

ARTFUL LIVING

WHEN I FIRST MET THE OWNERS OF THIS RESIDENCE, I REALIZED THEY'D MANAGED TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING THAT, IN MY EXPERIENCE, WAS TRULY SINGULAR: NOT ONLY HAD THEY PURCHASED A VERY DISTINCTIVE HISTORIC HOUSE, THE PAIR HAD WORKED WITH THEIR ARCHITECTS TO GIVE IT A DAZZLING NEW LIFE.

A U-SHAPED COURTYARD HOUSE IN THE REGENCY REVIVAL STYLE, COMPLETED IN 1938, IT WAS ONE OF VERY FEW CEDAR-CLAD RESIDENCES IN ITS REGION. THOUGH THE STRUCTURE HAD DETERIORATED OVER THE DECADES, THE ARCHITECTS HAD DONE AN EXCEPTIONALLY SENSITIVE JOB





PREVIOUS: The eglomisé walls by Miriam Ellner in the entry hall were inspired by a Tahitian pearl; accordingly, the palladium silver leaf behind the watery glass panels incorporates shades of gray and lilac. The satin-finished wood trim resembles faux ivory. The painting is by Robert Motherwell. ABOVE: The gallery forms the next beat, after the entry, in the house's procession of rooms. The bookshelves grew out of a desire to create a rusticate reinterpretation of eighteenth-century Italian architecture, but with a modern edge; the faux-stone plastered finish suits the vellum-covered books, Picasso plates, and textured objects.



of restoring the house to its “original” condition while also making sympathetic changes that rendered the plan more responsive to the residents’ lifestyle. In addition to extending the kitchen and staff wing, the architects enclosed the central courtyard, converting it into a living room of palatial proportions—thirty feet square, with a twenty-six-foot-high ceiling—that forms the new nucleus around which the residence revolves.

And yet. The interiors, though they’d been developed by an accomplished design team, were somehow out of sync with both the architecture and the couple’s intentions. I was invited to their New York home to discuss a new direction.

When I arrived at their apartment, and even before I met them, it was instantly evident that these were two very sexy, glamorous people. Decoratively, the place captured everything I love about eclecticism at its best: furniture and artworks spanning five centuries, every one spot-on and holding the others in exquisite balance. All the surfaces were beautifully considered and executed; it’s not often one sees a home with that high a level of finish. And it was evident that, as patrons of the fine and decorative arts, they had a deep understanding of quality and weren’t afraid to go the distance to achieve it.

We talked for nearly three hours, and what became abundantly clear was that—especially for the wife, who’d spent years struggling with the project—the idea of having to exert so much effort again was daunting. As it happened, I’d already made plans to be in the area the following weekend, and the husband said, “The house is yours. Let us know what you think.”

That weekend turned into two and a half months, in which I visited the house repeatedly and imagined another life for it. I knew the design would draw on the 1920s and 1930s and play off the architecture, but I was searching for a larger intention. When I’m asked to explain my working methods, I find it difficult, because it has a lot to do with intuition. I am very attuned to the energy of a home, its innate nature and vitality, and if a

PREVIOUS: A gilded plaster applique by the contemporary Parisian artist Patrice Dangel, above a French chair from the 1940s. OPPOSITE: A detail in the living room.

