



# *The Science of Style*

*A Back Bay town house is made to answer a physicist's yen for the colors and cool of his native Italy*

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**"NOT LOUD, BUT** engaging — and with a few things that'll knock your socks off." Those marching orders from the owner come to full effect in the living room, its calm color scheme punctuated by a custom leather ottoman. Curtains continue up and out of sight, hinting at the dramatic two-story space beyond the ceiling.



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nterior designer William Gregory joined the team renovating the six-story 1890 town house on Beacon Street in Boston's Back Bay with two basic instructions from the Rome-born owner: "It has to be Italian, and it has to be blue." Over the next two and a half years, moving through the complete overhaul of the 5,400-square-foot, former Po-Mo-style bachelor pad ("Think spheres and pyramids," Gregory says), he hewed true to the spirit of his marching orders. Calm, cool, and kinda blue, this tasteful and sophisticated residence now embodies the Italian soul of its owner, a scientist, company founder, and holder of more than 100 electronics-related patents.

"I was looking for design that was tasteful and discreet, that wasn't loud but engaging," says the owner. "William and I used 1930s Italy as an era to inform the directive for most of the interior design and cabinetry. And yes, my favorite color is blue. I wanted to use the colors from the Italian coast to attain a transportive feel."

The transporting starts just inside the marble foyer, where a hand-hooked wool runner rises up five flights of stairs, some 135 feet, to the roof deck. A deep and subtle blue, with a lighter blue

**THE SECOND FLOOR landing (ABOVE, LEFT) is grounded by its deep blue stair runner; a bench owned by the client received a punchy paint job and a cushion in a fabric by C&C Milano featuring stylized artichokes. In the game room beyond, a glass pool table by Teckell took a crew of six a full day to assemble.**



**FOR BOTH APPEARANCE and acoustics, the dining room's old marble floor was replaced with one of quartersawn stained oak. The walnut table and chair set by Ceccotti sits on a Christopher Farr carpet. Carbon-fiber LED pendant lights hang beneath a glowing recessed ceiling, leafed with white gold by Arteriors of Natick, Massachusetts.**

silk cut-pile border, it was designed by Gregory, whose firm, William Gregory & Associates, is based in Lincoln, Massachusetts, and Scott Lethbridge, partner in the Connecticut-based rug company Elizabeth Eakins. The runner draws the visitor directly up to the main floor. At the landing, beauty is everywhere. To the right, across the comfortable living room, are two-story bay windows rising through a cut-out section of the ceiling and filled with spectacular views of the Charles River and Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Cambridge, Massachusetts, campus (fitting for a man with a doctorate in physics). Open to the living room is a custom kitchen designed and built by the cabinetmakers Kochman Reidt + Haigh of Stoughton, Massachusetts. Flanked by two service areas outfitted with simple flat-panel red birch cabinets is a dramatic island topped with black granite, which sets off doors and drawers of makore (also known as African cherry) and quilted maple, all framed in chrome and finished with chrome hardware.

Dead ahead is the dining room, set in an alcove. A large-format photograph of an Italian vineyard by California photographer Elizabeth Carmel, printed by Digital Silver Imaging in Belmont,



Massachusetts, acts as a picture window. Before it, as if perched before a balcony, a long walnut dining room table has sensuous lines that invite touching and sinuous chairs that invite sitting. Gregory sourced the ensemble, as well as several other pieces in the town house, from the small Italian furniture maker Ceccotti, a favorite of the owner's.

To the left is a startling sight: a bright green regulation Ping-Pong table sits in the middle of a handsome room paneled with floor-to-ceiling black cherry, much of it a figured type called "roped." The wood's shimmering arcs, lit by recessed fixtures specified by consultants from Light Positive of Marblehead, Massachusetts, add a fascinating depth to the room. The surprises — and games — continue on the next floor, where the stunning river views are challenged by two astounding pieces

**PANELING OF ROPED black cherry gives the study a warm depth. Framed vintage Italian travel and commercial posters throughout the home are from International Poster Gallery in Boston's South End.**



**THE KITCHEN ISLAND and built-in hutch (RIGHT TOP) by cabinetmakers Kochman Reidt + Haigh are made of makore, quilted maple, and chrome. The silver-leafed recessed ceiling adds dimension to the room. Off the dining room, simple flat-panel red birch cabinetry (RIGHT BOTTOM) holds refrigerators, wall ovens, and wine storage.**

#### DESIGN DECISION *Black Beauty*

Cabinetmaker Paul Reidt of Kochman Reidt + Haigh was the first to suggest black granite countertops for the kitchen. The client demurred, suggesting other options. "I usually wait awhile when that happens," says Reidt. "But I knew black would bring out the rich colors of the woods we were building with, so I brought it up again." Interior designer William Gregory joined Reidt on the push, and still the client resisted. Finally, he explained his reluctance: In his mind, black was funereal, the color of death, and black granite is the material of tombstones in his native Italy. "To his great credit," says Reidt, "he explained where he was coming from and then listened to our argument." Take a look at the finished kitchen and try to imagine a better choice.





**NATURAL LIGHT POURS** through a large skylight into the two-story family room (FACING PAGE, TOP). The sofa is from B&B Italia, carpet from Christopher Farr, and the brushed leather Pouf Capitonné ottoman by De Padova. The adjacent study (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) features Art Deco-style side chairs by Giorgetti. Gregory kept the columns (four of 18 throughout the house inherited from an earlier renovation) and painted them the same color as the walls and trim. In the master bedroom (ABOVE), Bang & Olufsen speakers are set in alcoves on the wall, upholstered to enhance the room's acoustics.

— a billiard table and a foosball table, both of glass, designed and built by the Italian firm Teckell. The views are given a fighting chance by a clear glass balustrade that edges the two-story bay, a design feature the owner worked out with architect Michael Kim of Brookline, Massachusetts, and general contractor Stefanos Efstratoudakis of Stefcio Builders in Newton, Massachusetts.

On the floor above is a colonnaded two-story space that feels like a miniature Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum courtyard, rendered in monochrome. The owner wanted a light and airy space, with living plants and a calm simplicity he remembered from Italy. Gregory paid special attention to color here, using an “elusive shade of Farrow & Ball gray that changes throughout the day and the seasons.” That calmness extends into the nearby master bedroom, a serene retreat with a fireplace at one end and an upholstered wall at the other, the better to allow the Bang & Olufsen sound system to deliver the classical music the owner so adores.

“I loved this project,” Gregory says. “I would meet with the client on Saturday mornings, always bringing fresh bread. At every decision point, he was rational and precise — he’s a physicist. But beyond being cerebral, he was in touch with the emotional component of his aesthetics. His love and respect for his home country informed every choice.” ■

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