

Facing page: An original fireplace remains in the upstairs room used as an office. Deer head is from Restoration Hardware. The homeowner collects glass cloches. Cloches and curiosities from AKA Stella Gray. White linen drapes from Shading Places. *Right:* The entryway as seen from the dining room. Photograph by Dutch artist Suzanne Jongmans (Jongmans Gallery Wilms Netherlands) is a playful nod to Tracy Gielbert's heritage. Mirror was custom made by Uptown Frames.



The Old Grocery

2017 RENOVATION OF THE YEAR

Written and styled by Valorie Hart Photographed by Sara Essex Bradley



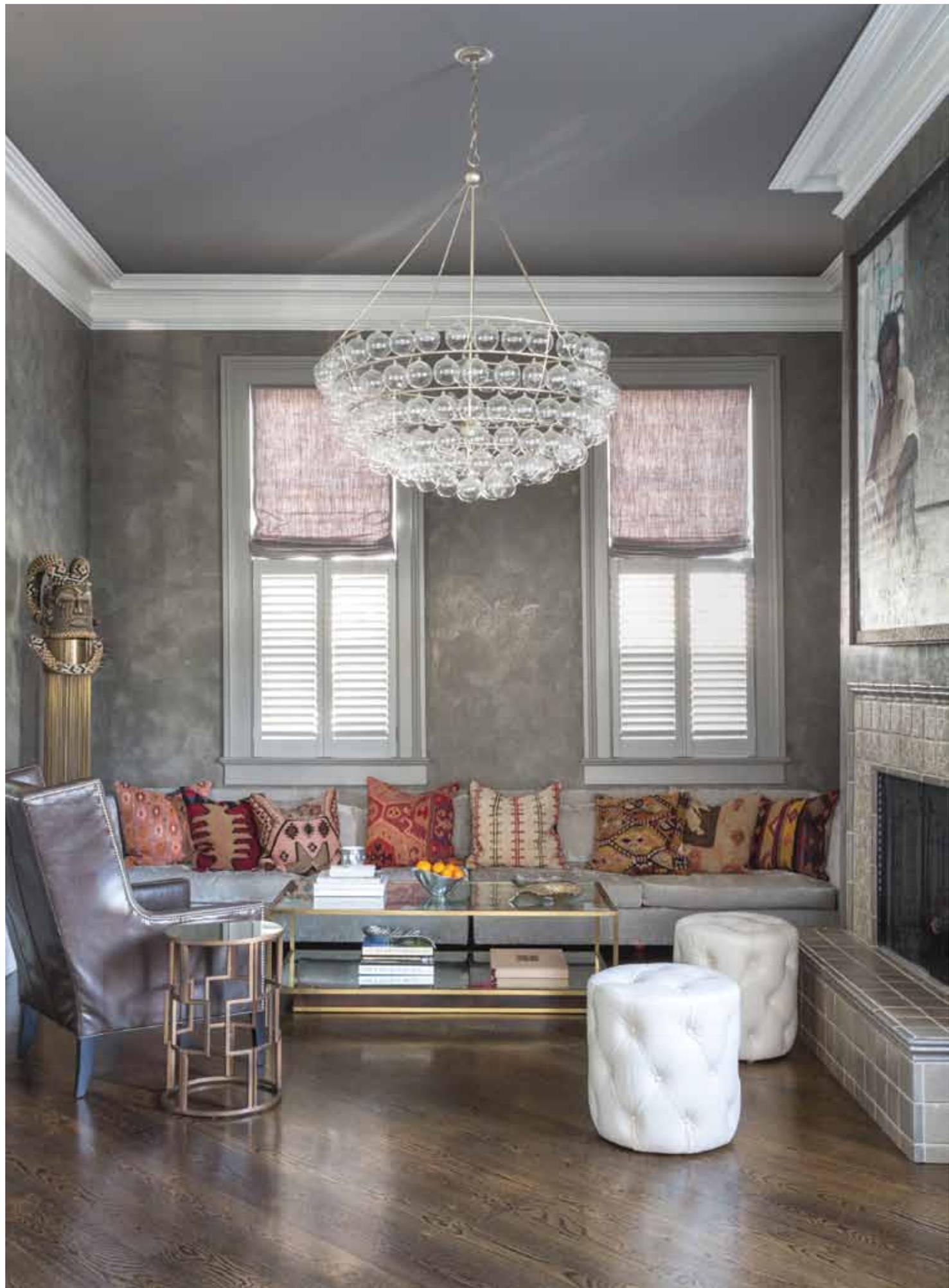
here are dozens, perhaps hundreds of old corner stores in New Orleans. Some are still in operation, but most are not. Defunct corner stores are a home renovators dream. Transforming a once-commercial space with an unusual floor plan into a viable residence, is a challenge, but can become the stuff of which dreams are made.

Tom Levandoski and Tracy Gielbert (with their dogs Queenie and Scruffy) call their Lower Garden District home The Old Grocery. Originally a grocery store in 1860, it has been used as a home for battered women and later as a shelter for men battling alcoholism. The couple purchased the 3,600-square-foot property at the end of 2013. It took one and a half years to renovate and they are still making tweaks and finishing touches. The house was already a residence when they acquired it and had achieved historic landmark recognition. The floor plan and décor was decidedly 1990s, which was not to the taste of the new homeowners.

The layout of a corner store is on two blocks of each of two streets. In the days when the Gielbert and Levandoski home was the old grocery, it was a place where the neighborhood was observed. From both vantage points there was a spatial and visual knitting together of the surroundings. Today The Old Grocery continues and creates a more personal knitting together of the old with the modern, providing a most welcoming space visually and personally.

The downstairs was gutted and reconfigured against all odds that mainly had to do with massive plumbing issues. The house is not the typically raised cottage, but built on a slab making it a difficult renovation when moving pipes. The shotgun-style floor plan divided the downstairs of the two-story house down length of the middle. The couple moved the kitchen from one side of the house to the other creating an enormous central hub geared to how they

Top: Detail of a reclaimed wood wall behind the buffet. The wood was salvaged from the Port of New Orleans. Dishes are Michael Aram; handmade pottery cups by Tara Underwood; artwork by Jill Ricci (Gallery Orange); lamp is vintage; buffet Mr. Brown from Villa Vici. *Bottom:* A new powder room on the ground floor features a sleek, space saving sink and mirror by Matthew Holdren. Tiles are from Floor and Decor on Magazine Street. Artwork reflected in mirror is by Joseph Bradley (Gallery Orange). *Facing page:* The living room features a 12-foot-long couch, Venetian plaster walls, simple window treatments, and one of the original fireplaces that the homeowners re-tiled. The reclaimed oak floors are laid on a diagonal to integrate sight lines. Mitchell Gold couch from Villa Vici; Kilm pillows from Etsy; Plaster walls by Randy Verduyn; coffee table Julian Chicherster from Villa Vici; Mitchell Gold wing chair from Villa Vici; Tribal head from AKA Stella Gray; Mitchell Gold poufs from Villa Vici; Curry and Company chandelier from AKA Stella Gray; fireplace tile from Stafford Tile; artwork over fireplace by Aron Belke form AKA Stella Gray.





entertain. They also wanted to keep the fireplaces, which meant dealing with all the support walls, while developing an open floor plan on one side of the house. The center wall was moved back to accommodate the refrigerator in the new kitchen. There are no upper cabinets and a pantry was carved out of the center wall. Many experts were involved, especially to add the extra structural support needed, and moving plumbing in the remastered kitchen

Gielbert came to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and opened Gallery Orange on Royal Street in the French Quarter in 2011. Her fine-art training at the Royal Academy Art, The Hague and Win (Willem) de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam, along with a stint with the Clinton Foundation working on the green rebuild of New Orleans led her to start working part time in a gallery. She realized that working in a gallery was her passion.

“After all the years in Holland selling my own art, I now realized that this was what I was supposed to do...sell art, not make it,” says Gielbert.

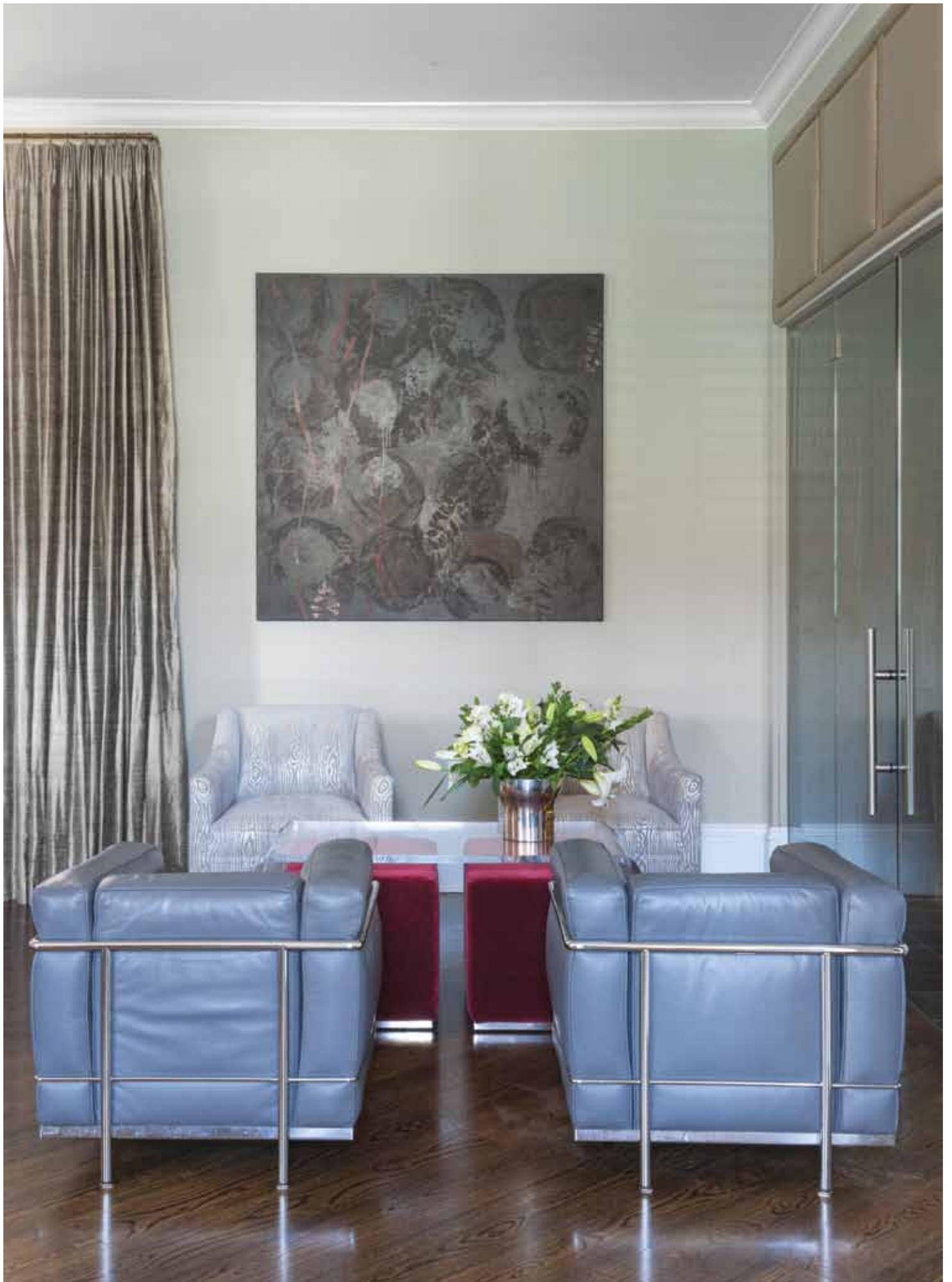
Another fortuitous moment came when Levandoski wandered into that first art gallery where Gielbert was working. The rest is history, as the saying goes. The couple purchased The Old Grocery as a joint project. Gielbert had a couple of renovation projects already under her belt, but this was Levandoski’s first and he immersed himself in the process. He is enchanted with the architectural mix in New Orleans, particularly the high ceilings found in old houses. He coveted 14-foot tall ceilings, but had to settle for the ceiling height in The Old Grocery being just shy of 13 feet tall.

The previous renovation of the old corner store was designed as a more formal space.

“We were not needing two formal parlors so we brought the kitchen bang into the middle of the largest space as the heart of the house and that’s how we live,” says Gielbert. “It seems to attract many people. Even at the inspections I think we had 30 people in the house: Four realtors, two inspectors, contractors, designers and friends all turned up. It was quite the party. We have a lot of guests all the time whether it’s out of town Gallery Orange artists doing a residence in the house studio or Tom’s fly fishing buddies sprawled on air beds in every room. The house still seems to have a commercial feel about it”.

The old formal dining room was transformed by taking down a wall, thus allowing room to make a space for another one of Levandoski’s passions: wine collecting. A handsome floor-to-ceiling wine cooler and wine room, with modern glass doors faces the dining area. Comfortable chairs are set in front of the wine room, perfect for conversation and wine tasting. The

Top: The wine room was designed by the Zangara and Partners, in collaboration with the homeowners. Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams chairs, table and ottomans (all from Villa Vicci) provide cozy seating for wine tasting and conversation. *Bottom:* The original staircase in the house has a sweeping curved handrail. Artwork is local (artist unknown). Homeowner picked it up from a pop-up art gallery during Art for Arts Sake on Magazine Street. Sconce is from Arterios. *Facing page:* The seating area in front of the wine room is a mix of vintage and modern furnishings. Vintage Le Corbusier chairs pair well with Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams seating (from Villa Vici). Artwork is by Tracy Gielbert from her early days of making art instead of selling it. Silk drapes by Shading Places.





The dining room is a mix of textures and furnishings including the Julian Chichester table from Villa Vici; luxe silk drapes by Shading Places; sideboard buffet Mr. Brown from Villi Vici; upholstered bench from Villa Vici; custom black walnut three-legged chairs by Warren Winsted (through decorator Tanga Winstead); chandelier is Arteriors; artwork over buffet by Jill Ricci (from Gallery Orange); artwork over upholstered bench by Gigi Mills (from Gallery Orange); artwork viewed through door to entry hall is a photograph by Dutch artist Suzanne Jongmans (Jongmans Gallery Wilms Netherlands) a playful nod to Tracy Gilebert's heritage



The new kitchen is the heart of the renovated Old Grocery. An 11-foot-long Carrara marble island provides plenty of room for food prep and dining. Custom bar stools by local sculptor Erica Larkin; striking overhead light fixtures by Dutch designer Marcel Wanders; range is a generous 48 inches by Viking. Reclaimed oak floors are installed on the diagonal. There are no upper cabinets, with everything stored in deep drawers and cabinets below. The cyprus wood ceiling adds drama and warmth to the European design scheme.



former kitchen is now an airy sunroom facing a pretty brick courtyard at the back of the house. The one original thing remaining downstairs is a beautiful staircase with a magnificent curved-wood handrail. The original plaster molding that remains intact on the second floor was copied in wood for the downstairs entry hall and downstairs rooms. Any new walls that were added were made thicker to add proper scale. All wood was locally sourced for the new floors (replacing Mexican tiles). It was installed on the diagonal because of sight lines being open to each other, and seen from different directions. The “new” oak floors are old re-milled wood from the 1800s. Cypress was used on the kitchen ceiling to a dramatic, yet warm effect.

The second floor did not require much structural work. Dark green paint and wallpaper was removed and replaced by freshly painted white walls. The doors got a fresh coat of black paint adding a modern, yet traditional accent. Two bathrooms were renovated. Striking modern light fixtures are a playful mix, and call attention to the high ceilings. Tailored white-linen drapes add to the light and airy feeling.

The couple describes their style as having a European feel in the kitchen, with a boutique hotel edge in the other rooms downstairs, and a mix of art with modern and vintage furnishings upstairs.

They sought out a lot of local design help from friends and craftsmen. Zangara and Partners project managed and oversaw the architecture and Chevalier was the contractor. Matthew Holdren did custom woodwork. Nick Conner of Conner Millwork handled the antique re-milled wood used throughout the house. Stafford Tile provided the tile for the fireplaces, wine room, dining room and entry hall.

Both are big supporters of local sources and used furnishings acquired from Eclectic Home, AKA Stella Gray and Villa Vici. The bar stools in the kitchen were custom made by local sculptor Erica Larkin.

“The style is really a mix of both of us,” says Gielbert. “Tom wanted to make sure it was masculine enough, and I wanted an open, non-fussy look but still with a lot of texture rather than color. I collect Dutch art and emerging artists and have a few custom pieces made especially for the space by Gallery Orange artists.” ■



Top: A pantry in the kitchen was created by taking down the existing wall and moving it back when it was reconstructed. Painting by Carlos Lopez (Gallery Orange). *Bottom:* The guest bathroom on the second floor got a soft renovation. Bathtub, windows and floors are original. Tile was added (from Floor and Decor on Magazine Street).

Inlay console table from Discoveries; Rug is Jonathan Adler; new sink and toilet and fixtures from Faucets Direct; shower curtains from Bed, Bath, and Beyond; sconces over sink from Arteriors; artwork by Tracy Gielbert. *Facing page:* The upstairs master bedroom is light and airy. Walls were painted white, and original floors cleaned up. White linen drapes by Shading Places. Upholstered bed from Restoration Hardware; toss pillows from Eclectic Home; sheepskin throw and zebra print rug from AKA Stella Gray; antique pearl inlay Syrian nightstands, vintage lamps and vintage canopy chair are treasures found by the homeowners; Kurt Pio did the painting over the bed (from Galley Orange); chandelier from Studio Mulders in the Netherlands.

