wood ones. They also used to face the slate mantles every few years. I'm on a green kick right now. This friend of mine just bought a historical home in New Orleans, and she is now using a paint called Old World European Chartreuse. It's so delicious—it's like moss growing on the wall."

Indeed, the artist goes through color phases. A predilection for pink marked the first decor of Corda Mansion, his country house in New York's Hudson River Valley, which was later superseded by lavender and blue.

A room might be painted three times before the color is deemed right. A houseguest, the magazine editor Marian McVey, once charmed Solow for choosing a particularly Pepino-Bimont shade. A "peculiar" lavender-blue gray copied from the trim of the Galler House in New Orleans was used to paint a bedroom at Lakeside Plantation, but it didn't hold the space, nor did several attempts at aqua. Solow isn't fussy by such setbacks. He lets the process unfold. This approach illustrates how the artist differs from a designer: His rooms evolve, rather than being planned and designed. In Solow's world, there is fluidity between creating and living: to create decoratively is to be line decoratively. Supporting this symbiotic relationship is Solow's passionate pursuit of collecting and designing or "collecting" as he has dubbed it. He is energized by the act of creating grottoes with his collectors, which, in turn, fuel his work. The vast amount of square footage he has managed to absorb him room to create even more settings. By the way, he Solow, the point of having so much space is to fill it. "I won't look at a house that's under 10,000 square feet," he says. "Why would I bother to get through all that for no space?"
A pair of off-the-dying posts at Lakeside, one of two historic plantation houses Shenon owns, is painted in Full Spectrum Paint's Berry's Ballyhoo, a festive color chosen for its "perennial" effect. The embroidered curtains are made from Lee Jofa's Cheri. In the dining room, a dining table with enough room for guests to gather. 