



On the landing, patterns and furniture styles mix to thrilling effect. An English Aesthetic Movement chair (James Sansum, Inc.) tucks in between a pair of painted Georgian-style plant stands. Wall-covering, Marthe Armitage, Taffeta curtain fabric, Brunschwig & Fils.

GOD SAVE THE *Queen Anne*



...and other historic neighborhood beauties, advises designer **Markham Roberts**, who wrote the rules of rescue and restraint in updating them for modern families.

INTERIOR AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN BY **MARKHAM ROBERTS** • LANDSCAPE DESIGN BY **PAUL GAZERWITZ**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **NELSON HANCOCK** • WRITTEN BY **MARKHAM ROBERTS**



LEFT AND RIGHT: In the living room (left), a custom double-sided settee in Schumacher's Pyne Hollyhock echoes the wall-covering pattern in an adjacent vestibule (right) and sits comfortably amid a mix of upholstery and mid-20th-century furniture, including a vintage Karl Springer coffee table. The crystal and brass chandelier is from the 1920s. (For more on chintz, see page 126.)

BELOW: Peacock blue dupioni silk curtains (Old World Weavers) and a Louis XVI-style table for Maison Jansen (Avery & Dash Collections) dress up the dining room. The rug is 19th-century Persian. Wallcovering, de Gournay.



IFIRST NOTICED THIS MAGNIFICENT WHITE HOUSE on a hill during a weekend away from college. I was staying at a friend's house in Greenwich, Connecticut, and I recall that something set it apart from the others. At the time, I didn't know what, and only realized much later as an adult, when I began working on it, that what distinguished the three-story Queen Anne shingle-style house was that it hadn't been destroyed in what I laughingly refer to as an "awful renovation accident" during any of the decades since its late 19th-century heyday.

No one ever came and added floodlights to the exterior to amp things up like an airport. No one dotted every square inch of ceiling with hideous recessed lights that look like rotisserie chicken heat lamps. No one added giant sports bar TVs in every last room or ripped out the original detailing to put up new spray-finished mahogany paneling.

And mercifully, no addition was put on to make way for a not-so-Great Room. For these things I was thankful.

This house had an old soul. It felt happy and quirky and uncontrived. Yes, we would have to improve things to make it work for today. For instance, having a rabbit warren of servants' rooms isn't ideal for a modern family who likes to cook; a scary old cellar isn't great for four children who need space to play. But the entertaining rooms were perfection, and all they needed was refurbishing the floors and stripping off years of paint to reveal the architectural beauty sleeping underneath.

In a historic home, it's not hard to mess things up. I liken it to plastic surgery: A little extra care can often bring a better result than fashioning a whole new face, and this is doubly true for old houses like this one. They need to be treated with reverence, despite it sometimes taking a bit more thought, effort, or money.

Hand-finish the paneling; save beautiful old floors and windows whenever you can. Yes, of course, we all want modern conveniences

LOVE ARTWORK, ROBERT INDIANA, BLACK AND WHITE LOVE, FROM DECADE, 1971.



An 11-color carpet (Pierre Frey) adds lively contrast to the library's walls, trim, and shelves, all coated in a custom blue-tinted charcoal glaze. The coffee table and slipper chairs are vintage mid-20th century.



Modern Romance

TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: Japanese zelkova trees punctuate the chaise longues (RH), upholstered in a Perennials stripe. ♦ Ribbed paneling (painted in Benjamin Moore's White Diamond) frames a La Corne range. **CENTER ROW, FROM LEFT:** Walls covered in Brunschwig & Fils' iconic Les Touches pattern enwrap the primary bedroom in rhythmic curves. ♦ A circa-1960 Carlo Nason for Mazzega pendant (John Salibello) illuminates the stairwell. **BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT:** A Louis XVI-style dining chair (1stDibs) cozies up to a Louis XVI commode (Avery & Dash Collections). ♦ Wraparound porches are guest-ready, thanks to a set of vintage wrought-iron furniture. Cushion fabric, Perennials.



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that make a house better, but even simple lighting systems provide ample light and dim for more attractive illumination at night. We're not performing surgery in our living rooms, at least not with a license.

A common pitfall in old house renovations is overdoing things. Be sensitive to needs, not trends: Don't put in a pizza oven if you aren't going to use one. Don't do up a ridiculous wine cellar with tasting rooms and whiskey rooms if you aren't a true oenophile and whiskey aficionado. Do we need four dishwashers or six washing machines? Are we ever going to use the gift-wrapping room? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, then great, full steam ahead. Just make sure you ask them.

I beg clients to think about what makes sense for them and for their families. Because you can save a lot of money by not throwing it at things we don't really need. I think there is a pervasive cultural idea about how rich people live, and we risk blindly following like aspirational sheep, rather than considering what we will truly use and love having. (These clients needed no such cajoling—they were architecturally savvy, and we easily collaborated on the way forward for this house.)

It's hard to write about rules in design, because there is an exception to every point. But if I had to think of a few for renovating old houses, it would be these: First, respect the architecture. Though we took the back facade off this house and reorganized the core space and back rooms to allow for a new kitchen and family room, with a new primary bedroom suite above, you can't really tell from the outside



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that the house was ever touched. The new paneling and stair in the central hall (leading to the basement) were designed to look original. But they don't feel old, because the paint treatment, wall upholstery, and contemporary art give the space a more vibrant feel.

Second, yes, you can have nice things. My client very much wanted her bathroom updated with suspended mirrors, hanging lights, and a shared vanity as much as she wanted a clean, spare kitchen with a giant island. Neither room is particularly architecturally sympathetic to the house, but they fit into the overall scheme, if for no other reason than because they suit the clients so well.

And third, you don't have to stick to the rigidity of a period. My clients had an interesting collection of mid-20th-century furniture that they worried might not work in a historic shingle-style house. I said, Why the hell not? So we used it all, and mixed it happily with furniture and art from many other periods. In the living room, modern pieces like a Karl Springer parchment low table, a vintage Vladimir Kagan curved sofa, and a 1950s Italian credenza play well with tufted Napoleon III chairs, French '40s iron tables, a Japanese lacquer étagère, and two 18th-century Russian girandoles. This resounding chorus of "It's a Small World After All" helps take any static quality away from the decorating.

Again, there is an exception to every rule. I guess that's what gives us permission to experiment, which brings me to my last rule in renovating old houses: Be thoughtful, and then you can be confident—if that proves daunting, hire a professional whom you trust implicitly. ♦



A fantastical floral wallpaper (Tilton Fenwick for Duralee) envelops the pantry, complete with original cabinetry. OPPOSITE: In the family room, limed-oak paneling beautifully offsets a custom marble mantel (Chesneys). Sofa fabric, Kelly Wearstler for Lee Jofa.