

WALL FLOWERS

She is hardly shy when it comes to dressing her walls in fantastic flora.

MAYA AND STUART STARR'S traditional Main Line home contains a mystical world that glows with visions of flowers and trees, an interior landscape with which the furnishings — colorful, diverse, draped with exotic textiles — merge naturally.

There is a threefold relationship among the Starr landscaping, the house's decor and the shimmering paintings of flowers and flower-drenched landscapes that she creates in her bedroom-turned-studio. "It was for me very much the working in the garden that made me want to bring nature into the house and later to the canvas," she says in her lilting French-accented English. But her art is "not realistic, it is not meant to be. It is my own fantasy."

Maya was brought up in Paris, where she attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts et des Arts Appliques. But as a child, she frequently visited the Italian village where her mother grew up, and she often returns to the farm her family still owns there: "My heart is very much in the Italian Alps — there is the simple peasant life and trees and flowers and green everywhere," she says.

Maya emigrated to the United States 22 years ago with her new American husband — she had met Stuart in Paris, while he was there for a medical-study program. The couple lived in Boston, New York and then Atlanta. Maya worked as an illustrator first; then, in Atlanta in the early 1970s, she went into business painting silk clothes and screens.

When Stuart accepted a research position with Children's Hospital in Philadelphia 12 years ago and the couple moved to

The Starrs European provincial living room (facing page, top) has a unique twist: Maya's nature-inspired murals and paintings. Blue tree flowers climb a bedroom wall.



the Main Line, Maya began to put her personal imprint on her new home by decorating its walls. In Atlanta she had developed a method of gluing paper to the wall and brushing it with a coat of glue before applying paint. Her background is latex, the decoration is in oil — to provide a higher sheen and deeper color. Applied stones, small driftwood formations, an occasional shell peek out of Maya's painted trees and flowers. "I am very much inspired by the little pieces of nature I pick up or friends bring me," she says.

In 1979, inspired by her own wall decor, Maya began painting on canvas for the first time in 20 years. "With the silk, I felt I had attained a craftsmanship and I was pleased with it," she says. "But I wanted to continue just with the canvas, to achieve technique without losing the greater spontaneity it allows."

Though her surreal landscapes and floral paintings are her sole preoccupation now, she continues to redefine her home — to alter it here and there, to add and to subtract. "I am in my house all the time so I need the change," she says. As for Stuart: "This is the second house Maya decorated for us — it goes so well with her work and with our mutual love of nature that I'm just delighted." Adds Maya: "At first Stuart wouldn't say anything to destroy my joy, but I could see it disturb him to come home to a new environment. Now he is the one to bring new things — once, from a trip, a branch he found in the Nevada desert. . . ."

"And sometimes now he call me from his hospital in the middle of the day and say: 'Well, should I prepare myself for something new?' I think he is hoping yes." □

The dining room is a medley of lace, pottery, flowers and rustic furniture (above left). Stuart and Maya Starr have turned the walkway to their home into a lush, bucolic fantasy.