

# New England Home

CELEBRATING FINE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

November/December 2009

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### WE'LL TAKE BOSTON

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# We'll Take



Designer Paula Daher's family moved from the suburbs to a Boston brick-front that Daher felt called for an interior look rooted in elegance and simplicity.

# Boston



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**Text by Stacy Kunstel**

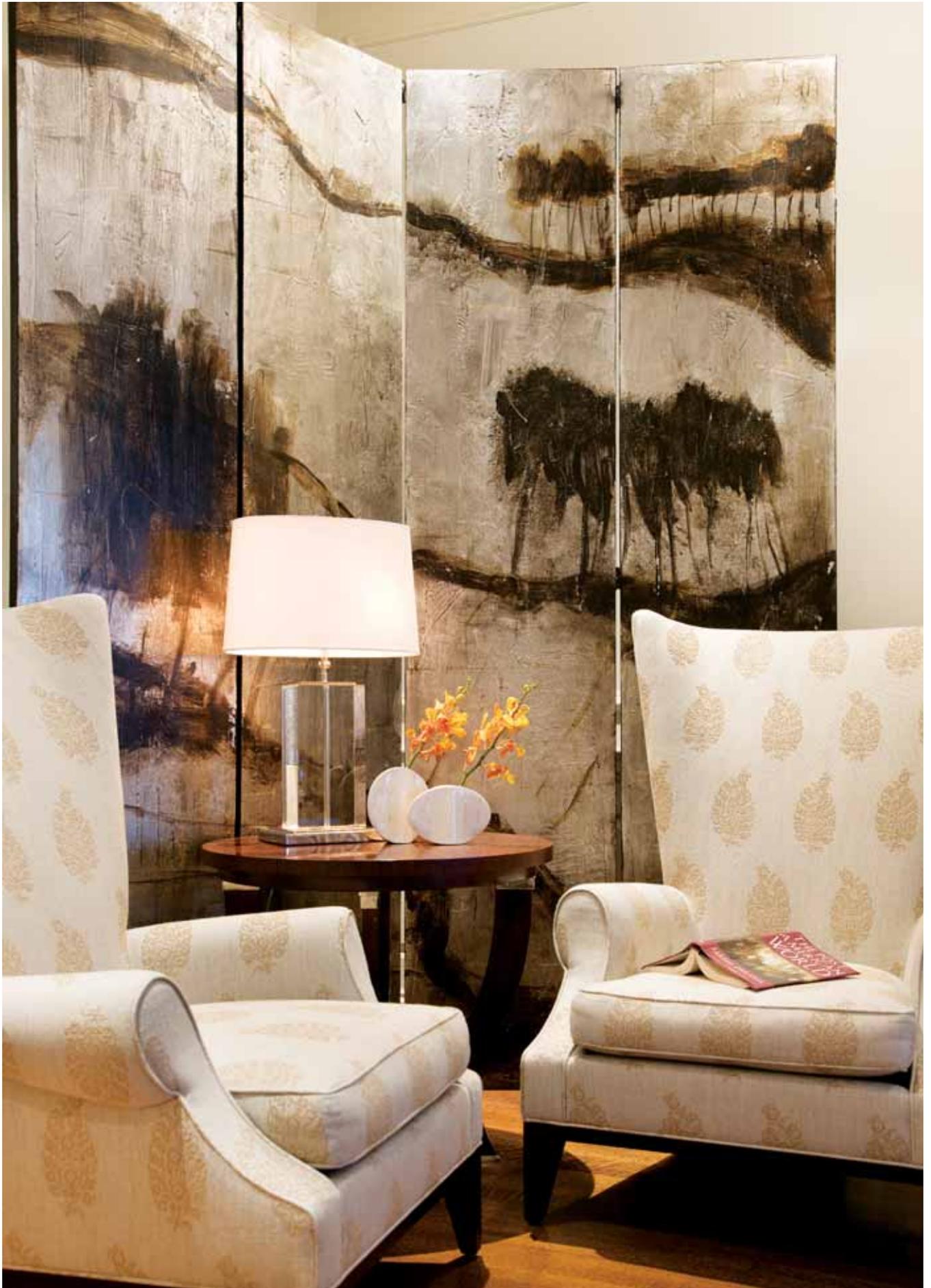
**Photography by Eric Roth**

**Interior design: Paula Daher**



Daylight pours into the living room, enhancing the palette of snowy whites and creams. The Barbara Barry damask drapery fabric was the starting point for the room's decor.







Curved pocket doors original to the 1890s home separate the family and dining rooms. The modern dining table and chairs complement the room's nineteenth-century architectural details. *Facing page:* A hand-painted screen lends interest to a corner of the living room.

A few years ago—before Wall Street’s woes and Ponzi scheme collapses—a certain group of empty nesters began selling their overstuffed homes in the Boston suburbs to assume sleek, minimalist lives in the glassy towers that accompanied the city’s boom of new residential construction. The trend seems to have cooled as quickly as our faith in the stock market, leaving those who seek the city life to do so from a point of passion, not fashion.

Take, for instance, the Daher family: Paula, an interior designer with a business in bucolic Andover, Massachusetts, and her husband, John, an executive with the footwear company Clark. With two daughters having just entered college and a son beginning his freshman year of high school, it will be a while before they have lives to live on their own.

Still, city life beckoned, whether it was planning family vacations (“We’re not beach people,” says Paula), driving into Boston for dinner or exploring neighborhoods and museums on weekends. The Dahers began to re-evaluate their lives and decided that if their hearts were in Boston, perhaps their home should be, too.

They began with the criteria for their dream location. Parking, a suburban luxury they did not want to surrender, would be essential, and preference was given to intact spaces—fixer-uppers would only delay their entry into the urban landscape. Armed with an appreciation for architecture and history, they also hoped for a home with character and detail.

The search took them all over Back Bay and the South End before the home of their dreams presented itself in the form of a recently refurbished brick-front 1899 apartment along Commonwealth Avenue with original plasterwork details, floors, moldings and paneling. The bones of the apartment—all 2,800 square feet of it—evoke Left Bank comparisons, with carved marble fireplaces and high ceilings.

Paula then went to work creating a color palette and furniture plan for the space, knowing she would leave most, if not everything, from her four-bedroom colonial in Andover behind. This was a space that called for elegance and simplicity, bold forms and—most important—a nod to the city life they had been looking for.

“I wanted the space to remain light,” Paula says. The windows for the most part are on only one side.” Using a combination of linen white (a yellow-based color) and China white (a gray-based hue) in the rooms, she then let textures, fabrics and furnishings sing.

Beginning in the living room, which sits just off the entry and overlooks the street, she



selected a large-scale damask by Barbara Barry for the curtains. “Once I found that fabric, I just worked everything in the living room around it,” she says.

For additional texture and privacy, she ran woven wood Conrad shades in a gray tone behind the curtains. Above the Donghia sofa she hung a pair of Salvador Dali sketches, and in one corner of the rectangular room she placed a tall, silver-leaf screen behind a pair of modern wingback chairs.



In the family room, cafe curtains provide privacy while long drapes add drama. *Facing page left:* A sleek sculpture anchors an end of the family room. *Facing page right:* Designer/homeowner Paula Daher with children Olivia, left, and Clayton.

Modernity lives comfortably throughout the home, elevating the style factor and making the apartment feel more European in its mix of new and old. "I wanted it to be understated, elegant, modern, yet comfortable," says Paula.

Among the few "suburban relics," as the designer likes to call them, is the living-room coffee table, rescued from its previous life as a cocktail table and shortened by four inches. Accents of crystal shimmer on a side table after languishing for years in the dark recesses of a cabinet in the old house.



"The family room was part of what really drew us to the house," says Paula about the large, oval-shaped space that sits at the back of the house and opens to the kitchen. Here, a large flat-screen television sits above the fireplace. "I knew we had to have a TV and the only place we could put it was above the fireplace, but when it's off, it acts like a large black mirror," she says.

Two down-filled sofas face one another in front of the fireplace, flanking a mosaic-topped table the couple found in an antiques store. The warm red tones in the stones project color into the space, lest it be too monochromatic or predictable.

Pocket doors original to the space separate the dining room from the family room and kitchen. Paula introduced a modern aesthetic to the room's fifteen-foot-high ceilings and original architectural details such as the 1890s paintings, mirror and intricate moldings. A sleek, B&B Italia dining table and high-backed upholstered chairs complement the room's height while a David Iatesta chandelier adds delicacy and femininity. The effect is clearly French and influenced by the family's travels together. "Paris is one of my favorite cities," says Paula. "There's such an appreciation for historical architecture."

The Dahers are respectful of history, yes, but not bound to relive it in terms of design. In the master bedroom, for example, a once-dark Chippendale bench from their previous home has been painted a crisp white, lightening the look and the implications of living with such a frilly, carved piece.

"I love how the French reuse old antiques like I did with the Chippendale bench," says Paula. "They're not interested in living in the past."

Neither are the Dahers. "We said, 'what are we waiting for? Let's make our lives what we want,'" says Paula. "Life is precious, why wait?" •



**To see more** of this home tune in to NECN's *New England Dream House*, Sunday November 15 at 10:30 a.m. Host Jenny Johnson and Stacy Kunstel, homes editor for *New England Home*, will take viewers on a tour. The show will also air on November 15 at 7:30 p.m. and at 3 p.m. on November 16, 19 and 24 and December 2. You can also see the story online at [www.nedreamhouse.com](http://www.nedreamhouse.com) starting on November 15.

**Note** For more about *New England Home*, visit [www.nehomemag.com](http://www.nehomemag.com).



Daher added the master suite's built-in cupboards. A flat-screen television hides behind the floor-length drapes. *Facing page left:* Daher chose the velvet iron-work-pattern fabric because it reminded her of her grandmother's flocked wallpaper. *Facing page right:* The silver chest was a consignment store find.