

New England HOME

Celebrating Fine Design, Architecture, and Building



Transformations

*BOLD BRILLIANCE IN
THE NEW YEAR*

FRAMEWORK

A LIVING ROOM BUILT IN 1870 TRANSFORMS INTO AN AT-HOME ART GALLERY FIT FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY—ALMOST.

Text by
ERIKA AYN FINCH

Photography by
READ MCKENDREE

Designer Lisa Tharp achieved a formal living room that welcomes extended family while also showcasing a growing art collection. The residents, who moved into the home and had it remodeled in 2014 but didn't call in Tharp until 2019, possess the 1870-built home's floor plans from a 1936 renovation. While much of the millwork is original, the plans reveal the fireplace mantel was replaced during the 1930s project.





In an example of life imitating art, Lisa Tharp designed one Greater Boston family's living room to act as a giant canvas and ornate frame—witness the home's original 1870 ceiling and crown molding—for her art-collecting clients.

The room serves as a gathering space for the extended family members who congregate here for the holidays, so it also needed to be comfortable and durable. "The goal wasn't to replicate the home's period but to reflect how the owners live now," says Tharp, a recent inductee into the New England Design Hall of Fame. "We wanted to honor the bones and the volume of the space—make it refined and sophisticated but also plush and comfortable."

Winter-white walls and millwork and floor-to-ceiling drapery help emphasize the room's eleven-foot height while showcasing the artwork. Shades of wheat and mossy green, most evident in the performance-velvet-covered Dmitriy & Co sofa, and dark wood floors reference the home's verdant landscape. The wife, who has a fine-art background and wanted to see it reflected in the living room, says it was Tharp's artistic eye that drew her to the designer, who likes to paint in her spare time. "Lisa has a way of



compositionally balancing a variety of shapes and styles," the homeowner says. "She knows how to let the architecture and art sing, while at the same time using—but not overusing—color."

Tharp's artistic touch extends beyond the furnishings to the applique painting that hangs above the sofa and anchors the space. Serendipitously, the hand-dyed piece was crafted by Tharp's daughter, artist Fia Tharp, a recent Rhode Island School of Design graduate. The homeowner appreciates

Most of the wavy glass in the room is original, which gives the space beautifully refracted light. The midcentury Italian alabaster table next to the custom settee sports an unusual ring handle on its top. **FACING PAGE:** The room's only portrait features the homeowner's mom and hangs above a velvet-covered Saladino bench. In the corner, a drink table is secured to the foot of a wing chair.



ABOVE: In an example of mixing the modern with the classic, the new Paul Ferrante hearth stool has an antique finish. **BELOW:** Before they were married, the homeowners purchased this Emil Alzamora sculpture; Tharp commissioned the oval plinth on which it now resides. **FACING PAGE:** Master woodworker Wayne Towle refinished the home's original mahogany pocket door, which separates the living and family rooms. It's flanked by a pair of 1820s neoclassical Danish chests boasting giltwood-carved figures.

personal connections to her collection: the portrait that hangs between two windows features her mom, a 1960s folk singer, and was painted by her dad, Billy Hardison. "My mom is a lifelong subject of my dad's," says the homeowner. "This portrait hung in my house when I was growing up, and I've carried it with me from place to place. It now has its spot."

The painting isn't the only piece that looks like it's always been there. The mirrors that flank a doorway leading into the family room were custom designed to fit the walls from the top of the wainscoting to the bottom of the crown molding. A corner settee with upholstered legs and a fringed ottoman

inspired by the billiards room at The Breakers, one of the Newport Mansions, were also custom. "Fringe can be a polarizing detail," admits Tharp, "but it can also add just the right amount of elegance and soften the hardwood floors of an area that doesn't have a rug."

Elegant seems to sum up the space, but it's not too elegant to use, says the homeowner, whose daughter takes her guitar lessons in the room. The lack of television fosters conversation, and the open floor space in front of the fireplace encourages winter puzzles and game nights. But there is one family member who has yet to set foot, or perhaps we should say paw, in the room. "We recently got a puppy—our first dog—and he's not allowed in the room quite yet," says the homeowner with a laugh.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For details, see Resources.



INTERIOR DESIGN: Lisa Tharp, Lisa Tharp Design
RENOVATION BUILDER: Kistler & Knapp Builders