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An Historic Home That Channels the Spirit of New York

Interior designer Kathleen Walsh marries century old bones with an edgy palette.

BY JESSICA CHERNER PUBLISHED: NOV 4, 2022



Donna Dotan

When New York-based interior designer Kathleen Walsh agreed to outfit an Upper East Side four-bedroom designed by Rosario Candela in 1931, she did so with a very specific inspiration in mind. “Color-wise, I kept imagining what a slightly rebellious late-80s teen with an appreciation of New York City would want when they ‘grew up,’” she explains. The final result, a marriage between old and new in a punchy palette, is pretty spot-on. Plus, the clients, native New Yorkers, found it quite fitting.

In the years since the Italian-American architect designed the prominent 13-story building with uninterrupted views of the Guggenheim and Central Park, it lost a considerable amount of its storied, historical charm. “Our clients gave us a call and asked us not just to decorate but also to infuse the apartment with moldings, paneling, and detailing that would allow the apartment to nod to its former self,” Walsh says.

While she designed the space for modern living, she honored Candela’s original work with architectural details, including kitchen built-ins, antique and reproduction mantels flanking a double-sided fireplace, and custom moldings throughout. Though infusing the home with a sense of old New York charisma, the chief driving force behind Walsh’s design was the client’s request for comfortable living. After all, they’re a young family of four who hosts a whopping 24 guests for Thanksgiving.



Living and Dining Room

A dining table that seats more than 20 is a tough find in New York, where space is often limited, so Walsh's solution was a Holly Hunt table with room for 12 and a sofa banquette long enough to accommodate a temporary table for the remaining 12 guests. The rest of the spaces are filled with a collection of both rare antiques and new pieces that "evoke an age of yesterday," Walsh admits. And staying true to form, she purposely avoided pieces that felt too sweet or pretty, letting the unique color palette establish the cool factor within the home. She says, "The color combos stay strong and slightly 'off,' but in a way that feels right." In other words, the home is perfectly imperfect.



Walsh effortlessly divided the open-plan space into dedicated dining and living areas by layering area rugs. An elegant antique sits atop a modern Patterson Flynn Martin design, creating what the designer calls "a studied separation of space." Tying the colorful room together is a colorful painting by Lisa Breslow from Mason Lane Art.

In the dining area, Walsh paired an ornate custom mantel with a Holly Hunt table that can expand to comfortably seat 12. She also chose for a pair of Visual Comfort light fixtures that add a layered feel to the space.

Kitchen



Walsh transformed a formerly quiet corner into a multifunctional masterpiece complete with a nook for meals and homework and a sizable television. The superstar of the space, however, is the Artistic Tile mosaic over the banquette, which is surrounded with Serena & Lily chairs.



Family Room



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Walsh adds, “My favorite part of this room is the layered coffee table and ottoman featuring a hidden drink table,” which is covered in another impressive fabric from GP & J Baker.

Powder Room



Interior designers often like to have a bit of fun in a powder room because it's a small enough space that pretty much anything goes. Here, Walsh covered the walls in a New York City-themed toile wallpaper from Timorous Beasties. "It lends a cheeky touch," Walsh says.

Office



Walsh also played with pattern in the home office. She decided on Pierre Frey wallpaper and opted for store-bought brackets supporting painted shelves.

Primary Bedroom



Though most of the home features eye-catching hues, the primary bedroom is more serene. “We wanted to create a calming sanctuary with city views just outside,” says Walsh. The upholstered RH bed is flanked by Circa Lighting sconces.

Primary Bathroom



Following the primary bedroom's lead, the bathroom also boasts a soft and quietly luxurious feel, which was Walsh's intention. “The simple addition of a semi-sheer shade in the primary bath creates a neutral moment in this color-filled home,” she says.

Guest Room and Playroom



Another charismatic ceiling within the home, the playroom's is covered in a colorfully Quadrille wallpaper whose palette informs the rest of the space—especially the Ferrell Mittman sofa, which is upholstered in a Perennials fabric.

Daughter's Bedroom



The young daughter's room is fit for royalty, with a Pottery Barn Teen canopy bed, Cowtan & Tout valances, and a muted Quadrille wallpaper.

Deck



The storied apartment features two balconies and an expansive terrace, which is divided into dining and lounge areas with room for eight.

“Lovely west-facing sunsets made the apartment especially tempting” Walsh adds.

Q&A

House Beautiful: What was the home like before?

Kathleen Walsh: A lovely, modern, but very white, blank slate. While the clients appreciated the amenities and the layout of the apartment, gone were the storied details typical of a Candela design and telltale of a New York City apartment, in our client’s minds.

HB: What was the inspiration for the new design?

KW: As a family of four with two grade-school-aged children, (plus the requisite Covid pup), comfortable living was the request. But, for two native New Yorkers, that request also meant the ability to entertain family that drops in on a whim, with a guaranteed minimum of 24 for Thanksgiving and any other family occasion.

HB: Did you encounter any memorable hiccups, challenges, or surprises during the project?

KW: Modern amenities meant a lot of ductwork, which resulted in a challenging ceiling height. We worked hard to reconcile the ceiling layout to work with the furniture plan and feel right. Faux beams were added and spaced to provide some symmetry and rhythm, which felt logical.

HB: How did you save money/DIY/get crafty?

KW: Because we wanted to give future flexibility in the office, we decided to keep the wallpaper we all loved, and use store-bought brackets and painted shelves with a built-in counter surface, and added freestanding storage.

Jessica Cherner

Jessica Cherner is House Beautiful’s associate shopping editor and knows where to find the best high-low pieces for any room.

