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DOWN TO THE LAST DETAIL

After nearly thirty years in business,
one architect realizes his dream of a historic-
meets-modern home in Boston.

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Styling by SEAN WILLIAM DONOVAN



A hidden door in the living room, papered in the same de Gournay pattern as the surrounding wall, opens to reveal a serpentine hallway that ends in a petite powder room. **FACING PAGE:** The front door with its leaded-glass sidelights opens into a vestibule whose steel-and-glass doors—crowned by an original transom window—lead to the foyer.



ABOVE: The Paul Fournier painting above the living room fireplace was a gift to architect and homeowner David Sharff's wife from her father when she graduated from college. **LEFT:** Seen from the foyer, the sculptural staircase epitomizes quiet luxury. **FACING PAGE:** Against a lilac background, the living room's de Gournay silk wallcovering depicts a willow tree in hues of deep purple, aubergine, and white.



When it came to their first shared home together, architect David Sharff and his new wife knew exactly what they wanted—right down to the address. But securing a corner brownstone on one of Boston's most storied streets was going to take patience. After searching in earnest for three years, the couple was just about ready to branch out into surrounding neighborhoods when their realtor alerted them to a condo coming on the market. "We'd walked by it for years," recalls Sharff. "There were always young kids playing in the yard."





ABOVE: Sharff says the second-floor “cozy room,” with its moody European vibe, is his favorite spot in the house. **RIGHT:** Looking across the foyer from the living room into the dining room, an Ektacolor print by Shimon Attie grabs the eye. **FACING PAGE:** The condo’s existing archways and curves inspired Sharff’s design for the plaster staircase that replaced the more traditional original.

The duo snatched up the 1872-built condominium, which included a garden level, ground level, and second floor. Within the year, they had the opportunity to purchase condos on levels three and four, taking over ownership of the entire building. Almost immediately, Sharff and his team began restoring the building’s exterior before moving on to the interior, where the couple had very specific goals.

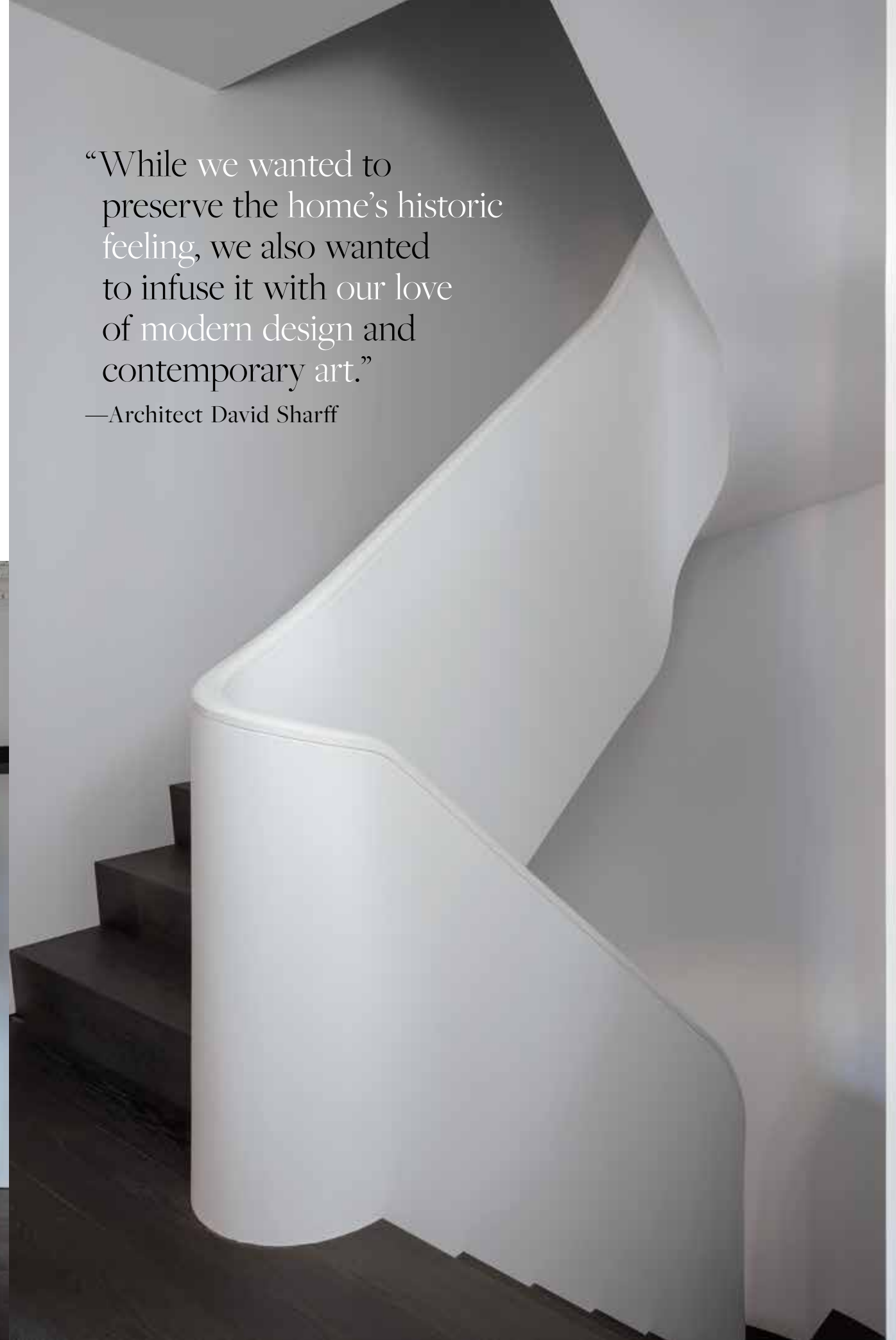
“It needed to be comfortable for the two of us to live and work in every day, but we also needed the space to entertain friends and family,” says Sharff. “And while we wanted to preserve the home’s historic feeling, we also wanted to infuse it with our love of modern design and contemporary art.”

Intent on respecting each room’s original proportions, Sharff says the biggest architectural change they made was replacing the traditional newel-post staircase with a modern, sinuous plaster version. To help make his vision a reality, Sharff called on C-Concept Corpora-



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—Architect David Sharff





tion owner Richard Cantelli and project manager Paul Marie. “The challenge with remodeling existing brownstones is that nothing is level,” says Cantelli. “It is important to remove all the walls, floors, and stairs, and then rebuild. And for a home with this kind of detail, there are no tolerances.”

Those details include reveal joints

at the base of the walls that give the impression each one is hovering just off the custom-stained white-oak flooring. Doorways forgo casings, light fixtures are plastered into ceilings, and faceplates disappear into walls. As a result, original architectural details like the kitchen and dining room’s intricate dentil molding stand out even more.

Sharff worked with Liaigre’s New York showroom on the furniture, and he consulted with interior designer Leslie Fine on furniture, fabrics, drapery, and stone. But it was Sharff and his wife who landed on the sublime de Gournay silk wallcovering that depicts a willow tree and envelopes an unusually shaped niche in the living room, turning the

space into an art installation. “It anchors this end of the room and balances the view of the trees you see outside the bay window at the other end,” Sharff explains.

Though he may be pragmatic about some of the design decisions, Sharff’s enthusiasm for details like the differentiation in interior doors, his love of



FAR LEFT: “The elegant and voluminous silk drapery throughout the home adds a feeling of warmth into the contemporary setting,” says interior designer Leslie Fine.

ABOVE: During the renovation, the team discovered the home’s original hearth. To pay homage, Sharff and kitchen designer Donna Venegas opted to place the new kitchen’s range on the same wall.

texture and patina, and his commitment to reducing his family’s exposure to chemicals comes through when he talks about the home. And while he’s helmed his own firm since 1996, this was the first time he’s taken on a project of this magnitude for himself.

“When you’re working with a client, you’re tapping into their vision and



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The white-oak flooring used throughout was sourced from sustainable forests in Germany and coated in natural resins, waxes, and oils rather than polyurethane to reduce exposure to chemicals. For a dose of drama, the primary bath's shower cascades from the ceiling. A matte-glass-and-aluminum pocket door closes off the closet from the primary bedroom.
FACING PAGE: The four-poster Liaigre bed is crafted from open-grain wood that contrasts nicely with the room's polished surfaces.

editing their ideas," he says. "But when you're designing for yourself, of course you're strongly influenced by your partner, but you also have this data bank of possibilities. You start to discover a new design methodology, and when you factor in the marriage of contemporary design with a historic building, you hone your style in the process."

EDITOR'S NOTE: For details, see *Resources*.

ARCHITECTURE: David Sharff Architect
INTERIOR DESIGN: David Sharff Architect, Leslie Fine Interiors, Liaigre
BUILDER: C-Concept Corporation
LANDSCAPE DESIGN: ZEN Associates