

nesting instinct

Dufner Heighes modernizes a historic Pelham, New York, house for a growing family looking to put down roots

text: jen renzi photography: john ellis



Flip back a page, please. Now, kick up your feet, relax—here, have a cocktail—and observe this intriguing wood-paneled room: the resolutely leafy view, that groovy triangular window, the serene quiet, the vintage-heavy furniture scheme. Bet you think this is the living room of some cozy '70's-mod cabin on a remote rural plot, right? Well, surprise! In fact, this is the second-floor sitting room of a painstakingly preserved century-old Edwardian-style manse within shouting distance (although please don't; the baby's sleeping) of the Bronx.

Dufner Heighes was the firm tasked with future-proofing the historic Pelham, New York, house for a growing family. The 7,100-square-foot dwelling has an intriguing back story. Previous owners include the island nation of Barbados, which used it as an embassy, and a Coca-Cola executive who frequently hosted President Eisenhower there back in the 1950s. Another head of state, George Washington, reportedly stayed on the property, too, in a structure that once stood on this abode's exact footprint. That provenance piqued the interest of Erica Holborn, CEO of Sandow Design Group (*Interior Design's* parent company) and a self-professed real-estate enthusiast. "I'm a house-with-a-story person," she admits.

When Holborn and her husband, Andrew, first saw the property listing, they deemed the eight-bedroom too big for their needs. Fast forward a year later. Their Dufner Heighes-designed Sutton Place apartment was getting a bit too snug for their expanding family (especially with WFH in the mix), and their upstate getaway, a 1970's A-frame designed by Frank Lloyd Wright protégés, was too far from the city for full-time residency. Plus, the Holborns got an offer on the latter that they couldn't refuse. So when the price dropped on the Pelham place around the same time, they finally took a look—and were sold.

Among the structure's many attributes was that it had been pristinely restored, from the oak millwork to the original hardware. "It was a perfect situation, because the previous owners had updated a few things, like the kitchen, but restored everything else—stripping layers of paint off moldings ➤



Previous spread: In the second-floor primary suite's sitting room, windows are angled to follow the roofline; a print by Linda Colletta, *Sky III*, joins a Dufner Heighes-designed Stop coffee table, a D'Urso sofa, and vintage wing chairs reupholstered in shearling.

Opposite: A pair of Finn Juhl chairs and a Bob sectional designed by Thomas Bernstrand and Stefan Borselius furnish the living room's seating vignette; the area rug, like most of the floor coverings throughout, is from Aronson's.

Top: Dufner Heighes designed the mudroom's Bubble table; the terrazzo flooring by Artistic Tile incorporates marble chips. **Left:** Near the living room fireplace, with original oak millwork, a Jaime Hayon side table cozies up to a leather daybed. **Right:** Katie Hammond's *Ol' Dirty Bastard* accents the stair hall, illuminated by Louis Poulsen pendants.



In the dining room, wallpapered in *Borderline Chinoiserie* by Voutsas, a Kiki Smith print, *Fawn*, hangs over a Jaime Hayon credenza; a flock of mouthblown glass birds adds height and interest to the oak table by Philipp Mainzer. ➔



"To make the historic house feel younger, we used furniture that was contemporary but not too minimal or modern—and that had enough detail and character to hold up to the surroundings."

Top: In the sunroom, a Bouroullec Brothers Ploum sofa joins an Iacoli coffee table featuring a custom top in onyx from Artistic Tile. **Left:** Works in India ink from Hugo Guinness's "Wobbly Records" series garnish the game room, adjacent to the lower-level family room. **Right:** In the kitchen, with Shaker-style cabinetry from Bilotta, Dufner Heighes added a built-in banquette to maximize space; the chairs and stools are by Hans Wegner. **Opposite:** In the foyer, a portrait by Elizabeth Peyton is complemented by handmade paper flowers by Livia Cetti and a custom table by Casey Johnson.

and all that stuff no one wants to deal with," notes Daniel Heighes Wismer, firm copartner with Greg Dufner. In short, it was practically turnkey. Early site visits suggested the project would be primarily decorative and cosmetic: reupholstering some existing furnishings, buying new items to fill in a few gaps, replacing antique light fixtures with more modern designs, updating cabinetry, hanging artwork. Midway through planning the new kitchen, however, it became apparent the current footprint was underscaled for the size of the house and had an awkward, dinky island unsuited to cooking and dining. "During one of our meetings with the team from Bilotta, with whom we were designing the kitchen," Wismer recalls, "someone questioned whether we could tear down a wall to annex the adjoining butler's pantry—and that changed everything," necessitating plumbing and electrical rerouting plus new structural steel. "My dream has always been to have a butler's pantry," Holborn sighs. "And then I finally buy a house with one—and promptly take it out!"

The monthslong renovation was well worth it. The new scheme is much brighter and airier, with a long Arabescato Corchia marble island that seats four, plus a window-wrapped breakfast nook. Dufner Heighes deployed two patterns of Artistic Tile terrazzo flooring, one incorporating marble chips, to create area rug–like accents that delineate spatial zones. Shaker-style cabinetry is simpatico with the period architecture yet modern enough to suit the décor. The same flooring and cabinetry also extend into an adjacent space, a former family room that now serves as a storage-packed mudroom.

The reinvention of a living space as service-oriented hub made sense, given the floorplan already offered a generous number of hangout areas, including the ground-floor salon and contiguous sunroom, a second-floor playroom for two-year-old Marlowe and baby Bodhi, a sitting room off the primary suite, and the family and game rooms that anchor the daylit basement level. "The challenge," Dufner says, "was how to make each living space feel like it had a unique function and purpose." Seating in particular was selected with specific activities and postures in mind. Thus the salon's more upright Bob sectional, its firm, snakelike form perfect for perching with a glass of wine; the sunroom's more lounge-y Bouroullec Brothers Ploum sofa, a holdover from the upstate house (albeit newly reupholstered); and the superdeep, nap-conducive sofa in the family room, where TV viewing occurs. ➤

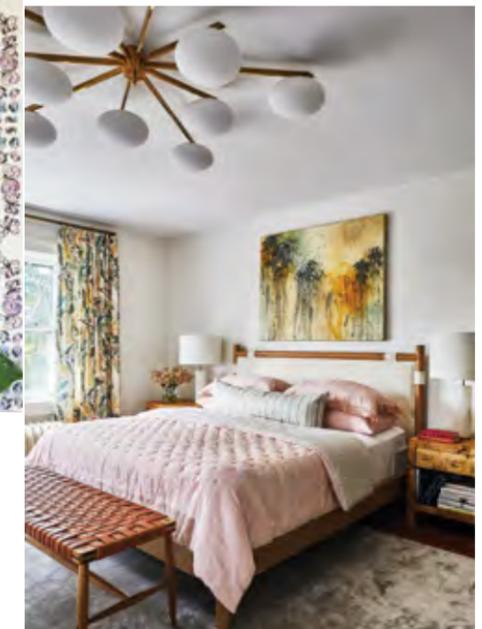


Though the house has a traditional layout, with discrete rooms, they open graciously onto each other, and curating sight lines was particularly important. Many features were considered holistically so they would work together from room to room. On the first floor, for instance, “there are points where you can see the ceiling fixtures in the sunroom, living room, entry hall, and the dining room all at once,” Wismer explains. “So the lighting we specified all needed to work within their respective rooms and also as a cohesive group.” Furniture and other accents were chosen and placed similarly, he adds. “There was a balancing of where we could go a little wild and where something had to be toned down so it wouldn’t get too heavy or layered.”

Speaking of going a little wild, check out the dining room wallpaper. The pattern, a trippy graphic confection in riotous hues, tents the room, extending up from crisp wainscoting lacquered a mercurial green-gray color. The op art patterning is the perfect jazz riff on the abode’s 1914 bones. “The contrast between historic and modern is just so great,” says Wismer. A sentiment that summarizes the project top to bottom. 🍷

PRODUCT SOURCES

SITTING ROOM KNOLL: SOFA. DUNBAR: SIDE TABLE. DESIGN FOR MACHA: CEILING FIXTURE. THROUGH NOGUCHI SHOP: FLOOR LAMP. GARRETT LEATHER: ARMCHAIR SHEARLING. KVADRAT: SIDE CHAIR FABRIC. **LIVING ROOM** BLÅ STATION THROUGH SCANDINAVIAN SPACES: SOFA. HOUSE OF FINN JUHL: CHAIRS. GUBI: COFFEE TABLE. ARONSON'S: RUG. BD BARCELONA THROUGH DDC: GREEN SIDE TABLE. FREDERICIA: DAYBED. **LAWSON-FENNING:** VESSELS. **MUD ROOM** BILOTTA: CABINETS. ARTISTIC TILE: FLOORING. SEUNGJIN YANG THROUGH THE FUTURE PERFECT: PINK STOOL. BLU DOT: YELLOW OTTOMAN. THROUGH NOGUCHI SHOP: PENDANT. **STAIR** LOUIS POULSEN: PENDANTS. **DINING ROOM** VOUTSA: WALLPAPER. E15 THROUGH STILLFRIED WIEN: TABLE. CARL HANSEN & SØN: CHAIRS. IITTALA THROUGH FISKARS GROUP: GLASS BIRDS. BD BARCELONA THROUGH DDC: CREDENZA. ARONSON'S: RUG. **GAME ROOM** MITCHELL GOLD + BOB WILLIAMS: SOFA. ARONSON'S: RUG. CARL HANSEN & SØN: LOUNGE. BLU DOT: SIDE TABLE. THROUGH JOHN DERIAN: ARTWORK. **SUNROOM** LIGNE ROSET: SOFA. IACOLI: COFFEE TABLE. CB2: SIDE TABLE. **KITCHEN** ARTISTIC TILE: FLOORING, COUNTERS. BILOTTA: CABINETS. CARL HANSEN & SØN: CHAIRS, STOOLS. E15 THROUGH STILLFRIED WIEN: TABLE. LOUIS POULSEN: PENDANTS. **FOYER** CASEY JOHNSON STUDIO: CUSTOM TABLE. BLU DOT: OTTOMAN. THROUGH JOHN DERIAN: FLOWERS. AJ MADISON: APPLIANCES. **NURSERY** LEE JOFA: WALLPAPER. THROUGH DESIGN WITHIN REACH: ROCKING CHAIR. DUNBAR: SOFA. HOUSE OF FINN JUHL: COFFEE TABLE. FLOYD: SHELVING. STOKKE: CRIB. **FAMILY ROOM** REJUVENATION: CEILING FIXTURE. NESSEN LIGHTING: GOLD LAMP. ØTRADITION: COFFEE TABLE, OTTOMAN. CARL HANSEN & SØN: GREEN LOUNGE CHAIR. MITCHELL GOLD + BOB WILLIAMS: SOFA. ARONSON'S: RUG. KVADRAT: MAMA BEAR CHAIR FABRIC. ZAK & FOX: CLUB CHAIR FABRIC. **BEDROOM** DESIGN FOR MACHA: CEILING FIXTURE. MICHAEL ROBBINS: BENCH. LAWSON-FENNING: BED. ONCE MILANO: QUILT. ARONSON'S: RUG. **POWDER ROOM** FLAVOR PAPER: WALLPAPER. GUBI: MIRROR. **THROUGHOUT** VISUAL COMFORT THROUGH CIRCA LIGHTING: TABLE LAMPS (SITTING ROOM, DINING ROOM, FAMILY ROOM, BEDROOM); CEILING PENDANT (LIVING ROOM, DINING ROOM, FOYER); FLOOR LAMPS (LIVING ROOM, NURSERY); READING LAMP (LIVING ROOM). **THROUGH FURNITURE FROM SCANDINAVIA:** ITEMS FROM FREDERICIA, HOUSE OF FINN JUHL, GUBI, CARL HANSEN & SØN, LOUIS POULSEN, AND ØTRADITION.



Top: A custom bar in ribbed oak backdrops the lower-level family room, with a Hans Wegner Mama Bear chair and Simple side tables by Dufner Heighes; marble from Artistic Tile tops the Space Copenhagen Fly table.

Bottom left: Daughter Marlowe’s bedroom features an Edward Wormley Knowland chaise, Finn Juhl Eye coffee table, and Lee Jofa’s Prism Pastel wallpaper. **Bottom middle:** Flavor Paper’s Happy Butterfly Day wallpaper and a Gio Ponti mirror bring zing to a powder room. **Bottom right:** The primary bedroom is furnished with a Lawson-Fenning Chiselhurst bed, custom Simple bedside tables by Dufner Heighes, a Michael Robbins Ranger bench, and a painting by Bruce Tolman.