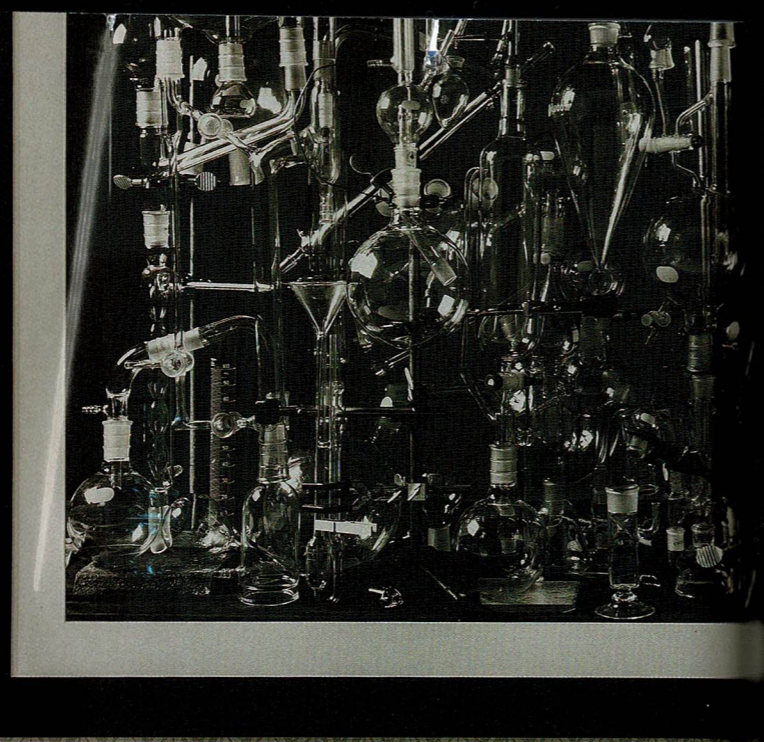


THE ULTIMATE PHOENIX

A RENOVATION, A FIRE, AND THE FINAL RESURRECTION OF A BOSTON JEWEL



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JUICY JUTE GRASS CLOTH from Phillip Jeffries covers the walls in the living room, adding texture yet keeping the decor simple and casual. The foyer (FACING PAGE) is a study in complementary patterns — on the wall, sofa, and floor. The photograph of laboratory glassware is by Cuban-born artist Abelardo Morell of Brookline, Massachusetts.



KIDS KNOW EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD HAS A HAUNTED HOUSE.

It's the one barely visible behind the overgrown bushes, the one with the curtains always drawn. It's the one you're afraid to approach lest the mysterious occupant — the one you and your friends trade dark theories about — jumps out at you.

The towering 1834 Greek Revival on Dane Street in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood was that house, in spades. Even the adults in the neighborhood were a little freaked out by it. "This was the place where no one would trick or treat," says the woman who is now its owner. "One neighbor lived right next door for 40 years and never stepped inside."

Despite appearances, the place was far from the setting of a Halloween tale; only two families had owned the property since the house was built. When its last lone occupant, a woman in her 90s who had not been able to keep up with maintenance of the once grand house, passed away in 2007, the future owner and her husband, who lived just around the corner, screwed up their courage and slipped a note through the mail slot of the old place. Turns out it had been haunting their home-renovation dreams for a while, and when the executors of the estate agreed to sell it to them, they found themselves crossing the threshold for the first time. It was full of art, antiques — and lots of junk. The husband said, "Oh, my goodness, what a wreck." The wife said, "I would like to raise my family here."

They hired architect Chris Hosford of Helios Design Group, also in Jamaica Plain, to develop a master plan, which added a new mudroom entry, two-car garage, and in-law suite at the back of the house, expanding the square footage from 6,500 square feet to 8,000. Onto the job came general contractor Kevin Cradock of Kevin Cradock Woodworking in Jamaica Plain, whose crew set to work building the addition and renovating the old part of the house, removing knob-and-tube wiring and gutting the kitchen and bathrooms.

In June 2008, the family of five moved in while the final strokes of the project were being completed. One day, a painter using a blowtorch to remove paint from one of the massive Doric columns sparked a fire



THE 1834 GREEK Revival house (ABOVE) sits stately and proud now that it is restored — on the outside to its historic roots, and on the inside to an eclectic blend of old and new. (FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) In the dining room, the raised dots on the grid-pattern wallcovering bring texture to the design scheme; the focal point of the foyer is the graceful spiral staircase; the chandeliers in both the living room and dining room were salvaged from the post-renaissance fire.





that quickly spread into the attic. The husband was at his office when his house, engulfed in flames, appeared on the news. He drove home to find the family safe, the third floor almost completely gone, the second floor half gone, and 2 feet of water in the basement. Hopes, dreams, money, and teamwork were gone in one afternoon. With understatement, Cradock says, "It was rough for everybody."

Onward, the team soon declared. Crucially, the house was insured for full replacement value, and as the owners negotiated with the insurance company, Cradock and his crew dealt with the mess that confronted them.

"There was a clear 'seam' between damaged and undamaged, right at the garage," he says, so they gutted the main house, removing

the remains of the roof and third-floor walls and deck, and the interior walls and floors of the first and second floors. What was left — unburned parts of the frame and wall sheathing — was blasted with baking soda, which removed soot and mold. A few precious details were salvaged as well, such as Indian shutters, the tall front windows, a doorway pediment, and some acanthus rosettes, because, as the wife says, "We'd lost so much that we felt very connected to anything that remained."

The work went on for more than a year, with out-of-the-ordinary projects that recaptured the spirit of the old house. A local supplier duplicated the great columns' Ionic capitals in fiberglass-reinforced plaster. Two new, equally massive columns were built for the

MOLDED PLASTIC DOWEL-LEG armchairs from Design Within Reach, originally designed by Charles and Ray Eames for Herman Miller, add color and whimsy to the casual dining table custom-made by contractor Kevin Cradock. Interior designer Dee Elms solved the problem of the mismatched windows with a *vive la difference* approach, leaving the larger window bare and adding bright Roman shades to the double-hung pair. The adjacent family room (FACING PAGE, TOP) is furnished with a comfy sectional sofa adorned, at the owners' request, with pillows with lots of texture and patterns. The kitchen (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) has a 4-foot-by-15-foot island topped with sustainably harvested South American mahogany.

rear facade. Craftspeople recast the original mantels in plaster so they could surround working fireplaces and still meet modern fire codes. Cradock, who is also a furniture maker, built a new family room table using wood from the kitchen's old pine floor. From mahogany, he fashioned a dining room table, sideboard, and other pieces, as well as the kitchen's massive island top. For the *pièce de résistance*, he renovated the two-story oval central stair and continued it up another floor to a new roof pavilion and deck. A twisting mahogany railing was crafted from 15 strips of wood glued and formed in a 20-foot-long vacuum bag.

Before moving back in, the owners hired Dee Elms of Terrat Elms Interior Design in Boston to help them with lighting, kitchen finishes, paint colors, and "the zillion other decisions that I didn't want to make



on my own,” says the wife. But it was now the midst of the recession, and they decided to hold off buying any more furnishings. “For two and a half years,” the wife recalls, “the only piece of furniture in the living room was a Ping-Pong table.” When the couple were ready in 2010, Elms returned and they got down to business, starting with a dramatic wrought-iron pendant light that hangs three stories through the center of the oval staircase. At the wife’s insistence, two 19th-century ormolu chandeliers, survivors of the fire, went to an antique-lighting restoration shop; they now hang in ornate splendor in the living room and adjacent dining room.

Those rooms, open to each other yet separate in function, proved to be Elms’s biggest challenge. “They have to be weighted equally, so that one doesn’t overwhelm the other, the chandeliers don’t dominate the scene, and the gorgeous architecture still shines through,” she says. As if in a conversation, a convex mirror over the living room fireplace

THE CRYSTAL CHANDELIER, also saved from the fire, adds a luxury touch to the master bedroom (ABOVE). (FACING PAGE) 1. A table in the foyer is a family heirloom. The art adds a pop of color that, says Elms, “paves the way for the rest of the house.” 2. Swivel chairs complete the seating in the family room. The painting is from artist John Guthrie’s “Drip” series. 3. A custom Sphere Chandelier from Ironware hangs through all three levels of the stairwell. 4. The first-floor powder room has built-in cupboards and a vanity with a wood top and metal sink. 5. Artwork in the kitchen “brings everything to life,” says Elms. 6. A sculpture by Corbin Bronze walks on the console in the dining room.

corresponds to one in the dining room. The living room’s watery-blue grass paper is the same value as the dining room’s brown, which gets an extra kick from an eye-catching grid of polymer “rivets.” A mix of classic and contemporary, the furniture features a curved-back couch that provides a softened edge between the living room and the foyer, and chairs were upholstered in deep, rich fabrics that allow for the spills and handprints that come with three busy kids, ages 16, 14, and 11.

The entry hall itself, long and imposing, needed taming, so Elms fitted it with a geometric wallpaper that fills the space more than would a solid field of color. Dark floors ground the 14-foot-high ceilings. In the family room, a long, deep, and colorfully pillowed lime-green sectional sofa is “the best spot in the house,” according to the owners’ youngest child.

The upbeat vibe continues at Cradock’s recycled pine table, which is surrounded by plastic Eames chairs in four vibrant colors. “I was so happy when they went for those,” says Elms. “I’m not as brave as Dee,” says the wife, “but she urged me to be, and I’m glad.”

Haunted no more, the very house that scared the neighborhood kids now draws them inside in droves. And it’s not just the kids. When it was under construction, Cradock would often find passersby wandering around, taking self-guided tours. “It’s a house with pillars,” the wife says and laughs. “It sticks out like a sore thumb. People still stop and take pictures of it.” Spooky! ■

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DESIGN DECISION *Making a House Livable and Lively*

With three active children, the owners wanted their refurbished house to be livable, for sure, but also stylish and sophisticated. “Bringing in texture can make it so,” says interior designer Dee Elms. Texture adds warmth to a space and it can stand up to the wear and tear that is an inevitable consequence of family life. “We used texture and pattern in interesting ways,” says Elms. “The result is simple but powerful.”

But what really elevates a project? “The frosting is the art. It completely transformed the space,” says Elms. She and the homeowners worked closely with S3 Contemporary Art in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, in selecting pieces that were right for the owners — and the house. “In a big house,” says Elms, “scale is really important, but we were also looking for color” and, most importantly, for art that appealed to the clients’ personal aesthetic. “We took a gallery walk-through and made a plan,” says Elms, “but everything was hung while the family was away.” Happily, the couple were mostly pleased with the selections. “They did switch some things out,” says Elms. “The art had to speak to them. They made the final decisions.” Now that all is in place, she adds, “The way the art brings everything to life is amazing.”