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Poetic Justice

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Revolutionizes the
Period Piece

Letter From the Editor

Right: Catherine Truman redesigned a gorgeous brownstone in South End (“South End Magic”).



THE GREAT FAMILY BACKDROP

I'm lucky. From Back Bay to Nantucket, I get to tour some of New England's greatest homes. Many of the visits, especially during the past year, have been virtual, but I've recently had the opportunity to walk through some properties in person. In November, I met with veteran Boston builder Jon Wardwell (jwconstructioninc.com) in a Charlestown brownstone he was busy renovating. It was a knockout inside, with exposed brick, ancient posts and beams and abundant modern touches. Something Wardwell said that day stuck with me: “Some people think our work is about making an investment, but I've always believed what we do is making a home.”

Our homes—and how each room lives and feels to us—have never been more important. The best rooms showcase meaningful elements about our lives; they offer comfort, provide utility and ignore trends.

Our favorite spaces are also backdrops for the events, major and minor, that populate our lives: the living room where we watch our firstborn take her first steps, with a soft leather ottoman serving as her balance point. The dining room where we gather with old friends for one last meal before they leave Boston for a new work assignment overseas. The kitchen where the marble island doubles as a poker table for monthly card games with neighbors. There are hundreds of rituals in countless spaces, and these moments eventually make our houses special.

For our Home Issue, our goal was to assemble inspiration for springtime projects. Renowned Boston interior designer Paula Daher

shares her favorite decor that cures wanderlust (“Escape Route”). Designer Jennifer Palumbo completely transforms a Waban home (“New Life”). Architect Catherine Truman reveals how to make sure a gut renovation—in this case, a five-level brownstone in the South End—goes smoothly (“South End Magic”). And for those who are looking for true craftsmanship in the kitchen and master bath, our team put together primers with the pros at Jewett Farms (“Space Race”) and New England Design and Construction (“Follow the Sun”).

One other truism about our homes: They're never complete. As the weeks roll on this year, please reach out and share pictures of your room projects—and even complete renovations. I can't wait to see how your new family backdrops come to life.

Here's to your gorgeous spaces and the happiness they deliver in the years ahead.

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FROM LEFT, PHOTOS BY: MOSHE ZUSHMAN; NAT REA

SOUTH END MAGIC

Architect Catherine Truman reimagines a gorgeous brownstone for a young Boston family.

BY MICHAEL MCCARTHY // PHOTOGRAPHED BY NAT REA

Catherine Truman makes no secret about her love for renovating old townhouses. Part of this reason, the Boston architect says, is they're all so radically different. She was tapped by a English family—who are new to Boston with three school-age kids—to tackle a five-level, 4,559-square-foot brownstone in the South End. The house had been renovated a couple of times, most recently in the early 1990s, “but the main formal floor hadn't been touched, and other elements, like the classic staircase, remained unchanged,” says Truman, who launched her eponymous firm (catherinetrumanarchitects.com) in 2013 after 15 years with Ann Beha Architects.

“My design aesthetic is really about finding the right solution for each project, each client, each home,” says Truman. “I also think design isn't simply about what the thing looks like but how it works. So part of my design aesthetic is finding the right functional solution as well as aesthetic expression. Ultimately, when something looks so simple that it looks like it couldn't have been any other way, that's when the design is right.”

When Truman worked with her clients to map out the new spaces, she noted the home had a beautiful, nearly perfectly preserved parlor, complete with plaster moldings, ceiling medallions and pocket doors. Other floors had been far more altered, she says, although all of the mantels survived.

The architect's process for working with clients is collaborative, not prescriptive, says Truman. “I bring options to the table, and we talk through what they mean—how the client



Moooi (moooi.com) lighting sets the tone in the main living area. Opposite page, from top: The billiards room features a rug from RH (rh.com); a colorful first-floor entryway marries lovely design and function.





Clockwise from top left: The kitchen features stools from DWR Cherner (dwr.com) and Silestone Eternal Statuario (silestoneusa.com) countertops; natural light spills into an office space that reveals the curved walls of the room; an outdoor space expands the home's living area significantly; the master bath is lined with Neolith Calacatta marble (neolith.com).



would live in different layouts, or how much different options may cost—and work through the dialogue. It's the same for details and materials; it's about finessing the possibilities.”

The clients were interested in creating a home that merged the historic character of the house with clean, contemporary design. “They wanted to make them blend together, which is totally what I love to do,” says Truman.

Since the house was missing some original detail, Truman decided to replicate detail where it was missing in order to tie the entire

house back together. “On the ground floor, there wasn't any original detail—except for the mantel. We replicated the original crown molding to tie it back to the rest of the house,” she says. “We opened up the basement stair and replicated the newel post and balusters, which ties the whole house together with the staircase. The master bedroom was missing its original ceiling medallion, and I unexpectedly found a plasterer who had a mold of the rosette from another house on the street. So we had that installed and hung a great modern light fixture.”



Clockwise from top left: The home's entry perfectly blends tradition and modernity, especially with a vibrant Osgood pendant from Arteriors (arteriorshome.com); the home's exterior; the merged kitchen and dining area features lighting from Stickbulb (stickbulb.com) and Eames chairs from DWR (dwr.com).

For the main living area, Truman wanted to create an open, light-filled family living space, so she removed non-load-bearing walls that divided the space and opened up the bearing wall with columns. She also understands the importance of utility to a bustling home with kids, so she added front and rear garden entries with mudrooms and storage cubbies. "There also weren't many bathrooms in the house, so we added 2 ½ baths, including one on the kitchen level, one on the third level, and we split a Jack and Jill on the top floor to create two separate en suite baths," she says. "We needed to make the space respond better to the way families live now."

The family has many beloved furniture pieces, including a large dining table, which Truman's team took into consideration when designing the space. Throughout the rest of the home, Molly Jonak, who led the charge for Truman on furnishings, sourced most of the pieces from Boston suppliers. Standouts include Cherner stools from Design Within Reach (dwr.com)



in the kitchen, a sofa from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams (mgbwhome.com) in the sitting room and a statement-making custom rug from The Rug Company (therugcompany.com) in the master bedroom.

Naturally, the new Boston family loves the home and their neighborhood. Truman credits her clients, team members Jonak and Emily Spain, and builder Cambridge Construction. "Good design isn't a solo act—it's a collaboration and team effort," she says. ◦

DESIGN DETAILS

LOCATION

South End

ARCHITECT + INTERIOR DESIGN

Catherine Truman Architects
catherinetrumanarchitects.com

RESOURCES

Arteriors

Osgood pendant, front entry
arteriorshome.com

DWR

Cherner stools, kitchen
dwr.com

The Martin Group

Drapes, Kravet Basics by Elliot Wright Workroom, master bedroom
martingroupinc.com

Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams

Living room sofa and parlor furniture
mgbwhome.com

Moooi

Meshmatics pendant, parlor
moooi.com

The Rug Company

Custom rug, master bedroom
therugcompany.com

Studio 534

Bambois wallpaper by Fromental, master bedroom
s5boston.com