

Interior design by GIDEON MENDELSON Interview by MIMI READ Photographs by ERIC PIASECKI



FRESH START

MAKEOVER!

PROBLEM

- CITY TO SUBURB
- EMPTY NESTERS
- TOO TRADITIONAL

SOLVED

- PURGED POSSESSIONS
- LOTS OF COLOR
- PLAYFUL USE OF PATTERN

In the dining room of a house in Purchase, New York, designer Gideon Mendelson put a fresh spin on scenic wallpaper by cutting up Zuber's Courses de Chevaux into scenes and framing them in molding. OPPOSITE: Mendelson gave modern punch to a stair landing with pinched zebra carpet edged in lime by Patterson, Flynn & Martin. Prints by Matthias Weischer.



MIMI READ: If you had to come up with a label for the style of this house, what would it be?

GIDEON MENDELSON: Let's see—how about Polished Suburban?

Well put. Can you expand on that?

'Suburban' means it's unpretentious, not so serious. It's not trying to be glamorous or cool—it's friendly, with gingham and toile. But it's polished, in that everything is thoughtful. It looks composed. Why can't you have a traditional house that also throws off sparks?

Who are the homeowners?

A couple in their 60s. I've known them all my life. They raised their children in a modest, one-story postmodern house in Scarsdale, where I grew up. After that, they lived in a rental in Manhattan for a couple of years, but I don't think they ever truly left the suburbs. They were just having a rendezvous in the city while they searched for their dream home.

And what were they looking for, exactly?

He's recently retired, and they were ready to give their lives a big makeover. They wanted a beautifully landscaped property, a traditional house with plenty of space for their children and grandchildren to visit. They found land in Purchase, New York, and built this English-style house.

Did you do the house from scratch?

I did. About 95 percent of what you see downstairs are things I brought in. The art is theirs. They've always collected modern art, but they started collecting much more actively at the same time they started the house. They really kicked up the quality and the seriousness of the art.

What happened to their old furniture?

Some of it is upstairs. The rest went to the kids or the curb.

How liberating. I know people who joke that they hope they get robbed because it's so hard to throw away family furniture and memorabilia.

It was all part of their transformation. I think as you get older, you get less sentimental about things, and you're released from all the anxiety about what anyone else thinks. You accept the things you love and the things you want. The rest you don't need. I'd say this couple has graduated. They're living their own lives.

You've given the rooms a crisp, youthful, almost jazzy quality. And your colors are extra-spirited. Were they looking for a younger point of view?

I wouldn't call it younger. I'd call it 'fresher.' These are traditional people who like traditional things, but they're worldly, too. They've always lived with color. I just urged them toward the outer edge of their comfort zone. They've always gravitated toward blues and greens, but I said, 'Let's kick it up a notch in the family room, to something punch-

ier.' In doing so we're going to achieve something that feels more modern and not so stuffy. I put pillows and a table skirt in a Pierre Frey printed fabric that they are totally familiar with—but in an unexpected colorway with lavender in it. It twists the room just enough.

But you didn't only use zippy color.

Often I used it next to not-so-zippy color, like in the dining room, where the colors are muted except for the sharp yellow trim on the curtains, to add a little pop. I wanted the guests, food, and flowers to provide color. Or the stair landing with the zebra runner—everything's sepia except for the lime-green edge on the carpet. There's a thought-out rhythm to the way I use color, and it makes the house more visually interesting and enjoyable.

Zebra on stairs is something I've seen before, but here it has a sharper, jauntier look.

There are moments of relief in this house, and this is one of them. You're upstairs, you're bounding downstairs, and you can take a breather. The color is removed, but it's still a graphic moment, like a black-and-white picture. It's amazing how well the carpet and the grid of art work in harmony. The carpet doesn't take away from the art, and the softness of the art makes the carpet look sharper, more high-contrast than it really is.

The kitchen's green gingham ceiling is so happy. But I imagine it had to feel like a big risk.

Actually, the ceiling was less of a stretch for them, because they're lovers of plaids and checks. So I thought, 'Why not the ceiling?' We blew up the scale a bit to treat the eye and painted it on canvas first. It gives a classic white kitchen personality, and it brings extremely high ceilings down to a more comfortable place.

Designers always say they created the master bedroom as a peaceful sanctuary—it's become a cliché. You've broken the mold here. This master bedroom is more like an amusement park.

It is energetic, thanks to that toile wallpaper—a souped-up, major toile in a very sharp blue. But when you're in there it's oddly calming. The ebonized four-poster bed adds scale and contrast, and the creamy bedside tables and mercury glass lamps bring in glamour. But what makes the room fun is that bright yellow midcentury console.

It's practically electric. Did the clients have to get used to it?

First, I showed them a picture of it. They said, 'Are you kidding? No way.' So I said, 'Let me bring it to the house on approval. What's the worst that can happen?' Pretty much the minute it was plunked down in the bedroom, their eyes opened to how exciting it was.

PRODUCED BY DORETTA SPERDUTO



Curtains in the family room are Rampur Crewel by Hinson, a traditional fabric in a nontraditional palette. "Usually crewel is colorful embroidery on a cream ground," Mendelson says. "This one has it backward." He designed the club chairs and covered them in Lee Jofa's Blyth Taffeta Weave. Baldacchino coffee table from Holly Hunt evokes old barley-twist furniture. Pillows and table skirt, Pierre Frey's Taj Mahal. John Rosselli Greek Fret rug. Art by Donald Baechler.

"Blue and green are the ocean, the sky, the landscape—they're part of our DNA," Mendelson says. A pair of 1960s ceramic lamps bring in a sculptural sensibility to the family room. The marine blue glaze echoes the seascape by Axel

Kassebohmer. Avery Boardman's rolled-arm sofa is upholstered in Gaston y Daniela's Ottoman Segura. The metal side table from Jerry Pair adds a laciness. Walls are painted Blue Hydrangea by Benjamin Moore.





The breakfast area, which is centrally located in the open kitchen-family room, "is defined by its surround of windows and Art Nouveau chandelier from Belgium," Mendelson says. Lars Bolander's Massant side chairs. OPPOSITE: The kitchen's pea-green gingham ceiling was painted on canvas by Silvère Boureau. To further animate the room, Mendelson designed the island and painted it a custom bright green.