

THE MAGAZINE of *SPLENDID HOMES and GARDENS* • NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2013

# DESIGN

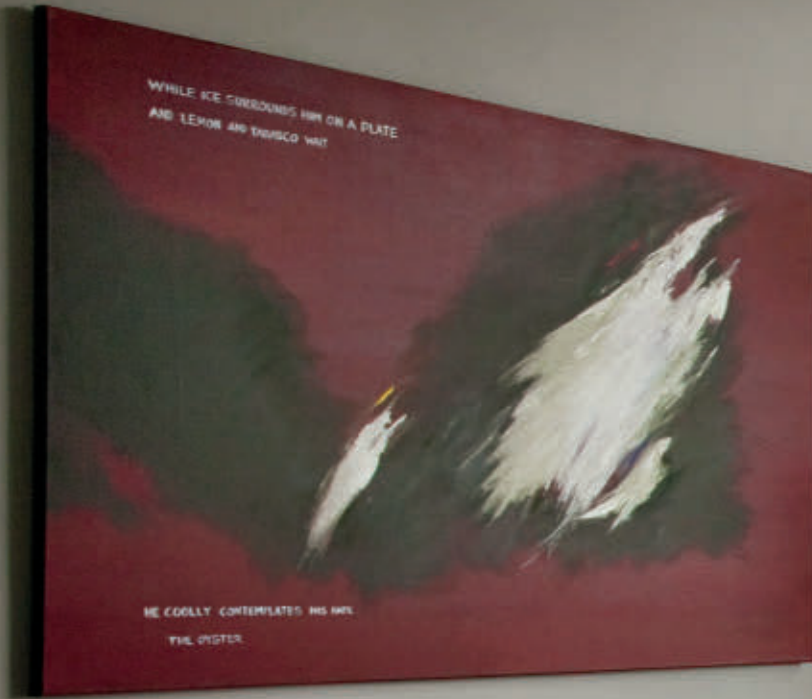
NEW ENGLAND

**Celebrating *Style***

SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



A SILK RIBBED gray area rug floats on the chocolate-brown hardwood floor, defining the living room's generous seating, which is oriented to the Charles River view. Long linen curtains are horizontally striped with silver metallic thread. Above the sofa, *Oysterville*, an abstract painting of an oyster by artist Mimi Reilly of Boston, is striking against dove-gray walls.



# ROMANCING *the city*

BOSTON'S BACK BAY STOLE THE HEARTS OF A COUPLE LOOKING TO BUILD A COSMOPOLITAN EMPTY NEST

WRITTEN BY ESTELLE BOND GURALNICK | PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC ROTH

 INTERIOR DESIGN DAHER INTERIOR DESIGN





# If

Janet and William (“call me Van”) VanArsdale seem to radiate joie de vivre, it’s because they both genuinely revel in what Van has debonairly dubbed their “cool and sexy” triplex in Boston’s Back Bay. Not cool and sexy, mind you, in the sleek James Bond mode, but rather in the timeless urbane sophistication of a Noel Coward setting.

Come to think of it, Coward could have written the script for their serendipitous meeting in 1999 at Orzo, a restaurant in North Andover, Massachusetts, where each was living at the time. Janet, recently legally separated with a 7-year-old son, had stopped in for takeout. Van, divorced with two daughters away at college, had become such a frequent diner that the menu featured a dish called “The Van Special.” When Janet asked about the dinner item, she was told: “Well, here’s the man who inspired it.” A second chance meeting a month later got them talking, and slowly a new, significant friendship was born.

Always subliminally Boston-bound, as newlyweds the VanArs-

**AN ETCHED BLACK-and-gray patterned fireplace surround in the living room (ABOVE) is set flush in a wall of built-in cabinets interrupted by long vertical lighted alcoves that showcase *Paper Wisps*, sculptures by Kim Radochia of Boston. The open kitchen (FACING PAGE) is a piece of art in itself. Elegant dubonnet-swirled Magma Red granite is used for all countertops. Floating gray wall shelves, which are lit from below, are a decorative balance to the multicolored glass-and-stone wall tiles.**

dales detoured first to a big Colonial-style house in North Andover for their merged families, vowing to stay only until Janet’s son went off to college.

Interior designer Paula Daher, now of Boston but then of nearby Andover, remembers “neither a knife or fork was brought from their previous lives, and we had fun making the house comfortable for everyone.” They also coincidentally learned that Daher, a self-described workaholic, was on a city trajectory, too, which she implemented in 2006 when her family moved to an apartment on Commonwealth Avenue, separate from her firm, Daher Interior Design, with its four full-time employees, just around the corner on Clarendon Street.

True to their goal, as empty-nesting loomed, the VanArstdales started combing Boston neighborhoods, from the waterfront to the South End to Back Bay, which in the end won their hearts for its walkability and Charles River views. But it took the ingenuity of The Holland Companies, a Boston design/build firm, to advise them how to attain the size and amenities they wanted by combining a garden-level, one-bedroom condominium with the duplex apartment above it to achieve a three-level unit with a garage and outdoor courtyard.

Daher was involved from the get-go when the total makeover began in 2010. She designed the stunning new steel staircase that pivots dramatically to stitch the floors together. “It was a great collaboration to work with the Holland brothers and all their





subcontractors,” she says. “Utilizing space was an important part of working together, and involved many meetings, because Janet is very organized and tidy and wants everything out of sight. She loves secret drawers everywhere, and now she certainly has them.”

The color scheme of soft grays, cognac, and plum has its origins in the striking granite Daher found to top the kitchen island. Named Magma Red, it has swirls of deep, rich dubonnet on a dark gray background. Color-coordinated with it, the backsplash behind the stove is a mixture of polished and unpolished glass and stone, all from Cumar Marble and Granite in Everett, Massachusetts. “We get so many compliments on the kitchen colors,” says Janet. “They create a vibe that people respond

to. And with music in the background, it’s hard not to think of a martini.”

The project was not without its drama, handled by Daher with her usual aplomb. In the midst of the construction, she tripped on a pile of mail, left on the stairs because the mailboxes weren’t in place. She broke her ankle in two places, had surgery to insert a 6-inch plate, and missed only one day’s work, con-

**STURDY AND GRACEFUL**, the new steel staircase (ABOVE LEFT) was designed by interior designer Paula Daher and engineered by The Holland Companies. Adding beauty and safety are the recessed lights along the treads. The Italian chandelier has handblown glass balls wired to hang at varying heights. Bailey, a bichon frisé, lounges in the restful master bedroom (ABOVE RIGHT).



tinuing site supervision by wheelchair and crutches. “I couldn’t drive, had to be lifted onto elevators, and my foot kept elevated,” she says. “My staff and clients were wonderful, and it never occurred to me to slow down.”

Accident notwithstanding, Janet says working with Daher and the Hollands was easy. “We don’t have width here,” she says of the narrow footprint of the building, “but we do have height.” Daher took advantage of the tall ceilings in the master bedroom. “Paula designed graduated built-ins that don’t tower above,” says Janet. “And in the kitchen,” rather than nesting in high cabinets, “the dishes are on under-counter slide-out shelves, which I love.”

Van notes that he and Janet have traveled the world together, staying in top-notch hotels, where often you can encounter very

good decorating, some to your taste, some not. They eventually concluded that traditional was too stodgy for them, but that transitional with a modern edge was more their style. “This place is who we are,” he says. For him, travel is part of life. As president of the Hydraulics Division of Eaton Corp., a global industrial supplier, he flies to his office in Minnesota on Mondays, might be in Europe or Asia during the week, and returns to Boston on Fridays. Sounds hectic, but he considers himself a lucky guy. “I’m a city kid from New Jersey on a great journey,” he says. “I’ve got three wonderful kids and a sensational wife. When I get on a plane to fly, I pinch myself.” ■

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