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BEFORE & AFTER



Chronicle of a Georgian Revived

A BOSTON-AREA HOUSE
COMBINES TRADITION AND
CONTEMPORARY FLAIR



Architecture by Botticelli & Pohl/Interior Design by Cullman & Kravis
Text by Steven M. L. Aronson/Before Photography by Sam Gray
After Photography by Durston Saylor



It had curb appeal aplenty, this circa 1930 five-bay brick-clad Georgian Revival: Set well back behind a high line of conifers and shade trees in an established neighborhood in the western environs of Boston, the house addressed the street formally and elegantly. But the minute Elissa Cullman, the designer the financier owner and his wife had hired, stepped inside the double front doors, she detected that the level of detail fell off precipitously. On the spot she proposed an architectural overlay that would bring

the interior homogeneously up to what the exquisite exterior implied. What's more, she recommended the Nantucket- and Boston-based firm Botticelli & Pohl, architects known for building and renovating houses with sensitive attention to historical imperatives.

They certainly had their work cut out for them. Ray Pohl, together with Cullman, shortly resolved the rabbit warren of meaningless rooms off the master bedroom on the second floor. They then appropriated unused attic space to make barrel-vaulted ceilings in



TOP: For a family's Georgian Revival residence near Boston, designer Elissa Cullman and architect Ray Pohl (above) refined the interiors to complement "the classical formality of the exterior," Cullman explains. The result is "a lively style we like to call 'young traditional.'"



BEFORE

LEFT AND FAR LEFT: "Because the entrance hall is the hub of circulation—and a formal greeting space—we emphasized the design of the floor." The canvas at center is by H. M. Luther. Mallett brass lantern. Bernd Goeckler Antiques lamp.

AFTER



RIGHT: The dark, cold living room (above) was transformed into a vibrant space. *The Dance*, left, is by Charles Green Shaw; *The Circus* is by Alexander Calder. Hyde Park Antiques chairs. Bernd Goeckler bronze table lamp and sconce. Drapery fabric from Travers; shade fabric from Stroheim & Romann.

the master bedroom and bath, the back hall, and a new reading alcove they created. Then, with what was left of the attic, they expanded the two existing bedrooms of the daughters of the house.

Wisely deciding not to tinker with the classic Georgian first-floor plan (living room on the right, dining room and library on the left, and sunroom directly behind the central stair), they zeroed in on the level below. Out of the welter there they made what Cullman cunningly calls a “cheery teenage living room,” complete with a computer station for each child; a mudroom (tenanted mainly by the family’s two Maine coon cats); and a crafts room consecrated to school art projects (it was there that the owners’ eight-year-old son recently built a replica of the White House from the most improbable raw material: an Entenmann’s pound cake and red licorice slathered with white frosting for the columns).

When it came to the interior detailing, the watchwords were



correction and refinement. Cullman and Pohl rescaled all the moldings and installed antique mantels; introduced slab marble floors in the entrance hall and the master bath and faux limestone in the sunroom; and replaced the dozen or so painted wood circulating doors that led into the entrance hall with doors of a punished and polished mahogany. In climax and conclusion, they had flat-panel wainscoting applied in the gracious curving stairwell from the first floor up. The owners, meanwhile, had simply (if that is the word) moved out for the duration.

Now at last Cullman was free to concentrate on the decorating, which she envisioned as being in “philosophical harmony with the architecture.” The wife, who describes the house as it was then as a “blank canvas,” had visited her decorator’s far-flung Manhattan apartment and been impressed, if not imprinted, by the brilliant mix of English and American 18th- and 19th-century furniture, 19th- and 20th-century American art, antique Oriental rugs and decorative

objects. Of the experience of shopping with Cullman for the mostly American and English period pieces that now distinguish her own house, she says admiringly, “Ellie takes your hand and guides you and at just the right moment lets go.”

The wife’s favorite American pieces can both be found in

the luminous six-windowed living room: an inlaid mahogany tall case clock with its graceful bonnet top, and a Federal mahogany sofa with its characteristic rope-and-bow carving. The latter piece not only creates a nice silhouetted shape but also, since the two other sofas in the room are contem-

porary, serves to keep all that modern upholstery in check.

The English furniture also works splendidly here. A George III demilune console dispenses the sparkle of cross-banded-and-string inlay and the painted detail of tapering legs, not to mention the lightness of satinwood, to the for-



BELOW RIGHT: The sunroom had been covered in a precious print. **RIGHT:** The new faux-limestone-block walls “accentuate the feeling of a conservatory,” Cullman notes. Tray-on-stand from Kentshire Galleries. Marvin Alexander lantern. Stephen McKay floor lamps. Café curtain linen from Henry Calvin.



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT: Cullman glazed the dining room walls a rich red that “enhances the flow of color throughout the downstairs.” Severin Roesen’s *Floral Still Life* hangs above a circa 1790 English demilune console table. Drapery fabric from Travers.



AFTER



AFTER



BEFORE

LEFT: An off-center fireplace marred the master bedroom. ABOVE: Built-in bookcases—flanking a 19th-century English mantel—“moderate the asymmetry,” Cullman points out. Old World Weavers wallcovering and slipper chair and pillow fabrics. David Duncan Antiques sconces.

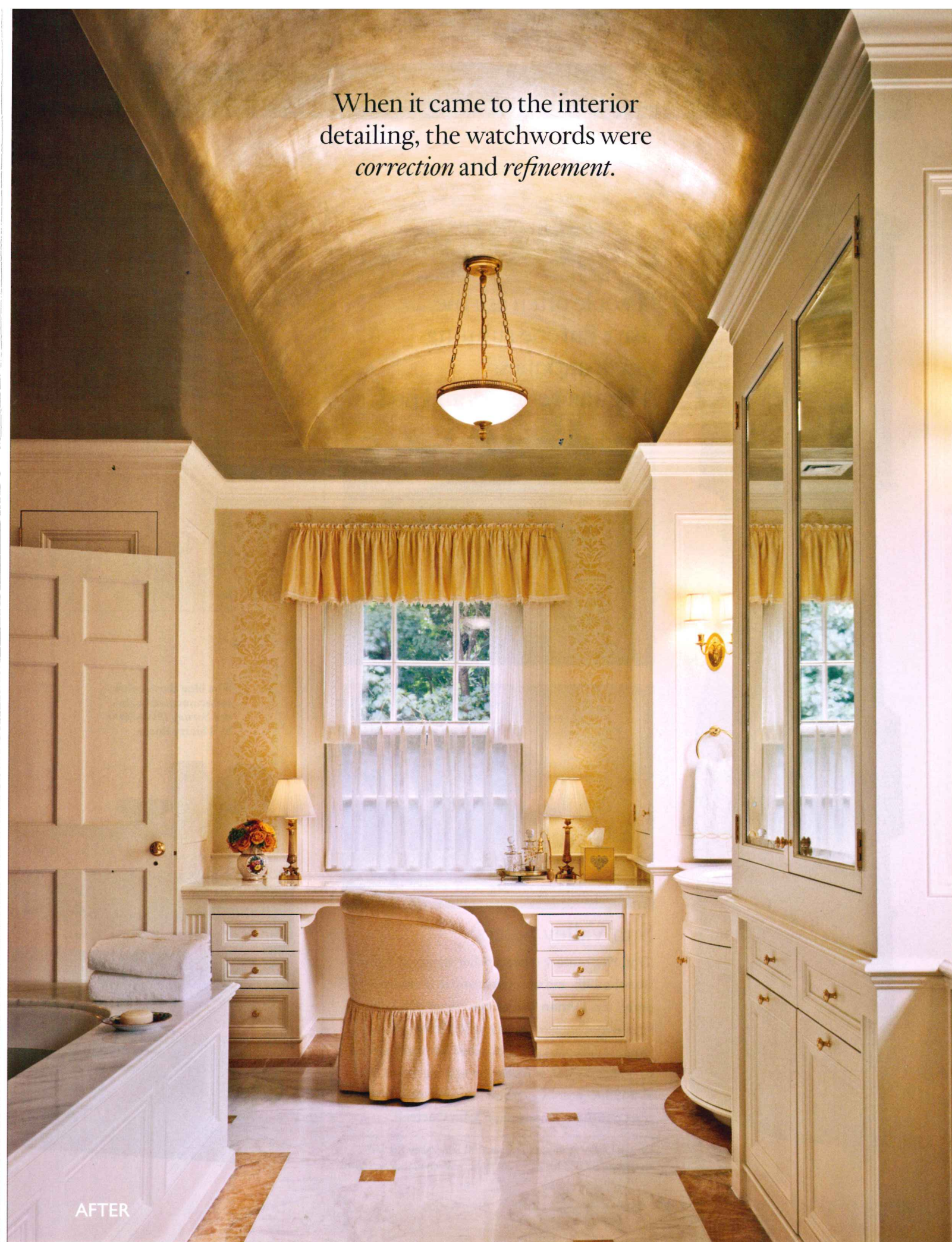
mal, antique-red dining room. And a mahogany George III chest of drawers in the master bedroom, between the two garden-facing windows (picture acres of greensward sweeping and then falling away), is a masculine presence—call it a lowboy on testosterone—in a buttery-yellow, rather feminine room.

The house was, to revisit the wife’s phrase, a “blank canvas” in terms of art as well as decoration. In fact, one of the reasons she had turned to Cullman & Kravis in the first place was for its heralded expertise in American pictures. The clients’ own taste ran toward 19th-century portraits, and the first painting they bought was by American Impressionist Frederick Carl Frieseke—of an enchanting turn-of-the-last-century female figure in dappled sunlight, book in hand. There are two other
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BEFORE

ABOVE: “The challenge was working within the limited volume,” Cullman says of the master bath. OPPOSITE: Installing a barrel-vaulted ceiling added depth and interest. Pair of table lamps from Lee Calicchio. Gilt-bronze light fixture and sconces from Marvin Alexander.



When it came to the interior detailing, the watchwords were *correction* and *refinement*.

AFTER