

TO GIVE THE LIVING ROOM an informal air, interior designer Mark Christofi chose painted shutters for most windows. The mohair-velvet chairs and walnut coffee table speak to "a put-your-feet-up atmosphere," says Christofi. In the dining room (FACING PAGE), chocolate-hued walls contrast with white wainscot. The ceiling inset is finished with reflective silver tea paper.



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Designer Mark Christofi updates his clients' decor to reflect their more polished aesthetic

Written by JILL CONNORS • Photography by ERIC ROTH • Interior Design by MARK CHRISTOFI INTERIORS



ADD “CHANNELING” TO THE ARM’S LENGTH LIST OF skills an interior designer must possess today. As in, channeling the spirit of a client’s inner style to arrive at colors, shapes, fabrics, and special effects that will create a totally simpatico home. North Reading, Massachusetts-based interior designer Mark Christofi thrives on the pursuit. “The design I like to create comes *from* my clients in an organic manner,” says Christofi. “I am not about the business of imposing a certain look or design or brand. For me, there would be no challenge in that. I respond to their individuality, and then it’s about pushing the envelope a bit.”

For the Brookline, Massachusetts, home of a young couple with four children under the age of 12, Christofi played off the couple’s love of color and contemporary art. When the couple relocated to the Boston area from San Francisco in 2001, they commissioned architect Marcus Gleysteen, a principal at Gleysteen Design LCC in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and builder Tom Grant of Eco Structures Inc., in Norfolk, Massachusetts, to create a two-story shingle house with an open floor plan. Christofi was part of the design process from the start, helping the family move in and outfit the home. Last year, they called on him again,



A PAIR OF CUSTOM-DESIGNED walnut and antiqued-mirror bookcases in the living room conceal a bar and glass and linen storage. The square pattern of the room's rug (FACING PAGE, TOP) is repeated in lampshades and a small linen-covered side table. With family pet, Edgar, adding to the welcome, the entry area (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) is distinguished by its red-lacquered chest, stone floor with tiles set in a running bond pattern, and papered walls.



A ROUND TABLE with upholstered stools occupies the hallway outside the master bedroom. The rich chocolate walls and white wainscot echo the mahogany post caps and white balusters of the stairway. The simple style of the ash cabinetry and island columns in the kitchen (FACING PAGE) conveys a Shaker sensibility. Work-surface countertops are stone, while the island top is largely dark walnut. The floor tiles are set in an argyle pattern.



DESIGN DECISIONS

Pattern Play

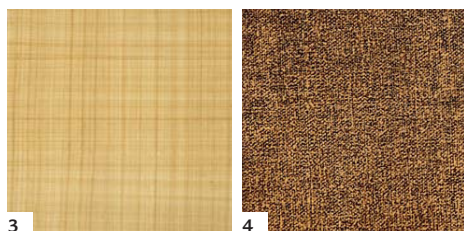
"In this house, we wanted to play with the eye, so we juxtaposed natural hues with hot reds," says interior designer Mark Christofi. The patterns seen below, many based on geometric motifs inspired by contemporary art in the home, were part of Christofi's overall theme of visual interplay between color and texture.

[1] Christofi-designed living room rug: from Stark Carpet, at the Boston Design Center (BDC).

[2] Living room drapery fabric: "Grand Velvet Stripe," by Lee Jofa, BDC. [3] Linenlike crosshatch pattern on living room walls: hand-painted by decorative artist Gerard Wiggins.

[4] Living room side table fabric: "Linen Weave," by Harrison-Van Horn. [5] Living room throw pillow fabric: "Xanadu," by Clarence House, through Webster & Company, BDC. [6] Living room chair fabric: "Dapple," by Larsen, through The Martin Group, BDC. [7] Christofi-designed dining room rug: from Stark Carpet, BDC.

[8] Dining room drapery fabric: "Knotty Knotty" embroidered silk, by Donghia, BDC.



to give the house a more polished look. "They were ready for better-quality furnishings amid the presence of a growing art collection," says Christofi.

For the overall color scheme, Christofi established natural tones — muddy grays and browns — and then juxtaposed them with jolts of hot orange or red. "The clients love color, but color used in a graphic way," he explains. Red upholstered armchairs in the living room add contrast to the linen hues of the room. The master bedroom's neutral backdrop gets a vivid color burst from terra cotta-red upholstered stools and accent pillows.

Christofi also uses color to create continuity throughout the house. The striking contrast of rich chocolate brown with crisp white occurs in several areas: Both the dining room and an upstairs hallway have cocoa walls set against white wainscot. A raised portion of the family room ceiling is painted brown, gaining definition from the otherwise white ceilings.

Geometric motifs appear as well, giving the house a contemporary edge. The design of the living room carpet is built on squares, but Christofi made sure the design did not overpower the room. "The rug has scale and geometry, but it still appears as background," he notes. He chose square lampshades as a subtle echo, and his design for a pair of mirrored bookcases highlights a grid as well.

The kitchen, which is open to a casual dining area and family room, exemplifies both the color and geometry at play throughout the house. The floor is an argyle pattern of brown and white tiles, while two woods — pale ash cabinets, dark walnut for the island countertop — carry on the light-dark contrast. "This homeowner loves to cook and bake," says Christofi, who particu-

THE GENEROUS PROPORTIONS of the master bedroom include 10-foot-high ceilings. The sculptural bed has stained-walnut and white-lacquer posts. Botanical fabric for the curtains and Roman shades lends a garden feeling while Christofi added richness to the scheme with sponge-glazed walls and a faux walnut-grain finish on the fireplace. In the entry hallway (FACING PAGE), crisp white paneling draws the eye across the warm oak floors to the staircase; the dark paneled doors lead to the kitchen.





larly likes the walnut atop the island. “I love the color and grain of it. It’s a true brown; there’s nothing orange or yellow about it.”

Another one of Christofi’s techniques for adding visual interest is to apply special decorative finishes to select walls. The master bedroom, for example, has sponge-glazed walls, while the adjacent hallway has a straightforward coat of paint. So, too, with the living room, which has cross-grained faux-painted walls that resemble linen, while the adjacent dining room has plain painted walls. “I put simple paint finishes in the spaces between rooms with decorative finishes so that it gives breathing room,” he says.

Textures provide one more way to add layers of interest without overwhelming the house with objects. Christofi chose a range of textural fabrics, including the master bedroom’s raffia-upholstered stools and chenille chaise, and the living room’s linen-wrapped side tables, mohair-velvet chairs, and linen sofa.

Ever mindful of the mind-boggling number of choices that go into the interior design of an entire house, Christofi delights in the process, taking clients shopping in several cities. “We shopped in New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, as well as Boston,” says Christofi, who notes that most of the carpets, wallpaper, and fabrics were found at the Boston Design Center.

In the end, says Christofi, it is the creative — and somewhat whimsical — part of the design process that he finds most soul-satisfying. “I love it when my client’s persona shines through on a project and their home becomes an extension of how they live,” says Christofi. “I am often asked what my style is, and there is no one answer. Everyone has a personal style, for, after all, style is nothing more than a gesture or a point of view.” ■

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