



Raw silk wallcoverings create a soft backdrop for a curvaceous chair in the user-friendly living room. Rich draperies were mounted just below the ceiling to add height.

West by Northeast

She favors the bright, breezy feel of California, he prefers traditional New England sophistication. Their designer gave them both in a happy marriage of styles.

text by regina cole | photography by sam gray | interior design: mark christofi



When Mark Christofi first met with

this suburban Boston couple, he faced a situation familiar to designers and, all too often, a source of the kind of conflict that results in the project from hell: the background, tastes, likes and dislikes of his newly married clients were not even vaguely alike. | In their interior style preferences, these two were like yin and yang, chocolate and vanilla, or, in their case, the sunshine-infused brilliance of Southern California and the history-steeped shadows of New England. This couple represented, for Christofi, azure waves and fuchsia hibiscus in contrast to weathered wood and winter landscapes. >>

The six-panel antique lacquer screen hides an inauspicious window in a corner of the living room. The linen-wrapped coffee table's simple lines pay homage to the screen's Asian origins. Over the fireplace mantel hangs one of A.C. Goodwin's views of Boston.







“My husband wanted a decorated home. I wanted a house we could use every inch of.”

“For me, it was a great pleasure,” Christofi, a designer based in North Reading, Massachusetts, explains. “What made it so wonderful to work with this couple is their generosity toward each other. They approached the fact that they have different tastes as an opportunity to find creative solutions, not as the basis for discord.”

“I’m a California girl, and my husband is very traditionally rooted in New England,” the wife says. “When we first met Mark, we were in the beginning stages of a new marriage, a second marriage for both of us, complete with a big, blended family. This was our first big project together.”

HOW PERFECTLY THIS COUPLE REPRESENTS THE STYLISTIC expressions of our opposing coasts. He likes mahogany furniture, eighteenth-century soft-paste porcelain, Chinoiserie, New England artists, quiet patterns and colors. She

loves flowers, the outdoors, soft fabrics and textures, saturated color, deep comfort. Botanical fabrics make her smile, he has a soft spot for Chinese export bowls. But their different approaches to this decorating project go even deeper.

“My husband wanted a decorated home: he wanted it to be beautiful. I wanted a house that we—meaning the two of us, our friends, our children and their friends—could use every inch of,” says the wife. “I grew up like a lot of people. If you walked into the living room, some adult would scream. My mother kept it pristine and perfect, and that’s what I thought a beautiful house meant, that it had to be off-limits to kids. I thought, before I met with Mark, that houses could either be beautiful and untouchable, or comfortable and shabby. We thought we’d do something radical and try to have both.”

Still, the beginning of her relationship with Christofi was not propitious. The homeowners drew up a short list

OPPOSITE: The sunroom, a favorite respite for the homeowners, is a later addition to the house. THIS PAGE: Contemporary and neoclassical elements in the front hall.





of designers based on recommendations from friends, and started to set up interviews. "I liked Mark because I felt he really listened to me and valued my opinions," she says. "But when he showed me his portfolio, I said, 'Frankly, there's really nothing here that I like.' And, you know, he wasn't offended!"

"It was brave of her to trust me, despite the fact that she didn't relate to my past work," says Christofi. "But she seemed to understand that I don't impose my own style on

my clients. I wouldn't find that a challenge, and I think my work would be falling short. It's important that I reinforce the fact that it's the client's home and thus, the design is all about them, not about me. I enjoy the fact that every project is different.

"In this case, the challenge was to marry a traditional Boston feeling with an L.A. sense of style. We juxtaposed them to create a new style."

The house, built in the 1940s, started as a modestly

OPPOSITE: The wife especially loves the antique Venetian mirror; her husband is fond of the inlaid chest. **THIS PAGE:** A deeply traditional dining table is surrounded by contemporary chairs upholstered in soft floral fabric.



scaled suburban Colonial. Over the years, a number of additions have expanded the space to about twice its original size, but the symmetrical simplicity of the structure has not changed. However, when they started, the house was, in the homeowners' words, "an empty white shell."

"The rooms have nice proportions and the flow in the house is good," says Christofi. "But there really was no color and there weren't any softening details. Each room was essentially a plain white box."

CHRISTOFI ADDED CROWN MOLDINGS, WAINSCOT, raised paneling, closets, stair balusters and other architectural elements. Against this newly rich background he applied the furnishings that came together to produce a stylish and comfortable home. "It wasn't so hard to bring personality into this house," he says. "The homeowners have definite ideas, likes and dislikes. And, they have a wonderful art collection. With great art, you don't want too much going on that'll distract from it."



The marriage between old and new, traditional and contemporary, recurs throughout.

In the living room, for example, an Andrew Wyeth watercolor landscape hangs over the sofa while one of A.C. Goodwin's Boston oil paintings tops the fireplace mantel. The two pictures dictated the room's soft blue-and-earth-tone color scheme. Raw silk gives the walls contemporary glamour. Simple upholstered furniture in soft fabrics surrounds a linen-wrapped, Asian-inspired coffee table. A magnificent six-panel black lacquered screen covers a corner.

"That screen represents my husband's taste," the wife notes. "I don't care for Asian things. But in this room you can see how Mark brought our different tastes together."

THIS HAPPY MARRIAGE BETWEEN OLD AND NEW AND traditional and contemporary recurs throughout. The mahogany dining room table has a carved and reeded apron

that recalls the early nineteenth century, but the contemporary chairs, upholstered with soft florals, are streamlined and deeply comfortable.

An old Venetian mirror is a favorite of the wife's; her husband loves the antique banjo clock. In the front hall, a Frank Stella painting over a contemporary console table speaks the vocabulary of the twentieth century while the stained floor bordered with a Greek key design and the white-painted paneling below the chair rail are deeply traditional. It all works.

With the help of a skilled designer and clients open to each other's differences, the house proves that the sensibilities of both coasts can coexist—and, in fact, shine—in one space. **NEH**

RESOURCES For more information about this home see page 206.

OPPOSITE: To make space for the bed, Christofi removed a window from the bedroom wall. THIS PAGE: A California sensibility brings bloom and color into a New England bedroom all year long.

