

GLORIOUS WINDOWS ARE the focal point of the living room. Interior designer Debra Szidon used a vintage driftwood coffee table from Mohr & McPherson in Boston's South End as a counterpoint to the tufted-velvet sofa, a modern take on a classic Chesterfield, from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams. Structured leather chairs are from Room & Board.



Reincarnation

A 1960s conversion sapped a Beacon Hill brownstone of its 1840s charm, but a sensitive renovation brought it back to life

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Amanda Kay refers to her search for a home as “an epic story of condo hunting in Boston.”



It was 2008 when she and her husband, Brian, began their quest. By 2011, the couple had gone to more than 300 open houses — yet they weren’t any closer to finding something that suited them. “We stopped counting the number of open houses we were going to,” says Amanda. “The situation was becoming kind of heartbreaking. We couldn’t find anything that felt right to us.”

In 2013, the couple had decided to “settle” for a unit in one of the city’s luxury high-rises. But while Brian was out of the country on business, Amanda visited one last open house in Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood. The two-bedroom condominium was in an 1840s brownstone adorned with graceful hallmarks of Italianate architecture. The building was designed by Richard Upjohn (the architect responsible for the entrances to the Boston Common) for the two Thayer brothers, who ran a

AT MORE THAN 10 feet high, the windows in the living room immediately entranced homeowner Amanda Kay (ABOVE). Szidon placed botanicals in every room because, she says, “Plants enliven and soften the space, which has a lot of angles.” The exterior of the 1840s building (LEFT) has more ornate detailing than the neighboring buildings, which were constructed at the turn of the 19th century.



IN THE STUDY, a velour sofa from RH converts to a bed to accommodate guests. The interior shutters are exact replicas of one S+H Construction found encased in drywall during the renovation.





prosperous bank on State Street that financed railroads. Eventually, Boston University took ownership and housed its school of theology in the space. Then, in the 1960s, it was unsympathetically converted to residential units. Splendid mouldings were covered with sheetrock, and ceilings that had soared more than 13 feet were “dropped” with stock-grade materials. The original parquet floors were replaced with cheap replicas.

Despite the dismal alterations, Amanda was enamored of an expansive wall of glass in the living room. “The house was in rough shape,” she says, “but that living-room window made anything seem possible.”

Sure it was meant to be, the couple bid only on this property over the course of their exhaustive search, and they intended a sympathetic renovation to restore the original architectural intent.

“The Thayer brothers,” says Brian, “bought three brownstones in 1840 that they tore down and replaced with two identical, much more palazzo Italianate-style brownstones with ornate detailing and volumetric spaces. We wanted the home to reflect as much of the building’s original time period as possible.”

KITCHEN CABINETS ARE painted a deep midnight blue (FACING PAGE) by Farrow & Ball called Railings. “You don’t often see really dark cabinetry, so it has a bit of a modern feel,” says Szidon, “but brass hardware adds a more classic, traditional look.” Botanical prints are from Room & Board. A custom hood with open shelves on each side (ABOVE) keeps the small, windowless room feeling open.

They brought in S+H Construction of Cambridge, Massachusetts, to handle the nine-month renovation. Project manager Walter Mayne focused on restoring and re-creating the important details. “It was pretty amazing the way the building had been broken down when it was made into condos,” says Mayne. “It was 1960s ‘what-were-they-thinking’ architecture. There was no trim anywhere, and they had run sheetrock right up to the door casings.” Fortunately, above the dropped ceilings, some of the original plaster mouldings were still intact.

“We couldn’t use any of the original mouldings, and the budget did not allow for replacing them with exact replicas,” says Mayne, “but we were able to re-create smaller versions by installing multilayer crown mouldings in wood.”

When a 10-foot interior shutter was discovered behind the sheetrock next to the window, Mayne’s team fabricated exact replicas. Similarly, the marble fireplace in the living room, which had been covered up, was too damaged to use, so the builders created a similar mantel to which they added prominent floor-to-ceiling shelves.

While such details were important to the owners, they wanted a more modern overall aesthetic. “Amanda and Brian are professionals. She’s very fashion-minded,” says interior designer Debra Szidon of Cocoon Home Design, who relocated from Boston to California during the project. “We wanted a place that represents who they are while maintaining old, quintessential New England style.”



Furnishings are modern, but not too modern. “There’s a warmth to the space that comes through with the various materials we used,” says Szidon, who communicated long-distance with the owners and project team via Pinterest and phone as the work progressed. “There’s a lot of velour along with leather and various woods.”

The tall windows that first drew Amanda to the living room fill that space with natural light, but the kitchen and dining room have no windows, so an extensive lighting scheme evolved. Throughout the apartment, dramatic chandeliers provide illumination and striking appeal. In the hallway, a beaded wood Marcello pendant from Horchow throws a lovely reflection on the wall, while a Jason Miller Modo fixture infuses the more traditionally furnished living room with contemporary flair. “The home has an elegance to it,” says Szidon. “It feels modern and classic.”

“The condo really hadn’t been lived in for over 30 years,” says Brian. “The owner had another home and barely used this one. Today, the rooms are very comfortable. It’s a space we can relax in. We were lucky. Debra and the folks at S+H really understood how to make it the right space for us.”

That seemed like a stretch when the couple bought their home, but the project proved architectural reincarnation can happen. ■

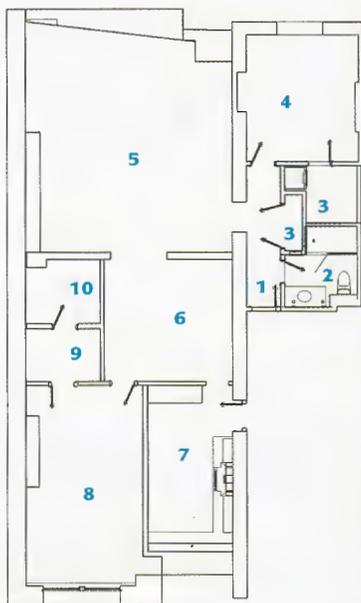
THE HOMEOWNERS PURCHASED an oil painting of Daniel Webster (ABOVE) that Brian felt a kinship with as Webster is one of the premier graduates of his alma mater, Dartmouth College. The bathroom (RIGHT) is compact, but opting for a washstand-style sink makes the room feel more open. The wall is clad with Carrara marble and the floor is sheathed with an Ann Sacks mosaic tile.



DESIGN DECISION

Parsing Parquet

In the 19th century, stately parquet floors ran throughout the entire house. Antique parquet is pricey, so the homeowners opted to install more affordable dark-stained quartersawn oak. However, they wanted the living-room floor to pay homage to the era. "It was a challenge to do this, because parquet only works well in square and rectangle rooms, and the living room is an odd, almost wedge shape," says Walter Mayne, project manager for S+H Construction in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He compensated for the irregularity by creating an oak border around the perimeter and inset parquet in the center. "It's a detail we debated," says Amanda Kay, "but we love the way the herringbone pattern turned out."



- 1 ENTRY
- 2 POWDER ROOM
- 3 CLOSET
- 4 STUDY/GUEST BEDROOM
- 5 LIVING ROOM
- 6 DINING ROOM
- 7 KITCHEN
- 8 MASTER BEDROOM
- 9 MASTER CLOSET
- 10 MASTER BATH



THE DINING ROOM dazzles with a chandelier from Anthropologie, Devoe brass sconces from Dwell Studio, and Farrow & Ball's Lotus wallcovering.