

HOME & DESIGN

dazzling KITCHENS

PLUS THE LATEST CABINETS,
APPLIANCES, TILE + MORE



DARK SIDE

*Ann Gottlieb channels a moody, luxe
vibe in a Tuscan-style Great Falls manse*



In the great room (left), a dark-stained ceiling and stucco walls conjure Spanish Revival style. Transitional furnishings beckon while ornate chandeliers sound a Gothic note. The powder room (below) features Clarke & Clarke Silverback wallpaper.



Gothic doors imported from an Argentine castle greeted a house-hunting couple when they first beheld a 15,000-square-foot stone mansion on five scenic acres in Great Falls, Virginia. Designed in 2005 by DC architect Igor Oshurkov and built by BOWA, the five-bedroom, 10-bath home was chockful of unusual architectural features, from Tiffany stained-glass elements to wall panels salvaged from a Glasgow church.

“We loved its uniqueness, and while many finishes weren’t our style, we thought we could make changes and preserve the home’s quiriness in a way that felt more like us,” recounts the wife, a photographer. She and her software-engineer husband took the plunge, then turned to designer Ann Gottlieb for help realizing their vision. “We’re big fans of

Renovation Architecture & Interior Design: Ann Gottlieb, IIDA, LEED AP ID+C, Ann Gottlieb Design, PLLC, Fairfax, Virginia. Contractor: Luxor Improvements, Fort Washington, Maryland. Styling: Kristi Hunter.

Text by JULIE SANDERS

Photography by ANGELA NEWTON ROY

designer's eye



dark and moody spaces with some weight to them—not light and airy,” the photographer explains.

Gottlieb embraced the challenge, which included revamping the great room and primary suite as well as making smaller fixes throughout the house. Says the designer, “We reflected the owners’ quirky vision—but with a livable-modern twist.”

Describe your clients’ vision and how you achieved it.

They requested a “Spanish-Revival-meets-Gothic” aesthetic—and those terms were my springboard. I used to work at Gensler on commercial projects, and part of my job was researching architectural eras for historical restorations. For this project, I researched Gothic and ancient and modern Spanish architecture to understand exactly what they wanted.

How did the owners determine which architectural elements to keep?

A lot of elements were interesting but not relatable to them; the stained glass, for instance, depicted violent scenes they



Clockwise from top, left: In the gallery, a former aquarium made way for a chic bar adorned with Moroccan mosaic tile; existing hand-carved panels clad the surrounding wall. Antique Chinese doors remain in the great room, where Gottlieb designed a stucco fireplace accented with a slab of black, marble-look Dekton.

didn’t want their young son to see. But they kept antique Chinese pocket doors separating the great room from an adjacent lounge, and hand-carved wall panels in the gallery, among other features.

What alterations took place in the great room?

We replaced a massive limestone fireplace with one of more livable proportions. The new fireplace has a sculptural stucco surround with soft edges—a nod to Spanish Revival. The insert is made of dark, marble-look Dekton, a favorite finish of mine. Ceiling beams were reinstalled to accommodate a new lighting plan and we stained the ceiling dark.

At 16-by-30 feet, the great room is huge. How did you make it feel intimate?

All the tones in the room are on the warmer side to keep them inviting and comfortable. And I made sure to maintain a human scale in my design. For instance, I was dead set on sizing the mantel so you’re not craning your neck to watch TV above it. A mix of soft textures and metals balances the room.

designer's eye



A mural wall covering by Phillip Jeffries anchors the owners' bedroom (right). Gottlieb achieved a striking and serene sensibility in the primary bath (above and below) via expanses of Zellige tile, which contrasts with the warm wood vanity.



How did you introduce Gothic influences?

Largely through lighting, which is modern with a dark, ornate edge. An example is the gold-leaf Corbett Theory chandelier in the great room. We also chose a massive Hubbardton Forge chandelier with a Gothic feel for the foyer. Lighting was a major factor in the design concept; we went big to fit the size of the rooms.

Explain how lighting improves a space.

Lighting provides mood, drama and contrast. Without it, even beautiful finishes can look bad. And you need to be able to set the scene for the time of day and what you're doing. Residential lighting should be cozy and warm, never above 3000 on the Kelvin scale. All lights should be on dimmers.

Discuss how the powder room evolved.

I originally came up with a pretty scheme based on soothing wallpaper. When I presented it to my clients, they said, "we need something darker." It felt a bit like a challenge—so I came back with a stack of the scariest wallpaper samples I could find. They picked a Clarke & Clarke paper I found locally at Kravet with a motif of a gorilla in the form of a skeleton.

Outline changes to the main bath.

We combined adjacent full and half baths to enlarge the primary bath, now clad in deep blue-gray Zellige tiles. Quartz countertops on a custom vanity are folded down in front to convey the appearance of a thick concrete slab. Inside the shower, a bench of the same material makes it a kid-friendly space. Gold cabinet pulls were installed sideways, which added a kind of wacky interest. These clients were open and willing to think outside the box.

Characterize the vibe in the primary bedroom.

The owners wanted a calm, soothing place where they could relax and chill out. We selected Wish, an atmospheric, textured mural wall covering by Phillip Jeffries. They requested a super-tall headboard and I found what they wanted at RH. We loved the Arteriors sconces with tassels on them. ■



ASK ANN

DO YOU PREFER RESIDENTIAL OVER COMMERCIAL DESIGN?

Yes, I find the clients are often more creative. My inner crazy is better satisfied with residential design!

WHAT INSPIRES YOU AT THE START OF A PROJECT?

I put together fabrics that help me think about color, texture and pattern, even if I don't end up using them. How I build finishes is what informs my choice of other elements.

FAVORITE ITEM YOU OWN?

I like Scandinavian furniture with fur on it. In my bedroom, I have the &Tradition Little Petra chair covered in sheepskin. It makes me feel happy.

CURRENT TREND YOU EMBRACE?

I will always try to put mid-century classics into my projects—Knoll, Carl Hansen. These are investment pieces that will be cool 200 years from now.

GO-TO LOCAL SHOPPING SPOT FOR HOME GOODS?

Vivid Chill in Great Falls and Mosaic District. Furniture From Scandinavia, Merrifield Garden Center. I like to collect for shoots and give my finds to the clients afterwards.