

New England Home

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Suburban Renewal

*A designer gives his Greek Revival home on Boston's North Shore
a bright new look with an eclectic approach that marries period details,
Old World inspiration and thoroughly modern influences.*

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Dog owners have certain advantages. Spending time outdoors on walks, for instance, they have more opportunity to observe their surroundings than their petless friends. On his daily North Shore treks with his dog, Fred, Boston-area designer Mark Christofi had been marking the progress of a full-tilt renovation of a nineteenth-century registered Greek Revival. When he put



Moorish-style arches create a graphic backdrop for stylish furnishings. LEFT: Elegant architectural details like these in the living room appear throughout the house.





A nineteenth-century armchair revamped with antique Spanish funeral curtains makes an eccentric but wonderful partner for a low-key sofa and a streamlined glass table. The designer redid the old pine floors for a semiglossy look.



An antique outdoor lantern illuminates the dining table. The decorative design on the floor echoes the room's shape. RIGHT: The graphic wave mural helps unify the rooms. Artful dinnerware heightens mealtime drama.

his own home—a country-like school-house—on the market and it sold more rapidly than he'd anticipated, Christofi suddenly needed a new nest fast. What came to mind, but the old house he and his beloved buddy strolled past every morning?

“The house had been divided into two units—upper and lower,” Christofi explains. “The developer had wisely retained many of the classic period details like the beautiful crown moldings and window trim. The ceilings soared ten feet, so the rooms were also nice and airy. The only quandary was which unit to buy.”

In the end, swayed by the graceful front porch, dual fireplaces and the bonus of an ample-sized side garden (since grown lush and green thanks to the designer's touch), Christofi opted for the first floor. That was three years ago. Ever since, he's been refining and fine-tuning.

The scale of the architecture and what Christofi labels “the great old charm” of the place was the starting point. “You sit in the living room, look through the large windows and see these beautiful fluted porch columns,” he says. Such high-caliber workmanship canceled out dinky furnishings and timid colors. Instead, Christofi unfurled a bold plan, catching the eye with stunning graphic murals by Maine artist Matt Cote—inspired in part by the designer's long affection for Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum—and using a savvy blend of furnishings culled from different eras.

No stickler for tradition, Christofi deftly marries such disparate pieces as a Mies van der Rohe Barcelona table, a quiet Pottery Barn sofa and an antique Italian armchair for stunning living-room results. The chair, upholstered in

nineteenth-century European skull-and-crossbones funeral curtains is, of course, a star. “The panels were a gift from my brother. I had them stashed away in a drawer,” he says. “I think they're wonderful.”

The recipe for the spacious dining room, where a Knoll sideboard, a sponge-glazed pedestal table and woven fiber-cord chairs intermingle, is equally cunning. Set atop floors designed by Christofi with Gerald Wiggins of Boston to resemble parquet, the overall tone is sophisticated, not



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FACING PAGE: An ample workhorse of an island allows the designer to spread out when he cooks. ABOVE: An Italian 1930s poster keeps the kitchen table company. LEFT: A Karl Weinberger photograph watches over the metal cabinet. BELOW: Christofi at rest.





stuff. Pristine louvered shutters dress the windows, affording a happy balance of sun and privacy.

Even smaller spaces like the front hall deliver memorable, almost magical, juxtapositions: an antique Greek Revival mirror Christofi says he bought years ago reflects a new handblown glass ceiling fixture as fragile as a flower above and a festive runner bound in creamy vinyl below.

A friend's photograph of a gnarly apple branch planted the seeds for the condo's palette—a dense Chinese red and a deep moss green. Christofi wields these colors, tweaking them here and there, to link the public and private spaces. While the living room flaunts in-the-forest green walls, the master bedroom is painted a more army-green with stand-up white trim. "The depth of the red and the naturalness of the green was a combination that appealed to me," he says. "It's important to think about the concept of a house and how each room will relate to the others."

Red seeps into the light-filled kitchen, around the dining area and into the master and guest baths as well. In the kitchen, the vibrant color is a fine contrast to off-white cabinets and verdant granite countertops. Christofi revs up the industrial vibe with an oversize, no-nonsense light, brushed silver hardware and sleek steel rods to hold the window valances. Clean and crisp, each galley feature—like the elements of a fine meal—plays a distinct role.

Claim a place, as friends and family often do, at the straightforward kitchen table and you're in the company of a modern metal cabinet (not unlike the kind where you flung your high school gym uniform, but with far more panache) and a striking Italian poster emblazoned with a winged lion—St. Mark's symbol. The framed poster is mounted on mirror in a masterful maneuver that heightens visual interest. Christofi says he used mirror extensively throughout to draw natural light in and increase the home's sense of space. Like the designer's well-placed pops of zesty color, mirror interjects a dash of irresistible sparkle, too.



Anything but austere, the apartment is packed with surprises. Christofi brings energy to all he touches, this stylish retreat a perfect example.

Over Christofi's bed a mystical drawing of clouds punctuated with a wispy orange thread, by Provincetown artist Nona Hershey, references rest and energy. Tailored and comfortable, the master bedroom is in sync with the theme: natural canvas shades at the windows, an orange-red blanket on the bed and, at the foot, a lean wooden bench with what the designer describes as having a gentle "organic feel." An adjacent dressing room every bit as cleverly choreographed with similar colors and materials also makes way for exercise equipment.

Anything but austere, the apartment is packed with surprises. "Wave" murals line halls to the mudroom and back door area, master bedroom and dressing room, side garden and front of the building. "This is the home of halls," Christofi jokes. "The murals help link all the fragmented areas together."

In another sleight of hand, hall ceilings are washed a

pale gray to bring them down a hair and add a bit of warmth. A fleet of mini-cars from the '50s and '60s—one of Christofi's passions—zoom along a wee shelf. Parked in a nearby corner, a chair crafted of street signs evokes thoughts of the open road. Having recently purchased a classic '93 two-door Chevy Blazer, the designer's car enthusiasm is running high.

But then, Christofi brings energy to all he touches, this stylish and highly personalized retreat a perfect example. Elegant but relaxed, it's a welcoming setting for visitors and—as Fred would attest—dogs. A home, in other words, that just also happens to be the best-looking and most memorable house on the block. **NEH**

NOTE For more about *New England Home*, visit www.nehomemag.com.



FACING PAGE: Twin dog beds at the bed's head translate to supreme comfort for reading. Smaller pillows sport Clarence House fabric.
THIS PAGE: The dressing room's high-stepping cabinet picks up on the green/red palette.