

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF DESIGN

APRIL 2007

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Georgian Renewal

FOR A HOUSTON COUPLE,
THE FUTURE LIES
IN A RECLAIMED PAST

Architecture by Ike Kligerman Barkley
Interior Design by Michael J. Siller
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For the creation of their 6,500-square-foot, late-Georgian-style town house in Houston's River Oaks, Roy and Mary Cullen hired the architectural firm Ike Kligerman Barkley and designer Michael J. Siller. ABOVE: The front elevation. LEFT: The living room. Low table, Julia Gray. Drapery, sofa and chair fabrics, Scalaman-dré; underdrapery fabric, Clarence House.



Roy Cullen is a leading philanthropist and patron of the arts in Houston. For 34 years he and his wife, Mary, a major art collector, lived in a large Georgian Revival house in River Oaks. By the time their six children had left home, the couple were thinking that they should find a smaller lot in the neighborhood and build a not-so-big house. It wasn't just that their nest was empty; the family home, built in the 1930s, had not aged well and was troublesome to maintain. Worst of all, it was now too big and spread out. "About 12 years ago," Mary Cullen explains, "Roy and I got a three-floor apartment in Chicago, and there we found that we liked living in an up-and-down space." This made them want their next home to be spatially compact.

The old house was loved by the family, in part for its beautiful architectural elements, including reclaimed windows, mantels, pediments and moldings. All of these pieces had been catalogued—photographed and measured—by the Cullens, and upon putting the house on the market, the couple stipulated that they could remove certain of them. As it turned out, the buyers wanted only the site; so before demolition, the desired parts were removed and stored. After the Cullens selected the firm Ike Kligerman Barkley to design and build a house more suited to their needs, the storied salvage found new purpose.

For partner in charge Joel Barkley, the commission was an ideal one: "The Cullens were ready for us, and the documentation they provided was very useful, but

LEFT: Next to the stair, with its bronze-and-walnut rail and Art Deco-style balustrade, is a large oil by Bohemian artist Toyen. Velvet from Travers covers the banquette's frame; a Brunschwig & Fils fabric covers the cushions. **ABOVE:** The stair's rise provides an intimate view of a Jacques Gruber stained-glass window and a Georgian-style skylight.



cated as a turbine blade," Roy Cullen says admiringly, adding that the wavelike pattern of the balustrade's openwork construction had to be tightened a bit to keep the smaller grandchildren from tumbling through. The window near the top of the stair, found by Mary Cullen in Philadelphia, was designed by Jacques Gruber and exhibited at the Art Déco exposition of 1925 in Paris.

The couple also wanted to reappropriate some of the old house's furniture, draperies and fabrics. Interior designer Michael J. Siller and Mary Cullen together decided what items would make it into the new setting and how they should be refurbished. "I brought so much from the old house because Roy and I didn't want to make a lot of changes," she explains. "Moving was a big enough change. Our children came to visit when it was just about finished, and they identified the mantels that had been in each of the old house's bedrooms and recognized all the old windows, doors, furniture, the art—everything." □



LEFT: Siller painted the library bright yellow because, as he says, it "creates a perfect background for the Cullens' Latin American art, with its rich, dark colors." Chair stripe and sofa floral, Travers. Blue sofa pillow fabric, Clarence House. TOP: The master bedroom. Stroheim & Romann drapery fabrics. Club chair and ottoman chenille, S. Harris. ABOVE: A guest room contains their Vietnamese art collection. Brunswick & Fils wallcovering.



ABOVE: The dining room has 12-foot ceilings and uses elements salvaged from their old house, such as the corner cabinet—one of two that flank the bay window. Valance fabric, dining chair fabric and wallcovering, Scalamandré. Brunswick & Fils armchair fabric in bay.



Roy and Mary Cullen (above) chose the town house as a way of downsizing. RIGHT: The bright kitchen has a Frigidaire range, a Waterworks faucet and a chair cushion fabric from Great Plains.

additional candidates for recycling were to come." Because the beloved old house had a Georgian Revival rigor that disciplined the eclectic mix of salvage, it was decided that the new town house should also be Georgian in style. Barkley chose as a source of inspiration the 1808, three-story Nathaniel Russell House, an iconic late-Georgian town house in Charleston, South Carolina. Like the Russell House, the Cullen house's entrance is big in relative scale and is centered on its façade at street level. At the Cullens', however, the entrance portal is set in a limestone base. It too was recycled, as were the base's pair of elliptical windows.

The entrance hall opens to a large reception space furnished with Wiener Werkstätte pieces and German Expressionist paintings, but it is the stair that begins here—and the windows that light it—that first command one's attention. Mary Cullen had a direct hand in its design. "I had been in Berlin and drove past a glass door that opened upon a beautiful staircase," she recalls. "I asked the driver to stop, then I got out and peered through the door and sketched the stair railing." The architects developed the design from her sketches, and it was made in a Houston foundry. "The stair itself is as compli-

