

New England HOME

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Modern Drama

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New England's
spaces

A BOLD MOVE

*A dad with a sense of adventure and a designer
unafraid to make a splash team up on a Boston
condo that even the kids think is pretty cool.*

Text by **Debra Judge Silber** | Photography by **Michael J. Lee**
Produced by **Kyle Hoepner**

High-gloss finishes and an LED fixture Elms dubbed "the ring of fire" put some shine into the living room. The deep window seat and sleeper sofa provide extra room for friends and family.



RIGHT: The comfortable sectional in the family room was one of the first pieces chosen for the space. **BELOW:** Dramatic veining with hints of amethyst make a custom marble sink the focus of the powder room. **FACING PAGE:** An encaustic work by artist Martin Kline frames the space above a custom-designed cantilevered shelf opposite the elevator in the entry hall.

“You’ve got to break a lot of eggs to make an omelet” isn’t something you hear a lot in conversations about interior design. But it seems oddly fitting when Dee Elms’s client uses it to describe the creative collaboration that transformed a bland Back Bay apartment into a boldly beautiful home that reflects him—and his family—to a T.



Cracking the mold wasn’t necessarily the aim when the recently divorced dad purchased the single-floor unit overlooking the Charles River. His goal was a comfortable, stylish, but not stuffy home base for himself and his three teenage children, two of whom would be living with him. “I didn’t want it to be a traditional ‘Boston’ place,” he explains. “I didn’t want it to be boring.”

“He said, ‘I want a place that’s super comfortable, that I love, and that’s cool enough that my kids’ friends will want to visit,’” recalls Elms. She had met the client previously in consultation on another project, and he asked her to walk through the 2,800-square-foot condominium before he purchased it. She remembers its rooms as blandly

PROJECT TEAM

Interior design: Dee Elms, Elms Interior Design
Builder: Chris Rapczynski, Sleeping Dog Properties

RIGHT: Offering a bird's eye view of activity along the Charles River, the breakfast nook is the client's favorite place to enjoy a cup of coffee. **BELOW:** In the kitchen, the designer removed a large existing island to make room for window-side dining, and topped off the new island with a dramatic waterfall of Calacatta marble. **FACING PAGE:** The bold, hand-painted wallpaper of the dining room creates a lively first impression.

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traditional, monochromatic, with tray ceilings and pilastered fireplaces. “It was white, white, white, and white,” Elms says. Still, she told her client, “This could be amazing.”

That Elms succeeded in her prediction is clear the moment one steps off the elevator into the entry hall, where the fluid brushstrokes of hand-painted Porter Teleo wallpaper draw immediate attention to the nearby dining room. A playful chandelier from Apparatus Studio hovers like a fistful of balloons over the dining table, around which chartreuse velvet dining chairs pop against the graphic backdrop. “I wanted it to make a splash,” Elms says. “The dining room became a kind of statement that we’re not too serious in this home. We’re having fun.”

Having fun with the design process seemed a natural consequence of the designer-client relationship, which both say was marked by a lively give-and-take that balanced the homeowner’s ideas and expectations with the designer’s experience. “We’d have these debates on what would work,” the client says, referring to conversations with Elms and project manager Carolyn Kotowski. “I think I surprised them with the things I was willing to do, and they surprised me with the things they came up with.”

Elms concurs. “We’d talk about what he liked and



what he didn't like. I knew he had a cool, hip vibe and we could play that up. But I also had to understand how far he would go."

This was tested in the dining room, where Elms's choice of the chandelier led to a slew of agonizing phone calls. "I kept thinking, this will look ridiculous," he says, "and then it goes up and . . . she was right."

Other conversations were easier, such as the one about the kitchen, where Elms proposed painting the existing cabinets black. "I said, 'I want to paint your cabinets black,'" she says. "And he was like, 'I'm cool with that.'"

Nor did he flinch when she suggested carrying the black into the wall treatment. "He just had so much trust," Elms says. Threaded with silver, the paper actually appears much lighter than one would expect.

"It was really a great marriage of client to designer

and designer to contractor, with outstanding results," says Chris Rapczynski, president of Sleeping Dog Properties, which managed the construction. He praises Elms's ability to communicate as well as her understanding of the choices required to achieve high-end results. "In the end, what you see is a glossy paint finish that looks great," he says, pointing to the shine on the living-room woodwork. "But beneath that is so many layers of decision-making. Those are the discussions we have with Dee."

The high-gloss shine Rapczynski refers to belongs to a storage wall Elms designed for the living room that pumps up the room's sophistication while providing closet space for the client's son when he visits. She also ditched the formal fireplace, putting in its place a gas unit trimmed with riveted brass and framed in marble. On the opposite end of the entry



LEFT: In the master bedroom, gray tones play out in a variety of textures, including the leather and chenille of the Holly Hunt chair, cashmere drapes, and high-gloss lacquer on the dresser. **BELOW:** Pendants from Fuse Lighting hang like tassels beside the master bed. **FACING PAGE, LEFT:** A favorite piece the client purchased in New Orleans finds a home in the master closet. **FACING PAGE, RIGHT:** Designer Dee Elms revitalized existing shelving and storage in the master closet with beefy hardware and a high-gloss gray finish.

hall, the fireplace in the family room got a modern makeover as well. In both rooms, Elms had deep window seats built into the curve of the existing bay windows. "He loved that idea," she says of her client. "It's another place for people to crash."

Crashing—or let's say recumbent relaxation—is further encouraged by the family room's cushiony sectional. "All three of my kids said, can we please get a couch we can all sit on?" the homeowner says. "It was the very first piece we picked out."

Throughout the project, Elms consulted with the children, the daughters particularly, to make sure the space would reflect their tastes as much as their



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OPPOSIT PAGE: One wall of a bold floral print from Flavor Paper brightens up a daughter’s bedroom. **THIS PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT:** A tub from Italian manufacturer Agape is deep enough for a luxurious soak. Elms kept the layout in the master bath but replaced the vanity with a custom-designed one; a skirt on the marble top creates an illusion of thick stone.



father’s. Despite this, the client says, some people describe the home as “masculine.” But he’s fine with that. “If it comes off masculine, I’d say, mission accomplished.” He also adds, “When my daughters’ friends come over, they absolutely love the place.” Elms has her own take. “I would never call it overly masculine,” she says. “If you’re in a dude zone, you’re not going to be using pale lavender drapery fabric. I think we balanced him, his kids, and his life really well.” Even, it turns out, when her client returned from a trip to New Orleans with a new purchase: a large

painting by artist Ashley Longshore depicting an oversize hundred-dollar bill stamped with the words: Grow a Pair. “I have to be honest. I hoped it wasn’t going in the dining room,” Elms says. Their compromise (which the client good-naturedly describes as a four-to-one vote) landed the artwork in the master bedroom’s walk-in closet, where it stands out against the flannel pinstriped wallpaper. “It fits perfectly there,” Elms says. And, she adds. “It’s so him.” ■ **RESOURCES :** For more information about this home, see page 196.