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Right at Home

Hired by a client whose family she has worked with for years, designer Elizabeth Lawrence elegantly updates a Manhattan apartment to feel both comfortingly familiar and refreshingly new

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the role that genetics plays in our aesthetic tastes and how we choose to live—versus the influence of environmental factors—is a fascinating subject. The question of heritability is especially intriguing with multiple offspring from the same parents. Why does one sibling go for a strictly neutral palette, while another is bonkers for color? How is it that glossy surfaces are alluring to one sister and anathema to the other? Where did a passion for contemporary photography come from?

Elizabeth Lawrence, partner of interior design legend Bunny Williams in the firm Williams Lawrence, has been working with a tight-knit Manhattan family for decades, marveling at both the similarities and differences in each member's approach to his or her interiors. Over the course of more than a dozen collaborations, Lawrence and the family—a long-married couple and their five adult children—have developed a distinctive design language, with dialects specific to each individual.

The latest in that long line of projects is a renovation of an Upper East Side prewar apartment that the oldest daughter, an →



In the living room of an apartment on New York's Upper East Side, Elizabeth Lawrence of the design firm Williams Lawrence furnished the main seating area with bespoke Wesley Hall sofas facing a custom Ironies cocktail table. A large Lyne Lapointe mixed-media painting animates one corner, while works by George Condo and Chris Burden hang between the windows, and a piece by Pamela Keravuori perches on the 19th-century English mantelpiece. For details see Sources.

Screen prints by Andy Warhol are mounted above the entry hall's Jules Leleu-style vintage sideboard and Portuguese Rococo side chairs, facing a Candida Höfer photograph, while a work by Willem de Kooning hangs at the far end above a Warhol Brillo Box sculpture. The 1930s American Art Deco ceiling fixtures are from David Duncan Studio.



A table combining a vintage glass base with a custom lacquered top is surrounded by midcentury chairs attributed to Jansen in the dining room, which also features a Regency-style sideboard and a rug by Marc Phillips. Contrasting with the de Gournay chinoiserie wall panels are artworks by Richard Mosse and Kikuo Saito, the latter visible in the mirror, as is a pendant by Ironies.



Antique chairs inherited from the client's parents join a vintage birdcage table in the living room, overlooked by a 19th-century portrait and a vibrant Mickalene Thomas artwork displayed above a Federal-style bench by Moxie Interiors; the rug is by Beauvais Carpets.



FROM LEFT: Wallpaper by Temple Studio clads the sunny breakfast nook, where a marble-top table with a Bunny Williams Home base tucks into the custom-designed banquette. A Kehinde Wiley drawing hangs above the family room's Wesley Hall custom sectional sofa, which is covered in a Kravet linen and wraps around a Bunny Williams Home ottoman.

active philanthropist, shares with her financier husband and their four children. For her, the priority is always color, pattern, and texture. “When I was a child my mother was constantly having to tell me to stop touching things in stores,” she says. “I had to put my hands on everything.”

For Lawrence’s part, such a long and fruitful history has its advantages. “My client was nearing the end of high school when I first began working with her parents, which is so wonderful, because I know exactly what she is talking about when she makes references to her childhood home. We don’t have to say too much to understand each other at this point,” explains the designer.

Updates to the five-bedroom residence began with some changes carried out by M. Damian Samora, a partner at Ferguson & Shamamian Architects, to give the spaces a more gracious flow to suit a young, modern family. “We flipped the kitchen from the north to the south side of the apartment, which allowed us to configure the entertaining spaces to overlook Fifth Avenue and Central Park, with the bedrooms on the quieter, north-facing side,” says Samora.

Throughout the apartment Lawrence inserted reminders of the antiques-filled rooms the homeowner padded around in as a child, while keeping things fresh and original. At one end of the elegant living room, antique chairs inherited from the client’s parents surround a classic birdcage dining table. Nearby, a Federal-style, scroll-arm bench is paired unexpectedly with an eye-catchingly patterned mixed-media painting of a reclining woman by Mickalene Thomas, one of the many contemporary artists in the couple’s collection. Other pieces are by Andy Warhol, Candida Höfer, Kehinde Wiley, and George Condo, as well as less-celebrated names. “I have watched my client’s passion for collecting grow over the years to the point where she now teaches me about the emerging artists she discovers,” says Lawrence.



The primary bedroom's Niermann Weeks bed features a canopy by Schneller and Matouk bedding, with vintage inlaid nightstands on either side. Visual Comfort & Co. sconces surround a TV mirror framed by AMCI/Regence over the 19th-century French mantelpiece from A&R Asta, and the rug is by Marc Phillips.

At the living room's other end, anchored by plump custom sofas, the 1860s English marble mantelpiece is surmounted by refined 1960s Jansen sconces and a mirror by John Rosselli (Bunny Williams's husband) that incorporates a reproduction of a radiant vintage Line Vautrin work. Here, too, the art keeps things loose, especially a nearly floor-to-ceiling Lyne Lapointe artwork saturated in cherry red and pink, hanging adjacent to mother-of-pearl striped curtains and a turquoise ginger jar turned lamp.

Parenting books often remind us that offspring are not mini versions of their parents, and while inspired by her mother's and father's collecting, the homeowner has her own ideas about living with art. It took guts to hang a vibrant Richard Mosse and an explosive Kikuo Saito on traditional de Gournay chinoiserie wallpaper panels in the fearlessly furnished dining room. Lawrence outfitted the space with a custom cobalt-lacquer dining table surrounded by guilloche-framed French chairs from the '50s placed atop a contemporary rug boldly patterned with asymmetrical swirls.

Clearly, the client hasn't shaken her attachment to the antiques she grew up with, and Lawrence jokes that "there were occasionally lighthearted suggestions that we sneak certain tables out of her parents' house to use here." The designer did not have to abscond with her client's childhood bedroom curtains, which were pulled out of storage and now hang in the couple's bedroom, also a sophisticated mix of old and new. "I love that Elizabeth knows how to work with my nostalgic tendencies," says the homeowner.

Just off the bedroom is the knockout dressing room, where Lawrence devised bespoke powder blue closets inset with panels of Le Manach floral fabric. On evenings when the client and her sisters go out together, they sometimes gather here to get dressed and talk. It's a scene not unlike one from their childhood—siblings with their own sense of style, feeling right at home. □



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: An artwork by Blair Saxon-Hill hangs next to an 18th-century Danish Rococo secretary and an antique Swedish armchair in the primary bedroom, which is lined in a Zak+Fox wallpaper. The primary bath is enlivened by a vintage Venetian chair covered in a Lee Jofa chintz and a hand-painted floor by Chris Pearson; the vanity sconces are by RH. In the dressing room, bespoke closets by Dutchess Cabinets of New York are inset with panels of a Le Manach floral print; the ceiling fixture is by Hudson Valley Lighting, and the carpeting is by Studio Four NYC.