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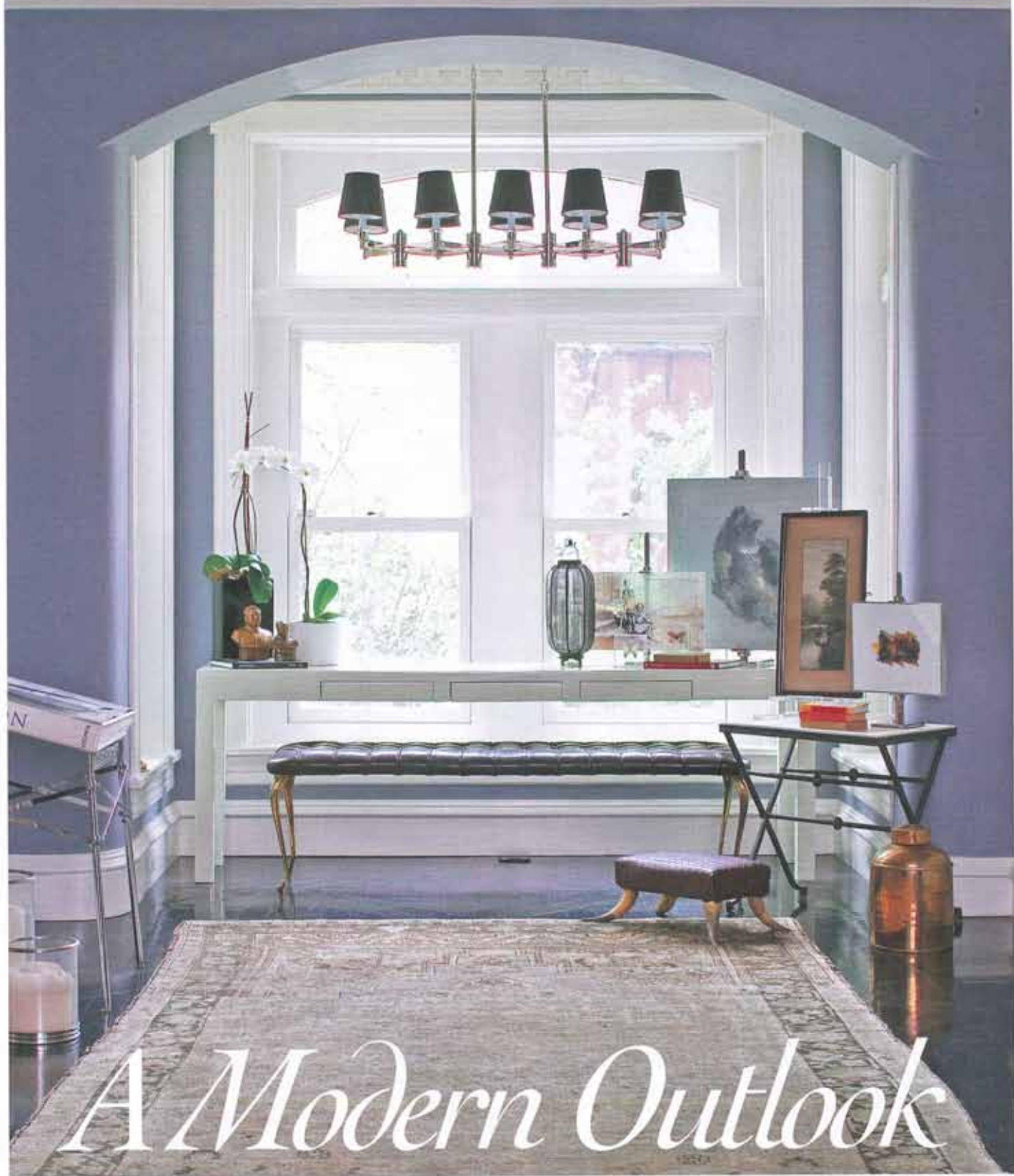
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A beloved Maison Jansen table in a white lacquer finish makes a bold statement in the dining room (pictured here). In the living room (opposite), Graham left the front window unadorned, framing it with crisp white moldings that contrast with the smoky-blue walls.



A Modern Outlook

Designer Lori Graham deftly blended original architecture with updated interiors in her Dupont Circle home

BY CHARLOTTE SAFAVI | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIK JOHNSON



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hen Lori Graham traded in her briefcase for a portfolio, she left a busy law practice to launch Washington, DC-based Lori Graham Design. Among the first residential projects she tackled after completing design coursework at the Corcoran:

her own Q Street, NW, residence. "I wanted to create an urban oasis in Dupont Circle," says Graham of her Victorian townhouse. Once an art gallery, the 4,800-square-foot home with a master suite on the third floor was the ideal place for Graham to live, entertain and work.

Her immediate challenge was to determine where to put the kitchen. The previous owners had used the first floor as a gallery, the second floor bedrooms as offices and the top floor, with its tiny kitchen, as their home. Graham wanted to install a proper kitchen on the ground floor.

"I went back and forth between putting the kitchen in the center of the house or in the back," says Graham. "In the end, I picked the center to allow for flow between the entry/living area and the dining room. It worked best for my style of entertaining—more mobile cocktail parties, fewer sit-down, 12-course dinners."

Once the kitchen was placed, the house, which had not been renovated since the early 1980s, had to be stripped down to joists,

INTERIOR DESIGN: LORI GRAHAM, Lori Graham Design, Washington, DC.



© MORGAN HOWARTH



An all-white kitchen (pictured here) pays homage to the home's Victorian identity while imparting modern elegance. A built-in wine bar that doubles as a buffet (opposite) is tucked into a corner of the dining room.



“I want my work to reference what’s come before, but at the same time, update it to the way we live today.” —LORI GRAHAM

beams and bricks before Graham got started. “Architecture and art have always been passions of mine,” she says. “Both are integral to my interior design process.”

Graham was soon in the thick of applying her twofold design philosophy to her own home. “The genesis of any job I do is in the architecture and architectural history of a residence,” she says. “I’m not a historical preservationist but I want my work to reference what’s come before. At the same time, I believe we’re allowed to update to the way we live today.”

She salvaged what she could of the Eastlake-style Victorian originally built by DC architect Thomas Franklin Schneider, while jazzing up the interiors to make them feel fresh. She painted the original fireplace mantels matte black and the historic doors glossy white, covered period brass hardware in contemporary nickel finishes and laid down her signature ebonized marquetry floors. “I wanted to take the architectural elements from the time period, yet provide modern finishes,” she explains.

Graham also had a vision of how she wanted the townhouse to flow on a vertical plane, based on everyday needs ranging from seeing clients and throwing parties on the updated-yet-formal first floor to running her business and welcoming overnight guests on the second floor to retreating and relaxing in the Zen-like private quarters on the third floor, which lead to a serene roof garden.

Throughout the home, consistent use of rich, ebonized flooring and lustrous white millwork provided a sense of continuity. Con-

trasting textures—wood and metal, velvet and silk, leather and linen—imparted interest and the use of Asian-inspired furnishings and animal hides referenced the designer’s background. “I was born in Japan and raised on a self-sustaining farm in Oklahoma surrounded by the Asian stuff my family had collected over the years,” Graham confides of her earliest influences.

In addition to working within the dictates of the home’s architecture, Graham drew upon her second passion—art—for further decorative cohesion.

“I always look at my client’s art collection for design inspiration,” she says. “What it is doesn’t matter, but what it means to them does. What they collect reflects them. This defines my conceptual approach to interior design. My goal isn’t to brand myself, like the generation of designers did before me. I want the statement to belong to the client.”

In this case, of course, Graham turned to her own art collection, which is diverse in scale, color and media with a mix of photographs, oils, acrylics, watercolors and sculptural forms.

For her upstairs walls, Graham went with her favorite “gallery white”—Benjamin Moore’s Decorator White—upon which she hung punchy art, furnishing the space with vibrant, warmly hued pieces in oranges, pinks and reds. Downstairs, she paid homage to the home’s Victorian sensibility with ornate white moldings and paneling, then selected cool-toned charcoal gray and smoky-blue walls for sharper definition. Neutral furniture and art ensure versatility.



On the second floor, a pale-hued runner provides a contrast to the dark floors in the hallway (opposite, left). A black-painted mantel with a zebra-patterned surround provides a focal point in a small guest bedroom (pictured here). In the adjoining bath (opposite, right), flocked pink velvet wallpaper adds a fresh twist to traditional damask.



© TYLER MALLORY



Lori Graham (top) furnished the larger guest room (right and above) with a leather sofa and four metal coffee tables. The mirror on the mantel has a reverse-painted frame.







"The goal in my house," she says, "was to make sure that anything I had would fit anywhere. So I naturally turned to more muted colors, natural materials and clean-lined furniture."

For Graham, good design relies on complete visual balance—whether artwork is being highlighted or architectural elements emphasized. "I don't like medium tones because they don't create tension with either art or architecture," she says. "Color and palette need to be immediately noticeable when people walk in. I want the contrast."

The result of the designer's efforts was a chic, comfortable working home that she loved. Graham enjoyed the process so much that she has since sold her Q Street house and is now busy renovating another residence nearby. She also plans to open a showroom in Logan Circle this fall.

Looking back, Graham says that her Dupont Circle house "was a trademark of my personal style, the realization of my design philosophy." She pauses playfully before adding, "In this case, I knew the client very well." ♦

Charlotte Safavi is a writer in Alexandria, Virginia. Erik Johnson is an Alexandria-based photographer.

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A spacious roof deck includes separate "rooms:" the lower-level lounge area with pergola (this page and opposite, bottom), clearly favored by the designer's dogs, and the upper-level area (opposite, top), intended for sun bathing.