

LIVING LARGE

An aging graystone becomes a perfect fit for a young family willing to undergo a massive renovation.

By Zlata Kozul Naumovski // Photography by Werner Straube



Clockwise from left: Amy Kartheiser's unique millwork design adds architectural interest to the living room, creating a perfect spot for artwork by local artist Linc Thelen; the dining room walls are wrapped in a Phillip Jeffries grass cloth, offset by a rug from Oscar Isberian Rugs; chairs from Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams create a cozy conversation area in the living room. Opposite page: A series of pendants from Circa Lighting illuminate the custom kitchen, which was a collaboration between Kartheiser and Deborah James Kitchen Design Group.



It had never crossed Amy Kartheiser's (amykartheiserdesign.com) clients' minds to tear down what was left of their century-old graystone in North Center. Sure, when they bought it from the previous owners—who had planned on flipping it but changed their minds post-demo—the house was missing a center support beam and had no load-bearing walls left. But it was located on a generous-by-city-standards lot and in a community of friendly families with St. Benedict Parish and Preparatory School just a couple blocks down. Plus, it was bigger than their previous residence, a condo in Wrigleyville. What more could a family of two working professionals in the city and a 4-year-old toddler ask for?

"We had been looking for a property for a number of years, and we couldn't find what we wanted," says the wife. "The new builds were all sort of the same, and our old condo was on a wider lot, so we were used to wider living."

Fortunately for them, Chicago zoning laws weren't as restrictive 100 years ago as they are today, allowing the home to have a narrower side setback from its neighbors. That turned out to be a game-changer for Kartheiser, who was brought on board to

help the family get to a finished home. This initially meant finishing the construction with an improved layout, good lighting and appropriate selections for hard surfaces, but quickly morphed into decorating as well. "The guts are so nice on those graystones," says Kartheiser. "In older homes, the setbacks from your neighbors were smaller than they are today, so you have a little more room, which allows for a larger home."

As an interior designer familiar with living in the city, Kartheiser will take any extra square footage she can get and turn it into a useful space. For example, in this house, she was able to create a proper entryway. "In a new build, you'd walk right into the living room," she points out. However, here, she added a built-in closet with high-gloss doors, flanked by floating shelves. A pair of mirrors and stools, combined with a cowhide rug by Forsyth and a geometric chandelier by Mr. Brown, complete the look. She was also able to carve out a larger family room and master bedroom.

Indeed, maximizing space was as much a priority for the homeowners as was adding pops of interest "to differentiate from the cookie-cutter homes that builders do," the wife says. Kartheiser started by





designing the custom millwork on the walls of the living room fireplace, adding much-needed texture to the space. “Just adding molding lends itself to a beautiful aesthetic in the room. It’s a nice punch,” explains Kartheiser.

Additionally, she appointed mesh panels on some kitchen cabinetry, installed a graphic wallpaper in the powder room that the homeowners were initially skeptical about and wrapped the dining room in a swath of blue grass cloth by Phillip Jeffries. Not to be outdone by colorful walls, the dining room ceiling was treated to molding “to add oomph,” Kartheiser says. She also chose the Stark rug in the family room, brought in abstract pieces by Chicago artist Linc Thelen and mixed metals with aplomb throughout the home.

All this left the homeowners entirely pleased. “I would have struggled with where to put what,” explains the wife. “Amy kept pulling me away from the same things I would have normally picked out, and she pushed me out of my comfort zone,” she says. “I walk into my house and it’s serene, but not boring. There’s a nice, consistent feel.” ■



Clockwise from top left: Though initially outside the couple’s comfort zone, the geometric Cole & Son wallpaper adds a playful pop to the powder room; Kartheiser created a formal entryway with a closet flanked by floating shelves for functional storage space, paired with the Hanover chandelier from Mr. Brown; the master bedroom features soothing neutrals in soft textures and an alabaster prism lamp from MagMile Lighting.