



## An interior designer's historic Boston brownstone blends European influences and modernist leanings

Designer Lisa Tharp's apartment in a prestigious Boston neighbourhood combines sophisticated, clean lines with vintage finds from France and Italy. *Photography by Jose Manuel Alorda. Interior design by Lisa Tharp Design. Production by Karine Monié.*

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*Fortuny chandelier Scheherazade 2 Tiers in Silk, Ralph Pucci daybed, Goffredo Reggiani articulating lamp from Gurari, Eno High Back Lounge Chairs from The Bright Group, Italian coffee table from 1stDibs, LT Signature 4-Door Cabinet from Lisa Tharp Design Collection, cabinet lamp from Chairish, Silk rug from Stark, Fia Tharp artwork, L. Fahn R. artworks, Sara Bumgardner artwork, wood pedestal from Global Views, Thomas Junghans sculpture from M Fine Arts Galerie, travertine dining table from Friends of Form, J.C. Mahey lamp from 1stDibs, Geo Semples artwork from Alain Hens Gallery.*

Venice, Rome, and Versailles may seem like lofty inspirations or comparisons for a home in Boston, but for Lisa Tharp, founder and principal designer of Lisa Tharp Design, they were not only achievable goals, but also completely realistic and reasonable. The house in question, after all, is an 1860 brownstone on the prestigious first block of Boston's historic Back Bay neighbourhood—“one built in the French academic style, which was popularised by Baron Haussmann's remaking of Paris for Napoleon III,” Tharp says. “The apartment also shares an architectural language with 19th century Rome and reminds me of neighbourhoods there such as Parioli and Prati, which were built around the same time and share many of the same classical influences.”



*Portrait of Lisa Tharp by Cheryl Richards*

Then there's the fact that Tharp's mother is Italian, and with her dual US/Italian citizenship, she continues to visit the country frequently with her own family "to reconnect with our heritage, the culture, the architecture, the art, the design, and the food." She also travels regularly to France for inspiration, pleasure, and work—"to locate special finds for our clients' homes and ourselves."



Initially built as a single family home, the one-bedroom-plus-study brownstone overlooks the Boston Public Garden and is steps away from Newbury Street, known for its high-end boutiques, galleries, cafés and restaurants. The apartment was converted to luxury residences half a century ago and was “love at first sight” for Tharp, who lives there with her entrepreneur and musician husband.



“It feels like being transported from Boston to Rome or Paris,” she continues. “Back Bay’s architectural style satisfied the wealthy’s appetite for European buildings and wide, tree-lined boulevards, sparked by their steamship travels abroad.”



Case in point: very high ceilings—some wood coffered and others with ornamental plaster moldings; classical symmetry; a grand sense of scale; ornate, decorative columns; three working fireplaces; and tall doors and windows overlooking the garden, a characteristic typical of classical villas and palazzos. Preserving and reinstating these elements was among Tharp’s main goals for the project.



“The biggest challenge was reversing prior, insensitive renovations to return the home to its original authentic beauty,” she notes. Among these revisions: removing false ceilings (“likely added during the energy crisis in the 1970s,” she suggests) that hid the stunning, ornamental ceilings and replacing the awkward closets around the fireplace in the study.



*Travertine 20th century French lamp from The South Loop Loft, Bernie Sofa in Mohair from Bright Chair Company, Ottoman reupholstered in Dual Terre de Sienne by Martin Group from Stitch NYC Inc, Maison Arlus sconce, handknotted silk rug from Stark, Norma Edward Cameron McClellan artwork, William Quigley artwork, Morgan Chair from Eva Quateman, Charles Spada showroom.*

Tharp also brought in vintage lighting, hardware, and furnishings from Italy and France. “These are true to the evolving history of the brownstone,” she explains, “and the effect is timeless, as if details and furnishings have been collected over the years, while other, contemporary finds keep things fresh.”



From Italy, for the living room, Tharp found a 1970s coffee table, a vintage travertine dining table, an articulated lamp from 1962 by Goffredo Reggiani, and a Fortuny chandelier from Venice, “which leads the eye up to the ornate plaster ceiling,” she notes. There’s also a pair of 1940s French dining chairs, a table lamp by Jean Claude Mahey, and a 1970s Brutalist lamp on the sideboard, all from France.



The study is anchored by a 1930s French Art Deco desk and chair in polished walnut, with a travertine and Lucite desk lamp and vintage wall sconce by Maison Arlus, also all from France. “The rich colours of Siena, Italy were the inspiration for the palette in the study, which also doubles as a guest room,” explains Tharp.



*Palazzo Bed from Lisa Tharp Collection, Young Chest with Plinth Base from Tritter Feefer, Marc Schepens painting from Ellen Miller Gallery, Thomas Junghans sculpture from M Fine Arts Galerie, Fia Tharp artwork, 18th century chair restored in Venetian silk velvet from Schumacher, Lisa Tharp painting, unknown artist artwork from Charles Spada.*

The bedroom features a pair of 18th century French Louis XVI oval-back chairs, reupholstered in Venetian silk velvet – the ultimate pairing of Tharp’s French and Italian references, perhaps—as well as a palazzo bed she custom designed for the space. “It’s a streamlined, reductionist take on the proportions of the canopy beds found in grand Italian villas or at Versailles,” she says, “and it was a joy to design: we took full advantage of those 13-foot ceilings.”



Similar to how these properties showcased, both historically and in the present day, immense collections of art, tapestries and sculptures, Tharp and her husband have adopted a 'collector's approach' to the items that live in their home. "Every piece, large and small, has to work hard and earn its place," she describes. "The goal was to balance delicate ornamentation with handsome, streamlined silhouettes."



Tharp curates unique pieces with interesting shapes across time and place, whether it's a chair or a custom lampshade. "I've always admired Italy's sophisticated blending of modernist elements with historic structures," she reflects. "This brownstone is my modernist take on a historic apartment to create an artistic, sophisticated, timeless place to call home."



*The living room.*



*A close up of the living room.*



*Another view of the living room.*

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