

HOME & DESIGN

Villa Firenze

*At Home with Italy's
New Ambassador*

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- **GOING GREEN**
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- **TOP TEN**
Kitchens & Baths
- **FUN in the SUN**
Glorious Gardens

Against a background of putty-colored walls, the abstract painting above the console becomes a focal point near the entry. A triptych of framed, organic objects such as leaves and bamboo stalks fits perfectly into a corner of the living room.



A Soothing PALETTE

Celia Welch updates a stately row house with a careful nod to its illustrious past

BY JULIE SANDERS | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGIE SECKINGER

The affluent DC neighborhood of Kalorama is known for the Washington dignitaries who have called it home—William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson and FDR, to name a few. It's also known for its elegant houses and quiet, tree-lined streets that offer an oasis within the urban chaos of downtown Washington. Nestled within an imposing block of row houses just off Connecticut Avenue sits one of Kalorama's more emblematic residences: a 100-year-old brick home that combines its history with a modern redesign that brings it beautifully into the present.

When Joe Lockhart, a founding partner at the communications firm Glover Park Group and a former White House press secretary under President Bill Clinton, bought the four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath row house in 2006, he found it perfectly comfortable—until a friend commented that it felt like a nice hotel. “That got me going,” Lockhart says. “I’ve been in a lot of nice houses that look like no one lives there. I knew I didn’t want that.” Lockhart tapped Bethesda-based designer Celia Welch to make the house “look like a home that’s lived-in, with nice but not fancy things.”

From a design standpoint, the challenge was to update the home while staying true to its original style. “The house has such great bones,” Welch says. “I didn’t think so much about changing it as about how to improve on it.” She tore out the worn carpet that covered the floors, exposing the original inlaid parquet floor. Other fine original touches abounded, and Welch tried to create an environment that would better showcase them, using soft creams and putty colors on the walls, “a warm but soothing palette, tone on tone, to allow visitors to enjoy the architecture.”

Like many townhouses, the home flows vertically, with the living and dining rooms on the main floor and the family room upstairs. The entry is wide and airy, opening into a welcoming living room.

Prior to the redesign, the living room

INTERIOR DESIGN: Celia Welch, Celia Welch Interiors, Bethesda, Maryland. CONTRACTOR: Stout Restorations, Inc., Hyattsville, MD. LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR: Cordt Gardens, LLC, Washington, DC.



In the living room, an eye-catching carved marble fireplace (above) occupies center stage. Welch designed the built-in bookshelves, which look as if they'd always been there. She appointed the adjacent dining room (right and opposite) with an abstract landscape and a large chandelier that fits the scale of the room and hangs above the owner's existing dining table and chairs.





Welch transformed an ordinary back patio into a luxurious outdoor room, accessible through French doors (this page). Slate floors, new latticework, a pergola and imposing planters (opposite) lend atmosphere to the space, and comfortable wicker chairs with thick cushions beckon guests to linger.

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—CELIA WELSH



The master bedroom is painted a calming, pale gray-blue; Welch added “a conversation zone” with club chairs by the windows. Chocolate-and-blue draperies reflect the palette of the room while sheers let in natural light.



was gray and dark, which “made it a walk-in point,” Welch says, rather than a place to linger. She delineated the spaces by emphasizing the ornately carved marble fireplace along the living room wall and creating an intimate seating area with elegant yet inviting furniture. New built-in bookshelves provide substance. Beyond the entry, the dining room was updated with fresh paint, a new chandelier and an Asian-inspired sideboard.

Though Lockhart had done some work on the home’s exterior spaces when he moved in, it was Welch who transformed the patio into an outdoor living room with enticing dining and seating arrangements. “It was cluttered,” she says. “It didn’t feel connected to the house.” She brought out colors from inside, replaced latticework and added slate paving. At the far end, a pergola was constructed over a full kitchen complete with Viking appliances and a granite countertop. A wicker sectional with deep, luxurious cushions offers guests room to lounge, and large planters bring in greenery. Lighting is strategically placed to enhance the patio’s nighttime mood.

Upstairs, the master bedroom suite has been reconfigured to include “a conversation zone,” as Welch describes it, beside windows with chocolate-and-blue draperies and sheers that let in the light. The second floor also houses a cozy family room with a built-in movie screen and projector, while the third floor houses Lockhart’s daughter’s bedroom, a guest room and a home office with furniture that’s been repurposed from other rooms. Above the third floor, a roof deck offers a panoramic view of the city.

Welch juxtaposed colorful abstract artwork with traditional furnishings, creating a fresh, warm look that enhances the venerable home’s architecture. She and Lockhart worked with Kaller Fine Arts in Bethesda to select the right pieces, and both are happy with the results. “The bottom line,” Lockhart says, “is that I want people to feel welcome and comfortable when they come into my home. I think we achieved that.” ♦

Photographer Angie Seckinger splits her time between Potomac, Maryland, and Spain.

—For Resources, see page 204.