

Glass-and-steel doors divide the reception area (this page); in the entryway, a Sol LeWitt painting hangs above a Squiggle Console from Cam Design Co. A vintage Danish sofa dressed in amber velvet anchors the living room (opposite); existing sconces flanking the reimagined fireplace were replated.



Balancing Act

A design team reimagines a century-old Dupont Circle residence while respecting its past

Text by CATHERINE FUNKHOUSER | Photography by MAX BURKHALTER

Nestled on a tree-lined street off Dupont Circle, a stately Beaux Arts townhouse captured the hearts of a couple looking to trade up from their nearby condo. The 1915 brick beauty—with impressive, arched windows gracing its front façade—offered the architectural character and traditional bones they were after, plus ample space to start and raise a family. “It just felt like a place we could be and grow in for a long time,” says the wife. “We loved the historic features. Those arched windows definitely drew us in.”

The aged abode needed an update, though. Purchasing it in 2020, the new owners—he’s an entrepreneur and she’s a journalist—wanted to tackle a host of improvements before moving in. They enlisted interior designer Zöe Feldman, who led them to architect Neal Thomson. The thoughtful, two-year renovation and redesign that followed would touch every inch of the now-four-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bath home.

Protected under The L’Enfant Trust’s conservation program, the front elevation remained happily intact; the back benefited from the addition of new windows. Inside, the primary goals were to increase function for a growing family (the couple’s first child arrived mid-renovation and their second was due at press time) and to infuse a modern-classic style throughout. “The project was an effort to create a ‘new old’ house by today’s standards,” reveals Thomson. “Keeping the spirit of the old house alive was really important. It became a balancing act.”

Collaborating with Pyramid Builders, the team reconfigured the spaces, bringing cohesion and order to a plan that had suffered piecemeal changes over the years. They relocated a powder room that floated between the dining room and kitchen to the stair hall; combined the kitchen and adjoining breakfast room into one airy space; and flipped the positions of the second-floor primary bedroom and bath. A second bathroom was added on the third floor, where the two children’s bedrooms and the husband’s office sit; other bathrooms received sparkling makeovers.

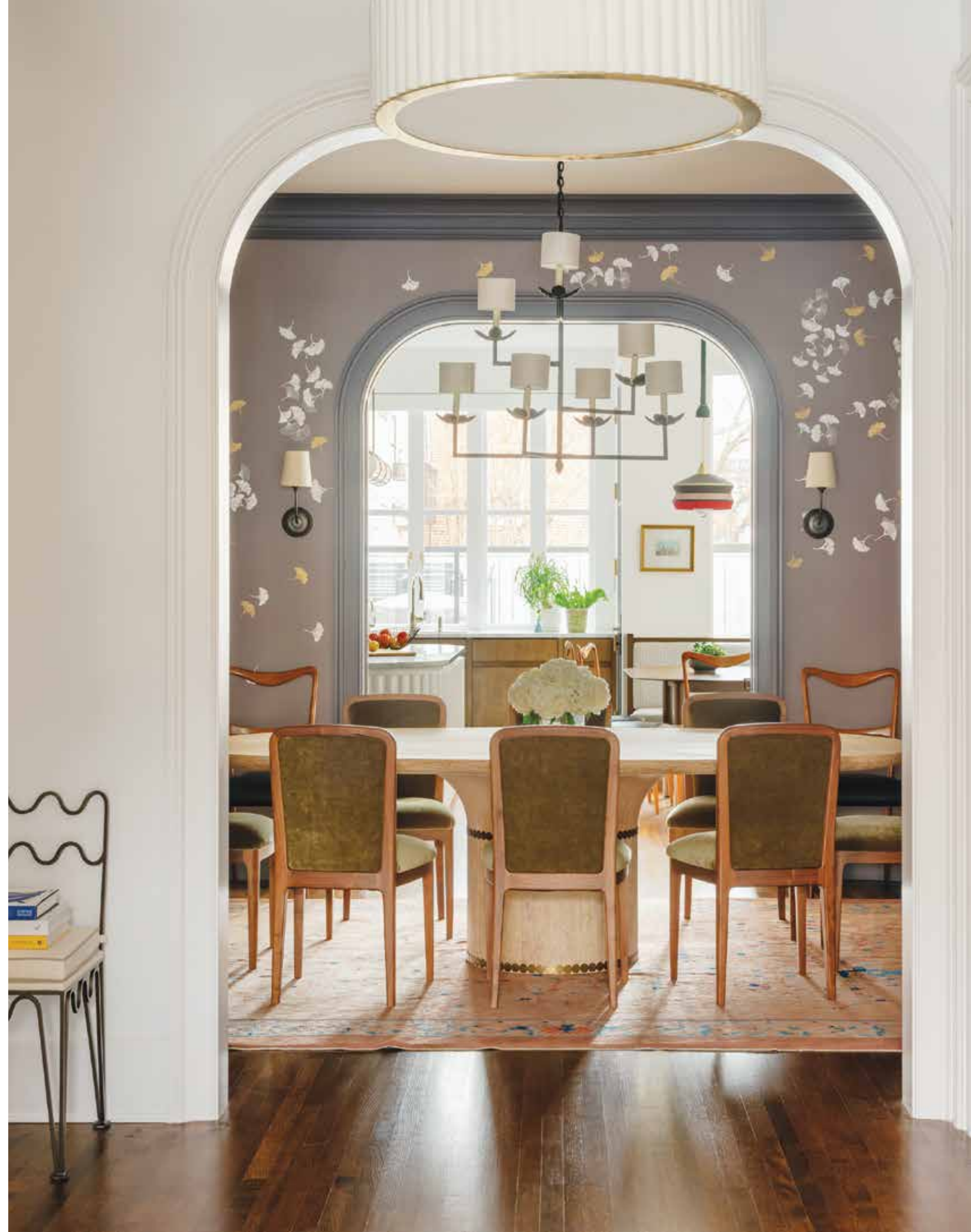
A separate basement apartment (previously a rental unit) was reintegrated into the main residence, bringing its total square footage to about 5,000. Now, a back stair accesses that revamped level, which houses a playroom/TV hangout, guest room, full bath, gym and utility spaces.

The redo also included an overhaul of the HVAC, electrical and plumbing systems. Lead abatement was a key concern, too. “Great care was given to build a new life for this house,” says Bret Anderson, founder and president of Pyramid Builders. “All the things you don’t see really do add up to the home’s overall health and longevity.”

Renovation Architecture: Neal Thomson, AIA, principal, Thomson & Cooke Architects, Washington, DC. Interior Design: Zöe Feldman, principal; Tenley Masson, senior designer; Charis Fortunato, senior project manager, Zoe Feldman Design, Washington, DC. Renovation Contractor: Bret Anderson, Pyramid Builders, Annapolis, Maryland.



An enfilade of cased openings (opposite) extends from the stair hall through the dining room to the kitchen. Neal Thomson transformed the dining room from rectangular to oval-shaped to lend it what he calls “defining character.” Walnut cabinets with brass-clad drawer fronts (above) are built into an alcove. A curved jib door (below)—one of four in the space—provides hidden storage.



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you know it’s been here forever, yet
it’s relevant for today.”

—ZOE FELDMAN



Clockwise from above: Additional windows along the back invite natural light into the kitchen. Custom-crafted by Old Town Woodworking and topped with Bianco Carrara Venato marble, walnut cabinets line the kitchen’s perimeter; a painted, tamboured island takes center stage. In the breakfast zone, 1950s Italian chairs found on 1stDibs round out the banquette seating. Taking cues from historical designs, the team re-envisioned the main staircase, which serves the three above-ground levels. The second-floor family room boasts the arched windows that initially won over the homeowners; an American Leather sectional sofa, clad in cashmere velvet from de Le Cuona, offers practical panache.

In the third-story office (these pages), moody, blue-gray De Nimes paint by Farrow & Ball coats the walls; an Eames chair that once belonged to the husband's grandfather has been re-covered in vegan leather. Along one wall, a daybed snuggles with built-in bookshelves.



Although preservation was a priority for the owners, many timeworn original materials couldn't be salvaged. In some cases, historically accurate replacements—such as the narrow-plank, stained-oak floors installed throughout and the dining room's plaster crown moldings—achieve comparable charm. Other dated elements gave way to simplified versions, as the living room's bolection-style marble fireplace surround illustrates.

Encapsulating the project's old-meets-new approach, steel-framed French doors now separate the front vestibule from the foyer. "We bifurcated that area," explains Thomson. "It's a moment you see in a lot of old houses, where there's the initial front door and then an interior door. We brought back some of those elements that had been lost along the way, but played with updated materials."

Feldman's choices of a mosaic-flower tile for the vestibule floor and deep-purple paint for its walls and trim hint at what's to come. "When you walk into this house, you know it's been here forever, yet it feels relevant for today," she offers.

The kitchen design, she explains, intentionally leans modern "to create a nice tension" within the historic setting; a fluted island plays the starring role and provides hidden storage. The





breakfast area's built-in banquette features drawers underneath for stashing linens and such.

As the renovation dust settled, Feldman worked closely with the wife to establish a balanced aesthetic. "She wanted a modern sensibility, but also for things to feel a little more formal," the designer relays. "We wanted to honor the classic bones of this elegant townhouse," referencing its 10-foot ceilings, among other grace notes. The dining room's hand-painted wallpaper from de Gournay was an early selection that set the tone.

Room schemes combine colorful upholstery, vintage finds and statement lighting. A designer-client buying trip to New York yielded many selections that became stylish springboards. Case in point: An amethyst, cashmere-velvet fabric that caught the wife's eye now adorns the family room sofa. This jewel-toned sectional serves as the pièce de résistance in an otherwise fairly quiet plan, with wool-clad walls and a bouclé-covered chaise. As Feldman explains, her client "wanted the spaces to be comfortable for family, but not at the expense of the design."

The couple is thrilled with the harmony struck by their collaborative team. The wife notes, "Our home nods to history, yet it's been modernized." ■

SOURCES OF NOTE

Upholstery: gretcheneverett.com. Window Treatments: rockvilleinteriors.com. Kitchen Island Pendant: rollandhill.com. Carpet in Study: elikorugs.com. Desk Chair in Study: us.julianchester.com through americaneyewdc.net. Kitchen & Primary Bath Countertops: petrastonegallery.com. Living Room Fireplace Surround: marblesystems.com. For a complete list of resources, see homeanddesign.com.



Clockwise from opposite, bottom: A third-floor vestibule painted in colorful Arsenic by Farrow & Ball leads into the two-year-old son's bedroom. It features Pierre Frey wallpaper and custom Roman shades crafted by Rockville Interiors; Lepere poufs add whimsy. The repositioned second-story primary bedroom received a bank of new windows; woven shades from Hartmann&Forbes control sunlight. In the owners' bathroom, a waterproof, lime-plaster finish covers the walls; Saffron White honed marble tops the custom vanities and cloaks the tub. An arched opening connects to a separate shower.

