



above: A Verellen sofa in Schumacher steel blue velvet and swivel chairs in cream bouclé create a chic and cozy space for the client to enjoy their art. The piece on the left is Charlie Hewitt's *Iron Pebble*.

INTERVIEW WITH
MICHELLE MORGAN HARRISON,
MORGAN HARRISON HOME
PHOTOGRAPHER JANE BEILES

ART APPRECIATION

A custom design plan allows for **CREATIVE WAYS** to incorporate the **OWNERS' BELOVED PIECES**

Who is the client, and how were you introduced to them?

The clients are an amazing couple, both enjoying a second marriage to one another. They had been living in the husband's home—an incredible piece of property on the water—but it was time to make it truly theirs. They were open to either a renovation or to tearing it down, and started looking at other waterfront properties in the area, eventually visiting a Lorono Construction home. I had worked with the Loronos on in the past, and they had asked me to design a few of their investment properties, including the one the clients visited. The clients fell in love with the Lorono Construction house but wanted to create a design especially for them on their existing property. They hired the Loronos to build the home, Mark Mustacato from RMG as the architect, Jenny Anderson as landscape designer, and me, as the designer to create their dream home.

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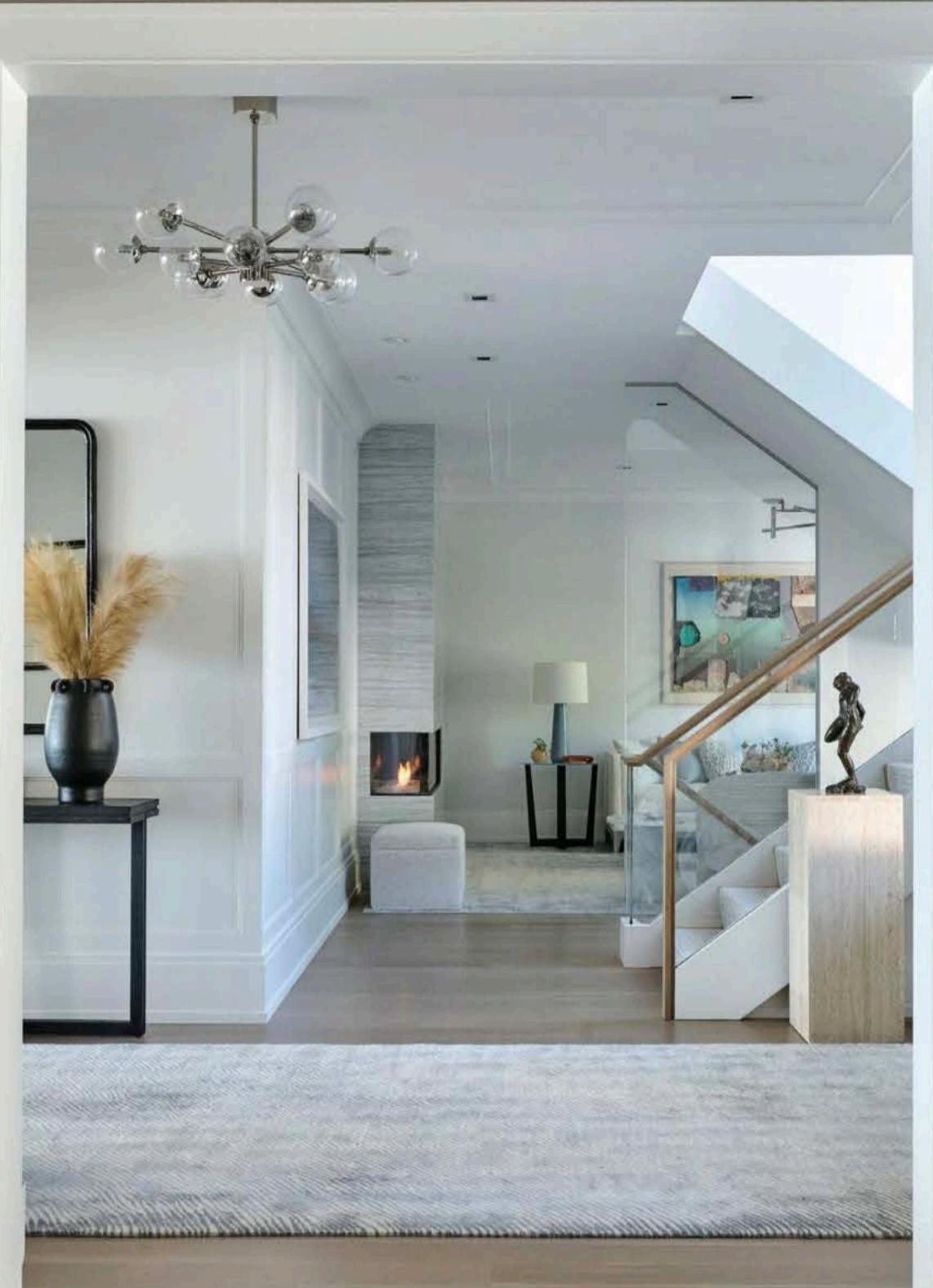
above: The clients' existing bench was upholstered in Zimmer + Rohde blue, black, and cream tweed. A Century tufted steel blue leather ottoman and Lawson-Fenning stools in charcoal leave plenty of room for entertaining.

What did the client want?

We work on a lot of ground-up construction projects, and we start every project with concept presentations, where we offer the client a few directions for every aspect of the look and feel of the home, from the exterior to architectural details, like stair design and millwork, to the interior finishes. From there, we work with the client to edit it down to one clear direction that serves as the playbook for both us (as designers) and the architect. Mark designed the home, and we designed the millwork, kitchen, baths, and finishes in addition to the interiors. I love working on construction projects, because it gives me the ability to really integrate the architectural details and finishes with the interiors.



above: Boyd Lighting's Branch Pendant hangs over custom counter stools in Brentano light gray faux leather. **right:** Interlude Home dining chairs in ocean gray fabric surround the clients' own Knoll Saarinen table. **left:** In the kitchen, the stove hood was designed by The Iron Designer and the marble counter and back splash were sourced from Dushi Marble and Granite.



top, left: An Arteriors 12-light chandelier is just as much a piece of art as the sculpture near the staircase. **top, right:** The custom rift oak coffee table perfectly contrasts the stone fireplace. The bookshelf's wallcovering is by Phillip Jeffries. **bottom, left:** The crystal chandelier from Generation and Lightmaker Edie Sconces keep the powder room bright and modern. Phillip Jeffries silver and blue-gray grasscloth lines the walls. **bottom, right:** The Baker sofa is begging someone to put their feet up and relax.



this photo: Aaron Wexler's *The Way to Walk Into a Wave*, 2020, is front and center. Below it, the client can relax into a Thayer Coggin sofa in Fabricut gray chenille. The patterned gray wool pillows are from Holland and Sherry, and the striped ones are Lance Woven Leathers. **below:** A Baker swivel lounge chair in textured Cowtan and Tout beige and camel fabric and a Vanguard side table in fumed oak with gold accents create an inviting reading nook.



Can you tell me more about some of the pieces specifically, like the one in the powder room and the larger, blue horizontal piece in the office?

One of my absolute favorite pieces of art from this project is the large Aaron Wexler piece in the husband's office. I love his work and the textural quality to it—this piece in particular is paint, painted paper, and print material adhered to linen—and how the piece pops against the textured, blonde ceruse millwork and neutral furnishings in the room. It's titled *The Way to Walk Into a Wave*, which I think is very fitting, considering the home's waterfront location. The piece in the formal powder room is part of the homeowner's art collection. Another favorite piece of mine is the one by Charlie Hewitt that hangs in the family room on the left side of the fireplace. That one is oil and acrylic paint with collage on canvas.

How did the art affect your design plans for this home?

From the onset of the project, it was clear that art was very important to the clients. They had an impressive art collection, including some amazing sculptures, and we designed the spaces to incorporate them: we placed sculpture pedestals within the floor plans and art in millwork elevations. Although they had a robust collection, the home required additional art. When we were near completion, I introduced them to Heather Gaudio of Heather Gaudio Fine Art. I love working with Heather, because she represents amazing artists with a variety of styles and a variety of price points, and she dedicates herself to finding the right pieces, no matter





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the size and budget of a project. When we started working with Heather, I sent her pictures of each space, floor plans, and images of their existing art and then let her and her team's expertise take over to pull the best pieces. We pre-selected a wide variety of art, invited the homeowner to come to the gallery to see everything in person, and from there, Heather arranged to deliver numerous pieces to their home. Her team placed each piece in different locations and different rooms so the homeowners could edit their selections at home. Seeing and feeling art in a space is critical before committing to a piece, and I love how Heather makes it so easy for her clients to experience that. Art is very personal. It's an individual expression of style that I often find takes time for a client to select and build their collection, especially if they are not coming into the project with an existing one. So, when finishing a project, we strive to identify the key areas that should be focused on for finding art first. Art can transform any room into something truly special, and a home is never complete without it. I think the most important role for an interior designer when it comes to the selection of art is to understand the style of art each client appreciates but to also push them to mix things up a bit. Just like how we mix textures, colors, and patterns in the design of a room, it's similarly important to mix the media of art within a space. We aim to have the client build an art collection that mixes oil paintings with sculpture, drawings, and photography. But the best and most cohesive results always happen when we work closely with Heather.

Speaking of blue, we see a lot of blues and blue tones in this design. How did that colorway come about?

The client identified a desire for shades of blue early in the design process, so we played with layered shades and textures of blue throughout the house. We added dimension by layering in shades of black and ivory with warm accents of camels and cognac with blonde woods.

left: Studio Zen's sisal and metallic steel blue/silver wallcovering provides the perfect transition from the wet bar to the kitchen. **below, left:** In the mudroom, a bench upholstered in Fabricut steel blue chenille and a Regina Andrew lantern are ready to help keep things bright and comfy. **below, right:** In the guest bathroom, Phillip Jeffries white and blue seagrass wall covering sets a calming tone.





left: A Stark stair runner lines the way up or down. The mirror above the console table is by Baker. **below, top:** Hammerton Studio's Mistro Square fixture in smoke gray glass is a showstopper at the front door. **below, bottom:** Black-and-white patterned wallpaper from Bradley USA lines the back of custom, built-in bookshelves.



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this photo: Visual Comfort's Graphic Grande chandelier hangs over a Taylor King sectional in charcoal fabric. A game table with a perfect view is a great space to entertain. **below:** A Mr. and Mrs. Howard swivel chair in teal chenille fabric is a centerpiece in this space.

What is your personal relationship to art as a designer? Any mediums you prefer, or artists you like?

I minored in art history when I was in school. Having a strong foundation in art history is important to understanding the styles and movements that have shaped design. This, combined with my background as a magazine fashion editor, allowed me to build a strong sense of aesthetics and an understanding of art's influence on design. I feel privileged to work with clients who have some incredibly notable pieces in their collections. My personal taste in art is broad. I love soft, abstract oils, black and white photography, smaller-scale abstract sculptures, and the simplicity of pencil drawings and charcoals. I also have a soft spot for vintage Swedish oil and watercolor paintings.

Take me through your design process for this space. Did it begin with a single element, like a piece of furniture or an art piece, or with one of your own ideas?

The process really starts with the concept presentation we give at the beginning of the project. Afterwards, each room comes together in our studio, often based on a single pattern, fabric, or rug. But, in this home, the design is more of a quiet luxury, with layers of textures and colors; their art ended up becoming the graphic pattern in each space, but the architectural details of the home are equally important.

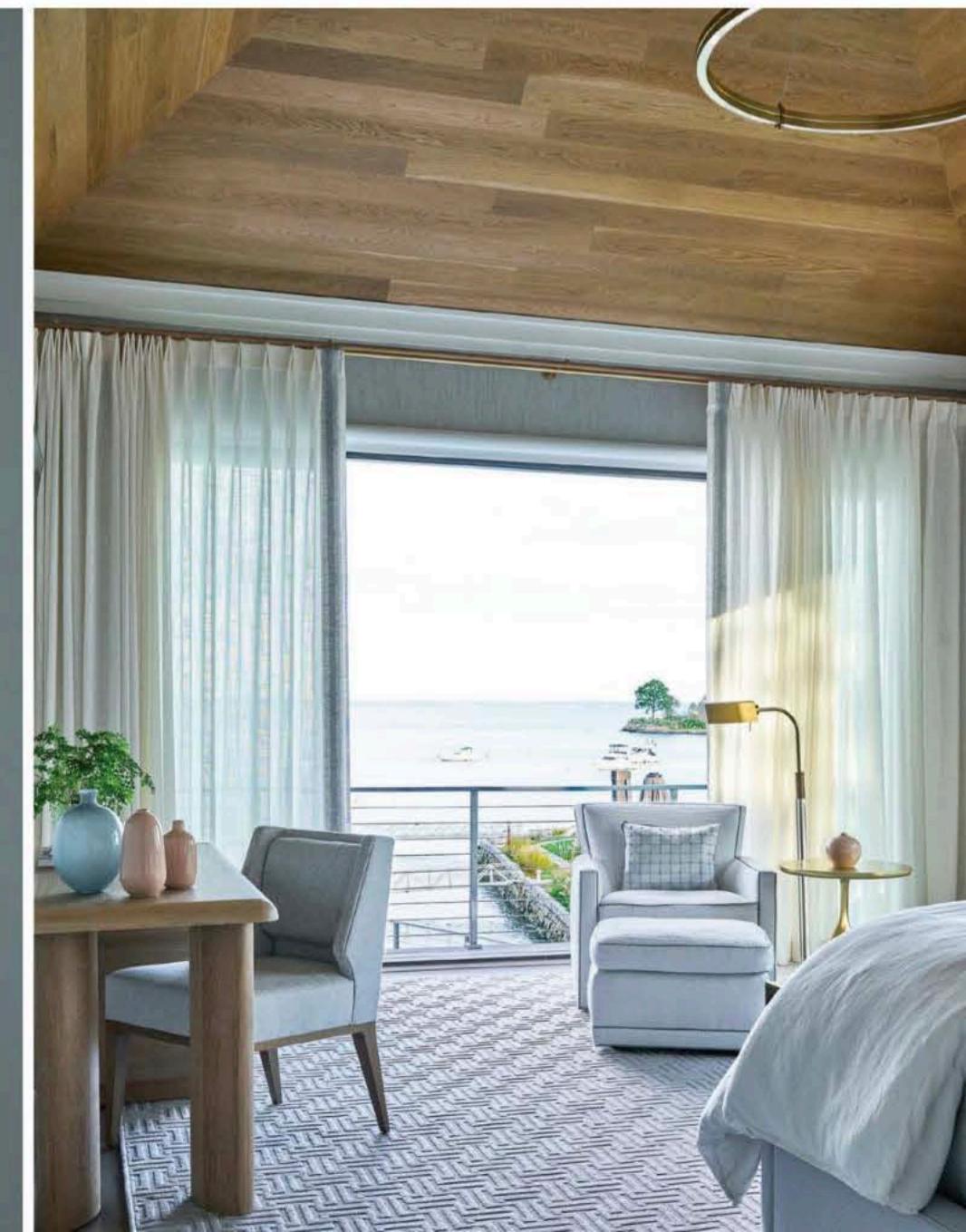




left: Visual Comfort's Paxton Ring Chandelier adds height to the bedroom, and a light blue linen bed set echoes the Phillip Jeffries seagrass wallcovering in pale blue-gray. **below left:** A Worlds Away bench with a faux ostrich leather seat is the perfect companion to the beautiful stonework by Dushi Marble and Granite. **below right:** The clients' existing lounge chair was covered in Cowtan and Tout cream linen to complement the Baker desk, which has a blonde ceruse finish. The floor lamp is from Generation Lighting in a worn brass finish. The side table is Julien Chichester in a raw brass finish.



this photo: Grays, creams, and beige neutrals keep things calm and collected in the bedroom. **left:** Stacked subway tile lends a glossy, classic look to the bathroom. **below:** A room with a view, and a CB2 side chair in black boucle to enjoy it on.



As an artist yourself, what role do you believe art has in the wider world outside of our design community?

As interior designers, our job is to create beautiful, functional, and stimulating spaces that have a lasting impact on peoples' lives. We are surrounded with design that serves practical purposes, but the only function of art is to express emotion, create connections, ignite conversations, and inspire creativity.

Art helps us create a connection with a space and to express emotions in a way that we cannot through other mediums.

—INTERVIEW BY VERONICA SCHORR

Resources:

Interior Design: Morgan Harrison Home, New Canaan, 203-594-7875;

morganharrisonhome.com

Builder: Lorono Construction, Rye, 914-967-1117; loronohomes.com

Architect: Mark Mustacato, RMG Associates, Rye, 914-998-5589; rmgarchitects.com

Landscape Designer: Jennifer Anderson, Wilton, 203-834-9666;

jenniferanderson-designs.com



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top: The home's elevation and stone retaining wall give it a commanding yet contemporary presence along the waterfront. **left:** Cane-line dining chairs surround an RH table on the deck. **above, right:** A statue from the client's own art collection emerges from tall grasses in the front yard. **opposite page:** The best views are made even better when taken in on comfy Sunset West chaise lounges.

