

Poetic License

Diane McCafferty and David Stern create a modern, airy interior within the shell of an historic New England gem.



MIDWAY THROUGH renovating an historic residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts, designer Diane McCafferty and architect David Stern were forced to contend with an age-old design dilemma: when to say when. The 4,000-sq.-ft. project began with a relatively modest objective: a general renovation that included converting extra bedrooms into offices for the work-at-home clients (both poets) and integrating adequate display area in the living spaces for their extensive art collection. But what started as a small-scale renovation effort to open the cramped interior morphed into a full-scale overhaul as the designers uncovered numerous structural problems along the way. "We knew we had to rework rooms to make them functional," noted McCafferty, "but as the process evolved, it became difficult to determine what elements to keep and what not to keep." So they stripped the interior and rebuilt the house from within.

The scope of the project and the design evolved continuously over the course of two years. Without "a big picture" to guide them

to a preconceived result, McCafferty and Stern took liberties with a modern aesthetic that nonetheless remains faithful to the house's antique charm.

Because the 150-year-old structure is located in a registered historic district, exterior alterations—such as moving or enlarging windows—were restricted. Save for a small rear addition to enlarge the kitchen and master bedroom, McCafferty and Stern worked within the parameters of the existing footprint and the basic room proportions. To invite airiness, they replaced solid doors between rooms with glass-pane pocket doors and opened walls to enhance the flow of light and space. While preserving each room's individual character, the designers united the interior with three light-hued materials—fir, pearwood, and marble—to create "a streamlined look that truly heightens the illusion of space."

The centerpiece of the house is the sky-lit entrance hall, a de-facto light well that doubles as a two-story gallery for exhibiting paintings. Half-height windows connecting the entrance hall to the living and library areas filter natural light into those rooms while providing additional display area for art objects. By establishing a dialogue between enclosure and openness, McCafferty and Stern have created an environment equally suited to private introspection and public interaction.

—Jen Renzi



Above, left: View from library to entrance hall, which features an elegant staircase of fir and steel.

Left: Glass pocket doors separate the living room from the library. A palette of fir, pearwood, and marble unites the two spaces.

MILLWORK: MASTERPIECE; WOODMEISTER. SOFA: HARRY. COFFEE TABLE: HERMAN MILLER. CHAIR: FLEXFORM. CEILING FIXTURES: PRESCOLITE. PILLOW FABRIC: JIM THOMPSON. SISAL CARPETS: STARK. LIGHTING DESIGN: WOLFERS LIGHTING. CONTRACTOR: MOSER & STANLEY.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVEN GERRARD